

DECISION BASED ON PROTECTION, NOT POWER: COUNCILLOR

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Halton Region was initially urging "voluntary compliance" when it comes to wearing masks or face coverings, which spurred local council members to bring their own bylaw forward on July 9.

Since then, it's become apparent that Halton may ultimately pass its own region-wide mask bylaw, meaning the Town's regulation could be considered unnecessary.

At press time, the matter was up for debate at regional council.

"I would prefer a uniform approach and that means a regional bylaw," said Bonnette. "This is about the safety of our residents and supporting the local economy. I want people to feel confident in shopping and patronizing establishments throughout Halton Region."

Regardless of which tier of the municipality is enforcing mask wearing, it's clear the issue draws a variety of opinions.

At Preston's grocery store in Glen Williams, owner Atur Shiba said she's happy that a regulation has been put in place, with an-

anticipated bylaw signage helping reinforce the matter if she has to ask a customer to wear a mask.

"This will help keep everybody safe," she said. "Since everybody is back in business, let's do what we can to keep businesses open."

But others don't feel the bylaw is a necessary measure at this time, like local citizen Janice Thompson.

"Cases have been steadily decreasing without mask enforcement, even though things have opened up. Why enforce masks now?" she asked. "If I'm sick, I will stay home. If I'm not sick, I am not helping anybody by wearing a mask."

The sentiment was echoed by Halton Hills resident Mike Baker, who recently informed council of his opposition.

"Had this been proposed in April or May, I wouldn't have felt strongly," he said. "Now the rate of new cases is in steep decline and the death rate is in even steeper decline."

He added: "I tend to place great value on freedom."

Ward 3 Councillor Moya Johnson contended that politicians don't implement such measures because



Graham Paine/Torstar

Sheryl Ballon and her mother Yanina wear masks while shopping.

"This will help keep everybody safe. Since everybody is back in business, let's do what we can to keep businesses open."

- Atur Shiba

they want power over people.

"We've made this decision because we want to help our community stay healthy," she said.

She noted that in the early stages of the pandemic, many businesses were closed and far fewer people were out in public spaces.

"Now, shops, malls, retail and public spaces are opening up," she said. "It's a

numbers game — there are more people out, so there's more risk."

During the special Halton Hills council meeting held to pass the bylaw, the local politicians also heard from Dr. Nadia Alam, a Georgetown physician and past-president of the Ontario Medical Association.

"There is a growing body of evidence, hundreds of studies, that even a cloth

mask will make a difference in how much of the virus you can spread," she said.

She noted there are "very few people who can't tolerate wearing a face mask."

"They do not cause a build-up of carbon dioxide in the body, or heat stroke, or infections, or pneumonia," she said.

"Masks act as a visible reminder that the pandemic is still at large. Even in Halton Hills, it exists and is easily transmissible by asymptomatic people through the simple act of speaking."

Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hamidah Meghani told Metroland Media that she continues to "strongly recommend" the

use of face coverings when physical distancing is a challenge.

"I'm also supportive of approaches and measures that aim to increase the use of face coverings as an additional layer of protection in our response to control COVID-19 in our community, including if a municipality should choose to implement a bylaw for this purpose."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

With masks and face coverings now being recommended by the World Health Organization as a way to help stop the spread of COVID-19, local politicians are responding with regulations to mandate the measure.

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