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## Fixing the river

By **SUSAN SHERRING**

Should the Ottawa River be protected simply for recreational uses like swimming or is it important enough an institution to protect it from pollution all year round?

That's the question being posed by Alta Vista Coun. Peter Hume.

From April 15 to Nov. 15, water headed into the river after being treated at the R.O. Pickard Centre gets a dose of disinfectant.

That kills the E. coli.

But for five months of the year, that practice stops.

And Hume can't help but wonder if allowing E. coli back into the system is the best way to treat the river.

Good question.

As chairman of the city's environment and planning committee, Hume is the leading expert on the river among his colleagues on city council.

And as such, he's fielding calls from concerned residents wanting the city to move on cleaning up the river.

"Should we be disinfecting all year round? We need to figure that out.

"I'd hate to be the people who draw from it downstream. And yet, knowing what we do, we're dumping it back in without disinfectant. We spend this effort to make it clean for swimmers, but should we also be taking care of the river?"

Dixon Weir, the director of waste and wastewater services, said the use of year-round disinfectant is one of many questions that needs to be looked at in terms of cleaning up the river.

"That's certainly something we can consider," he said.

So why isn't it being done now?

"Well, there are a couple of reasons. One is the temperature of the river (during the colder months). The E. coli dies off, and with the cold temperatures, their survival rate is very different in the river," he explained.

With constant media attention on the river, Weir is becoming a master at explaining the issues surrounding pollutants and how we treat them in very simple terms so everyone can understand.

"Fecal matter is essentially a bunch of stuff. Through the primary and secondary treatment (done at the Pickard centre) the fecal matter is reduced and dealt with. Basically, it takes out the solids.

"What it doesn't get is the E. coli. Some of that stuff goes back into the river. And that's what we use the disinfectant for," he said.

In Gatineau, they don't use disinfectant at all.

Hume says it's time for the different levels of government on both sides of the river to sit down and work out a co-operative plan to clean up the river.

That's become a high priority for Hume.

"There's a role for (Environment Minister) John Baird and the National Capital Commission (NCC) to play, ensuring both sides of the river are actively working to protect the resource that we have. That's a bigger challenge. One of the big fears is that we spend all kinds of money doing all kinds of things, but the improvement in the river isn't as great as it should be -- if the other side of the river still has a significant problem.

"Gatineau isn't taking the significant steps we are. And we have to start, we have to move to engage them. And of course, a lot of it revolves around resources. Baird has shown a real interest, if he can bring Minister Lawrence Cannon (MP for the Pontiac) to the table to take a real, good hard look at this, that would be good. We've got some opportunities here and we're going to have to start that dialogue.

"Maybe this is the issue that brings us to coalesce around this. We need to deal with this. But what if Gatineau is the elephant in the room?"

Weir agrees all options have to be considered.

"In the end, the strategy, the solution indicates an end point, a little bit of this, a little bit of that, maybe spending differently, maybe the mix is not quite correct. You've got apples, you've got oranges and what you need is a good fruit salad."