



FASTFACTS



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BUILDING A GREEN CITY

On March 28, Brandon City Council unanimously passed a by-law to regulate pesticides in the City of Brandon. Many other cities and towns in Canada have pesticide by-laws, but Brandon is the first city in the prairie region to implement a by-law of this nature. The Brandon by-law has been criticized by some, including the Manitoba Green Party, because it is not comprehensive.

We concede that the by-law is modest in terms of its scope and its immediate impact, however we would argue that the by-law and the process by which it was achieved, have created a foundation for on-going initiatives to improve health and the quality of life in Brandon.

The Brandon & Area Environmental Council (BAEC)

In the latter part of 2003, the Brandon and District Labour Council and local scientists, initiated discussions to ensure that environmental issues were included in local policy deliberations.

Consideration was given to a wide range of options. It was decided that the most effective approach would be to establish an independent environmental watch dog

organization to monitor city and regional policies, promote public discussion of environmental issues and make timely and substantive interventions to support/oppose public or private sector actions with positive/negative environmental consequences.

On January 26, 2004, seventy-five people from Brandon and surrounding communities attended a meeting and endorsed the creation of a new environmental organization. The main reasons cited in support of such an initiative were the health implications of the increasing use of chemicals in urban activities (pesticides) and agriculture (pesticides, growth hormones, and intensive-livestock operations), the threat to the quantity and quality of water of economic activities and the ongoing degradation of the environment.

Presenters in support of the by-laws stressed the negative health effects (on adults, children, pets and wildlife) and the tendency of regulatory agencies to be lenient with producers of chemical pesticides. They also noted the availability of safe and effective alternatives.

An interim executive was elected to prepare a constitution and by-laws and establish an action plan that would address the issues identified. Recommendations were presented at an annual general meeting on October 18, 2004. The membership formally adopted the name Brandon & Area Environmental Council (BAEC) and



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approved the mission to “conserve and protect the natural and urban environment of Brandon and Area, to proactively build public awareness of environmental issues, and to promote citizen involvement in environmental policy development and decision-making.”

BAEC had intervened on several issues after the first meeting in January 2004, including participation in a campaign to support the relocation of Assiniboine Community College to the Brandon Mental Health Centre site and raising issues of concern with water quality. The October meeting gave the executive a mandate to continue these efforts and also recommended that priority be given to the preparation of a model pesticide by-law for presentation to city council.

BAEC's Pesticide By-law

Before BAEC presented its proposed By-law to Brandon City Council on May 30, 2005, the debate on the issue was already well underway. Local pesticide firms in opposition to the proposed by-law made presentations to City Council and national organizations of firms in the pesticide business (Corplife Canada and the Canadian Association of Agri-Retailers) contributed letters opposing a by-law to the *Brandon Sun*. BAEC, local physicians, and many others carefully countered opposing arguments.

The model by-law presented to City Council on May 30 called for a phase out of the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes by the year 2008. Presenters in support of the by-laws stressed the negative health effects (on adults, children, pets and wildlife) and the tendency of regulatory agencies to be lenient with producers of chemical pesticides. They also noted the availability of safe and effective alternatives.

Council directed Brandon's administration to prepare an evaluation and response to the proposed by-law. Rick Bailey former manager of parks and recreation and now in charge of public works was assigned the task of preparing the City response. Bailey formed a broad based committee including representatives from Eco-Green, Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Conservation and BAEC.

By-Law 6825: To Regulate the Use of Pesticides in the City of Brandon

The Committee had a series of meetings that led to consensus of a final draft that maintained the foundation of the model by-law with greater flexibility to make it acceptable to industry representatives. In its final form, By-law 6825 bans the use of pesticides only on public

grounds – health facilities, school grounds, personal care homes, day care centres, etc. It also allows people with pesticide sensitivity to have their residences placed on a register that would protect them from exposure to pesticide sprays. The by-law also establishes a committee to monitor effects and recommend changes as required.

Concluding Observations

BAEC members were fully aware that agreeing to join the City committee would require them to make concessions on the original proposed by-law. However, it was recognized that successful negotiation of a by-law endorsed by a broad-based committee was a first step that could pave the way for future adjustments as awareness grows and industry looks to less harmful methods. It is apparent that to move forward with a green agenda aimed at improving community health and protecting the environment requires support from a broad-base of citizens who approve of both objectives and methods.

The Success of BAEC and the implementation of the pesticide by-law demonstrates how the community can play a leadership role in shaping public policy. The formation of BAEC and the pesticide by-law was the result of the hard work and determination of the Brandon & District Labour Council, committed local scientists, students at Brandon University and citizens from all walks of life who want to curb activities that hurt the environment and the health of people in Brandon..

- Jan Chaboyer and Bill Paton

Jan Chaboyer is the President of the Brandon & District Labour Council and Treasurer of the BAEC.

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