

Regional council defers issue on fluoridation of water

By Bill Rea

The future of Peel Region's artificial water fluoridation program is going to be left up to the next Regional council.

Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri had put forth a motion to have discussion on the matter reopened and to establish a working group of councillors and staff to get experts from both sides of the issue. But in the end last Thursday, councillors decided to simply defer the matter.

That came after some lengthy discussion at last Thursday's council meeting, at which things sometimes got heated.

Regional Chair and CEO Emil Kolb had to order that one woman be removed from the council chamber after she tried to shout down Caledon Councillor Richard Paterak while he advocated listening to the Region's medical staff.

'Shame on you all!' the woman shouted. 'You belong in jail! You're a bunch of murderers. Who the hell do you think you are? You're a bunch of lunatics!'

Council in June heard calls to halt the program from residents calling themselves Concerned Residents of Peel, who argued that while it had been assumed that fluoridation was safe and efficient, there was a growing body of scientific research that was calling that into question. At the time, lawyer Nader Hasan, representing the group, told councillors there was the potential for legal challenges of the Region's fluoridation program, as well as possible liability.

He said there's an argument that the program violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms because the possible benefits are greatly outweighed by the potential for harm. He added it also violates the Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act and the federal Food and Drugs Act.

Hasan appeared before councillors last week, stating they were ready to go ahead with legal action.

Sprovieri said fluoridation programs are supposed to be imposed by municipalities, after consultation with residents.

'I don't believe that has ever happened in my time at Peel Region,' he commented.

He also observed that the fluoridation program involved hydrofluorosilicic acid, something residents have never been told about.

There have never been any studies to see how levels of fluoride impact on cancer, heart trouble, autism or dementia, he said, arguing people should be well informed, with all the expert opinion available. Despite that, the Region has based its judgement on the one-sided opinion of staff.

Sprovieri said 70 per cent of the municipalities in Canada have decided fluoridation is unhealthy, as have all the countries in Europe with the exception of Ireland.

He also raised the issue of the Region being sued because it never listened to the other side in this issue, as he argued no expert can defend fluoridation.

The prospect of being sued didn't faze Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion.

'We're subject to legal action at any time on any issue,' she observed. 'That's the democratic right in this country.'

But she also agreed the issue has never been put before the public.

'The public should have the benefit of all the research that has been done,' she remarked.

'Researchers baffle me,' McCallion added, pointing out that some say there's a problem and others say there isn't. Councillors aren't qualified to deal with this, she said, suggesting the matter be referred to the next council (to be elected next month) and have them take it to the public so they can hear both sides.

Brampton Councillor John Sanderson agreed there are differing opinions. He said he's talked to doctors and heard a variety of position. 'It's such a mixed message,' he said.

Regional CAO David Szwarc said the issue has been discussed at length in public session. He said council spent about six hours listening to experts April 28, 2011, adding the chambers were full for that session, and council voted unanimously to keep the program.

'That's not much of a sample of public opinion,' McCallion observed. 'I don't believe the public is fully aware of this issue.'

Paterak was of a different mind, commenting that having the public decide matters of health would open a 'can of worms.' Doctors should decide medical issues, he added.