

Reintroduction of Fluoridation to the Water Treatment Process - Vote on a Question

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council receive this report for the Corporate Record.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This report provides Council with options for a potential question on reintroducing fluoride into Calgary's drinking water as part of the General Election in October 2021.
- What does this mean to Calgarians? Calgarians will have the opportunity to voice their opinion regarding potentially reintroducing fluoridation to the water treatment process in a documented manner for Council's consideration.
- Why does this matter? Reliable and safe drinking water provides the foundation of a healthy and green city. Water treatment is an efficient and cost-effective means to distribute fluoride to a large population, if this is the desired outcome.
- The Community Water Fluoridation Report (CPS2019-0965) issued by the University of Calgary's, O'Brien Institute, was presented to Council in 2019. This report outlined health considerations and social implications related to drinking water fluoridation and was received for the Corporate record.
- The overall estimated cost to reintroduce a water fluoridation system including capital, operating and maintenance with a 20-year service life is estimated at \$30.1 million in 2020 dollars. An additional \$2 to \$4 million dollars is estimated to be required for associated plant maintenance activities. Conceptual capital costs were estimated at \$10.1 million with an accuracy of +50 per cent to -30 per cent (PFC2020-1338).
- Potential reintroduction of water fluoridation is not included within the approved Water Utility budget. If approved, operating, maintenance and capital costs are not of the magnitude that would require an associated increase in water utility rates (PFC2020-1338).
- A jurisdictional review identified that due to changes in the Municipal Government Act, a municipal vote on a question is not required prior to passing a fluoridation bylaw. Council also has the authority to introduce water fluoridation without passing a bylaw (PFC2020-1338).
- Potential questions were evaluated for clarity, directness, and relevance.
- Strategic Alignment to Council's Citizen Priorities: A healthy and green city
- Background and Previous Council Direction is included as Attachment 1.

DISCUSSION

At Council's direction, Administration has prepared potential questions regarding the potential reintroduction of fluoride to Calgary's water treatment process and potable water for Council's consideration. As a vote on a question is non-binding, the outcome would serve to inform future Council debate.

Attachment 2 provides three versions of the question, which were evaluated for clarity (can be understood), directness (asks voters a question about what Council should do), and relevance (giving information that could be relied on to decide).

Attachments 3 and 4 respectively include the 2019 Community Water Fluoridation Report (CPS2019-0965) and the 2020 Cost to Reintroduce Fluoride in the Water Treatment Process report (PFC2020-1338). The Class IV cost estimate for the potential reintroduction of a fluoridation system considered operating, maintenance and capital costs with 20 years of service life is \$30.1 million (in 2020 dollars). There is also an anticipated additional cost of \$2 to \$4 million dollars for associated plant maintenance activities.

These costs have not been included in current budgets and budget revisions will be presented for Council approval should Council decide to proceed with fluoridation of Calgary's potable water. The costs associated with water fluoridation are not anticipated to be of the magnitude that would require an associated increase in water utility rates.

If Council directs Administration to reintroduce fluoride to the water treatment process, the Water Utility anticipates it would take 18 to 24 months to implement.

A review of jurisdictional considerations for reintroducing fluoridation to the water treatment process was also undertaken. Guidance on jurisdictional roles and responsibilities identified that:

- The Municipal Government Act no longer requires a municipality to hold a vote on a question before passing a fluoridation bylaw. Council also has the authority to introduce water fluoridation without passing a bylaw.
- An amendment to The City's Approval to Operate a Water Treatment Plant would be required through Alberta Environment and Parks, to allow for water fluoridation. This type of amendment is common practice and would not be expected to cause significant delays in implementation.
- The City has the authority to conduct a vote on a question regarding fluoridation, if Council so chooses.

If Council wishes to proceed with bringing this issue to a vote on a question, several subsequent steps would be required:

- Direct Administration to conduct the vote on a question as part of the upcoming municipal election,
- Identify the preferred question or identify a process to finalize the question, and
- Instruct Administration to develop an impartial information package for electors to review prior to voting.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION (EXTERNAL)

Public Communication or Engagement was not required

IMPLICATIONS

Social

A vote on a question requests guidance for Council from the population of voters. Fluoridation is a contentious issue and many public perspectives have been shared with Council over the years. Having broader engagement with the public may provide Council with a clearer understanding of public perception.

Environmental

Holding a vote on a question has no significant environmental impacts.

Economic

Holding a vote on a question has no significant economic impacts.

Service and Financial Implications

Other:

As outlined in the General Considerations - Vote on a Question report (C2021-0173), if a vote on a question is held, Administration will need to develop and make available information related to the decision. The Water Utility does not expect any service impacts and financial implications are outlined within the General Considerations – Vote on a Question report (C2021-0173).

RISK

There are no significant risks associated with a vote on a question.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Previous Council Direction Background
2. Potential Questions for a Vote on a Question
3. Response to Water Fluoridation in The City of Calgary (CPS2019-0965)
4. Cost to Reintroduce Fluoride in the Water Treatment Process Report (PFC2020-1338)

Department Circulation

General Manager	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform