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Public health inspection reports may become mandatory

By MELANIE HENNESSEY

The Champion

A bylaw that would make it mandatory for all Halton restaurants to have their health department inspection reports available for the public to see came one step closer to reality last week.

At its meeting last Tuesday, the Region's health and social services committee supported directing staff to prepare the bylaw that would make 'Dinewise' — Halton's current program where restaurants voluntarily disclose the results of their inspection reports — compulsory for local food establishments.

The document is to be based on a draft bylaw staff previously drew up and circulated for comments from all restaurant owners in Halton.

It's proposed to become effective July 1, 2006.

A report from Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal explains staff mailed out surveys with the draft in September to the region's approximately 900 restaurants. About 140 responses were sent back and it was found that overall more than 76 per cent were in favour of the mandatory concept — 83 per cent of the current participants and 72 per cent of non-participants.

These numbers pleased Halton Hills Councillor Clark Somerville, who noted he thinks it's great that the local restaurant and hospitality industry is embracing the idea.

"I'm absolutely thrilled by that," he said. "I think this is such a great program that we're rolling out."

Those surveyed support move

Halton residents were surveyed by the Region on the topic last year, which found 78 per cent wanted to see Dinewise become mandatory and 81 per cent said making information about food safety inspections available would influence their decision about where to eat.

Oakville Councillor Mike Lansdown said he thinks making Dinewise mandatory would create a great opportunity for tourism, meaning the Region could promote and advertise Halton as a safe place to dine.

But Regional Chairman Joyce Savoline disagreed, saying it should be up to the restaurant owners to advertise their participation in the program.

"It's not up to us to promote this," she said.

The committee also endorsed implementing the mandatory disclosure program, subject to the approval of additional public health inspectors necessary to carry it out in the 2006 budget.

In addition to finalizing the bylaw, Dr. Nosal's report calls for staff to develop a Dinewise bylaw implementation strategy by December 31. That would include a potential six-month phase-in period during which warning notices would be issued to restaurants not complying with the new rules.

"However, discretion would be maintained so that enforcement actions would see EVALUATION on page A3



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