

Plainfield, Vt., bans fluoride from tap water

BY LISA RATHKE • THE ASSOCIATED PRESS • MARCH 3, 2009

PLAINFIELD, Vt. — The town of Plainfield voted Tuesday to remove fluoride from its drinking water after residents expressed concern about potential negative health effects.

The vote was part of an annual town meeting that included debate about setting up a hydroelectric dam, library funding and what to do about an aging road grader.

Fluoride is added to tap water in many U.S. cities and towns as a way of trying to prevent tooth decay. Those who oppose fluoridation believe it provides only a minor benefit to teeth and carries health risks that include bone problems.

Supporters of the fluoride ban here said too many questions existed about its possible hazards to keep it in Plainfield's water system. The town's residents have a choice to use toothpaste with fluoride or have their children get fluoride treatment in school, they said.

"Inadvertent dosing is probably the wrong way to go," said Sarah O'Brien, 51, who has worked on environmental health issues.

Jeff Hunsberger, a health services director at the state Health Department, countered that no scientific study shows that fluoride has a negative effect on human health. The dentist at the Plainfield Health Center supported keeping fluoride in the water, he said.

"It's not a movement to medicate someone against their will," he said.

The fluoride vote came to the floor toward the end of the 4½ hour town meeting, in which about 150 people decided business and spending for the town of 1,300 residents.

Sitting in gray metal chairs, they raised hands to voice their opinions on everything from a new mentoring program for kids to whether the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant should be shut down. The town moderator, joined by town officials at a long table on the stage surrounded by red velvet curtains, helped administer the debate.

Residents spent much of the morning focused on a proposal to borrow up to \$200,000 to set up a hydroelectric dam with Green Mountain Power Corp. The dam on the Winooski River would power municipal buildings.

Supporters argued that the project will save the town money in the long run and give Plainfield some energy independence.

"There's been an exhaustive study of this. It's pretty much bulletproof," said Steven Farnham. "I don't know how much better you want it to look before you say yes."

The town now spends \$15,000 a year on electricity, said Selectboard member Claudia Clark.

The entire project would cost an estimated \$534,000, with \$250,000 covered by a state clean energy grant and \$284,000 split between the town and the utility, which would get about 48 percent of the power. The town would be a majority owner.

A few skeptics wondered whether buying the dam with a utility rather than on its own was the best choice.

The issue was put to a paper ballot vote and the results weren't immediately available.

As the morning wore on, residents snacked on coffee and doughnuts and later chili and corn bread. Some called for better accounting of the \$25,000 allotted to the library.

Others wondered if the town should buy a new road grader, an important question for a community full of dirt roads.

"If you don't do something pretty quick, you're going to spend some money on it," said Lyndol Lumbra, the former road foreman.

In the end, voters decided to add another \$30,000 to a reserve fund to cover a new grader or other equipment in the future.