



Waterloo's fluoridation plebiscite question will be simple

BY KEVIN SWAYZE, RECORD STAFF

WATERLOO — Critics say keeping the question simple only complicates an Oct. 25 referendum question about continuing fluoridation of tap water in the City of Waterloo.

Eight delegations called on Waterloo Region politicians to use "hydrofluorosilicic acid" instead of the generic "fluoridate" so citizens would know exactly what's going into that city's water.

Tuesday, the region's finance committee opted for simple: "Should the Region of Waterloo fluoridate your municipal water? Yes or No?"

The decision didn't sit well with any of the delegations. "The question is misleading and deceiving," said Robert Falla of Waterloo.

Regional staff had already removed the words "continue to" before fluoridate, after earlier complaints that the word biased the question toward keeping the current system.

A teacher of water treatment plant operators called on council to be specific in the question, so people can learn about the chemicals being added to their drinking water supply. That way, they can cast an informed vote.

"When you use 'fluoride,' it can mean a whole bunch of things to a whole bunch of people," said Peter van Caulart, from the Environmental Training Institute in Ridgetown.

Fluoride is a "nice, whitewash word that was created a long time ago," by proponents of the public health effort to reduce cavities, van Caulart said.

It isn't the same fluoride as people get in toothpaste, the treatment they get in a dentist chair or what naturally occurs in some groundwater, he said. "Hydrofluorosilicic acid" is a compound including lead, arsenic, radioactive material and phosphoric acid, he said.

It would be clearer to ask two questions, said Robert Fleming of Waterloo. One about adding hydrofluorosilicic acid to Waterloo's water, and the other about whether the region should fluoridate the water at all.

"We're just going to go on forever, or are we just going to use the word fluoridate?" asked Coun. Jane Mitchell.

Waterloo Mayor Brenda Halloran tried to get the question changed to include "drinking water," but nobody else on council voted with her.

In the end, the finance committee didn't fiddle with the question proposed by staff. Only councillors Claudette Millar and Jean Haalboom voted against the wording.

Wed., April 14, regional council will be asked to confirm the committee vote.

The question must be submitted to the province for approval by May 25 so it can be included on the Oct. 25 local ballot in Waterloo.

The vote result would be binding on regional council if half of registered voters cast ballots. Since turnout is usually 20 or 30 per cent, regional council has already passed a resolution to abide by the result of the plebiscite regardless of the voter turnout.

Regional council is in charge of treating drinking water, while the cities and two townships distribute it. That's why regional council is in charge of the referendum question, not the City of Waterloo which runs the local election.

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