



**Council Member Motion**  
**For the Council Meeting of August 25, 2016**

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**Date:** August 18, 2016

**From:** Councillor Ben Isitt and Councillor Jeremy Loveday

**Subject:** Applying the Precautionary Principle with Respect to Genetically Engineered Plants

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**Background:**

Genetic Engineering, Genetic Modification and Genetically Engineered Organisms refers to the direct manipulation of an organism's DNA using recombinant DNA technology.

Scientific research indicates that the process of genetic engineering can cause harm to plant and animal species (see attached article by Gilles-Eric Séralini et al., 2014).

As a result of this evidence and citizen advocacy, jurisdictions across North America and the world have taken steps to protect plant and animal species and safeguard long-term food security by limiting the proliferation of genetically engineered plants.

Policies supporting the limitation of genetically engineered plants have been expressed by a range of public bodies, from local government jurisdictions on Vancouver Island including the District of Saanich and District of Metchosin, to jurisdictions on the lower mainland including the City of North Vancouver, to national jurisdictions including France, Italy, Germany, Greece, Poland, Austria and Hungary.

This proactive policy is supported by the *precautionary principle*, which is described in the attached discussion paper by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce as an approach to risk management that has been developed in circumstances of scientific uncertainty, reflecting the need to take prudent action in the face of potentially serious risk without having to await the completion of further scientific research. The most broadly accepted definition of the Precautionary Principle is Principle #15 of the June 1992, Declaration of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, which reads:

"In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

This definition of the precautionary principle is currently enshrined in the 1999 Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA 1999):

"Whereas the Government of Canada is committed to implementing the precautionary principle that, where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

It is therefore recommended that the City of Victoria join other jurisdictions by placing itself on record opposing genetically engineered plants and calling for action by the Federal and Provincial

governments to introduce mandatory labelling of products containing genetically engineered organisms and placing restrictions on further genetically engineered products being brought to market in the absence of scientific testing of long-term impacts on human and environmental health.

**Recommendation:**

THAT Council adopt the following resolution:

WHEREAS, the City of Victoria has the legislative authority to impose requirements in relation to:

- a) The health, safety or protection of persons or property;
- b) The protection and enhancement of the well-being of its community in relation to nuisances, disturbances and other objectionable situations;
- c) Public health;
- d) Protection of the natural environment and animals.

AND WHEREAS, genetically engineered (GE) plants and foods have not been adequately tested by any federal agency for long-term impacts on human and environmental health;

AND WHEREAS, Health Canada has relied on data presented by corporations that hold GM patents, rather than undertaking independent testing for the long-term impacts on health and the environment;

AND WHEREAS, it is currently not possible to prevent genetically engineered seeds and pollen flow from contaminating non-GE conventional and organic plants and trees, and wild plants;

AND WHEREAS, most genetically-engineered plants depend on the use of pesticides whose use is increasing dramatically, including the broad-spectrum herbicide glyphosate, which the World Health Organization has recently determined is linked to cancer in category 2A: “probably carcinogenic to humans”, 2-4-D, and Dicamba, herbicides which have recently been used to control “superweeds” resistant to glyphosates (similar to “superbugs” in our hospitals resistant to antibiotics), either through direct spraying or by genetically engineering additional herbicide tolerance in crops (so called Agent Orange crops). The WHO recently confirmed its classification of 2-4-D as “category 2B: possibly carcinogenic to humans”, and neonicotinoids, which scientists have linked to declines in butterfly and bird populations as well as bee colony collapse disorder (CCD).

AND WHEREAS, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities passed a resolution in 2013 asking the Government of British Columbia to legislate British Columbia as a GE Free area in respect to all plant and animal species;

AND WHEREAS, in the absence of provincial legislation, many BC municipalities have declared themselves as GE Free zones including North Vancouver, Richmond, Saanich, Metchosin and Powell River;

AND WHEREAS, the City of Victoria has passed a Declaration of the Right to a Healthy Environment, which promotes the availability of safe foods, including clause 17(a): which specifies that “citizens have access to affordable, healthy and local food”;

AND WHEREAS, the Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission, an organization advocating for agriculture on southern Vancouver Island, supported the Saanich GE Free resolution passed in 2012 and does not endorse GMO and GE crops.

AND WHEREAS, the regulation of genetically engineered plants and trees is in the public interest:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Victoria places itself on record opposing the cultivation of genetically engineered crops, plants and trees in the City of Victoria in the absence of scientific testing on the long-term impacts of these crops on human and environmental health;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City calls upon the Federal and Provincial governments to implement a regime of mandatory labelling of all genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for sale in BC and Canada;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City calls upon the Federal and Provincial governments to impose a moratorium on bringing further GMOs to market for sale until a regime of independent and transparent scientific assessment and GMO management is introduced;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City of Victoria shall forward copies of this resolution to the Premier, Prime Minister, local Members of the Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament, and member municipalities of the Capital Region.

Respectfully submitted,



Councillor Ben Isitt



Councillor Jeremy Loveday

Attachments.

Letter from First Unitarian Church of Greater Victoria – Social Responsibility Coalition  
Canadian Chamber of Commerce *Definition of the Precautionary Principle*  
Gilles-Eric Séralini et al., "Long-Term Toxicity of a Roundup Herbicide and a Roundup-Tolerant Genetically Modified Maize," *Environmental Sciences Europe*, vol. 24, no. 14 (2014), pp. 1-17.

Petition supporting GE Free declaration