



Region starts process for framing fluoride question

Chronicle Staff

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Should the Region of Waterloo continue to fluoridate your municipal water?

It could be the question Waterloo voters are asked in October's fluoride referendum, according to a report presented to regional council yesterday.

Staff has proposed the wording and it will go to a public meeting on March 9 at 6 p. m. in regional council chambers.

At that meeting, councillors will seek input on the question and then finalize it over the following weeks.

"I think the question tabled is a fair question and quite neutral," said Regional Chair Ken Seiling.

"The question should be clear and straightforward, it shouldn't have any loaded language attached to it. It's up to the people on either side to get their messages out."

A bylaw must be passed by the beginning of April in order for the question to get on the ballot.

The question must be given to the city clerk by June 1.

For the vote to be considered binding, at least 50 per cent of eligible voters must weigh in.

Opponents of fluoride are already decrying the question.

"Science is mixed on whether drinking fluoride in water has any dental benefit at all," Robert Fleming, executive director of Waterloo Watch and vocal advocate for removing fluoride in Waterloo, said in a release.

He's concerned about how the water is fluoridated — by adding hydrofluorosilicic acid, an industrial byproduct.

Fleming believes the question should acknowledge that fact.

He suggested: "Should the Region of Waterloo continue adding hydrofluorosilicic acid containing inorganic fluoride and known traces of arsenic and lead into your municipal drinking water?"

All questions will be considered at the public meeting, and a report will be brought back to the region before the final question is formulated.

"Council will have a chance after the public meeting to examine the question again," said administration and finance committee chair Tom Galloway.

Once the question is set, local municipalities will have to butt out of the debate under provincial law.

"The region will not participate in any campaigns and the role will only be advising the electorate on the process for the municipal question," said a report to regional council.

The Region's Chief Medical Officer of health, Dr. Liana Nolan, will be an independent body during the campaign and will be allowed to

weigh in on the debate.

"Public Health will continue to provide this factual information but will not be spending public funds in support of any campaign activities," the report said.

At the city, meanwhile, staff is looking for ways to facilitate the debate without taking sides.

Under a proposal presented to city councillors last week, the city-sponsored discussion would start with an informal town hall in the spring.

The municipality would also make arrangements with Rogers Television to host a debate in the fall over whether to continue fluoridation of local water. It would be moderated by Rogers' host Mike Farwell.

Rogers would get to pick the so-called candidates stumping on either side of the issue. Two or three from each side would be selected for the debate.

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