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FEATURED

Landfill Opposition Read Into Littleton Select Board Record

Recent Weeks Show More Towns, Commissions, Counties Opposed

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As Dalton voters go to the polls on Tuesday to vote on a permanent zoning ordinance, some North Country residents want to see for themselves the complete Casella Waste Systems study concluding there is a need for additional landfill capacity in New Hampshire. Here, on Friday morning, two MBI waste haulers (red cabs) are parked along the shoulder at northbound I-93 and Route 3 in Franconia as they wait for the gate to open at the Casella landfill in Bethlehem, which is projected to close after 2026. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

Opposition to the proposed new commercial landfill in Dalton near the Littleton and Bethlehem town lines isn't often voiced at Littleton Select Board meetings.

On Monday, though, concerns expressed by one Littleton commission were read into the Select Board record.

In recent weeks, more towns, conservation commissions, county commissions, environmental groups, and North Country lawmakers have weighed in against the Casella Waste Systems proposal.

They have issued letters to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services and some have written to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which opened a public comment period on April 9 that ends May 8 for the federal waters-related permit Casella is seeking for a 70-acre landfill that would entail the taking of nearly 12 acres of wetlands.

The correspondence from the Littleton Conservation Commission, issued on March 15 before the USACE public input process, was one of the earlier letters.

"We received a letter from the Littleton Conservation Commission and I really felt that we needed to read this into the record," Linda MacNeil, chair of the Littleton Select Board, said during Monday's board meeting. "It talks about the wetlands application for the Granite State Landfill in Dalton and Bethlehem."

Read in full by MacNeil, LCC's letter was sent by Tom Alt, LCC chairman, to Philip Trowbridge, manager of DES's Land Resource Management Program.

It follows a previous LCC opposition letter sent to DES in 2021.

"From an environmental standpoint, NOTHING HAS CHANGED," Alt wrote in the new letter. "The same affected wetlands and watersheds STILL EXIST, the same porous soil conditions STILL EXIST, the same Ammonoosuc River still receives whatever is discharged from this proposed project area. What HAS changed is the more recent occurrence of two accidental discharges of TOXIC

landfill leachate from two of the applicant's landfill sites (Bethlehem, NH and Coventry, VT). What HAS changed is the increased recognition of the huge impact of PFAS on human health.”

What has also changed is the allowance of independent certified wetlands scientists to report their findings in the current application process, with their recommendations to deny the permit, said Alt.

“The Littleton Conservation Commission (and ALL Conservation Commissions) share a primary responsibility towards the protection of wetlands and watersheds,” said Alt, who likewise asked DES to deny the permit. “This same responsibility is reflected in the mission statement of the NHDES. Allowing the proposed Granite State Landfill or ANY landfill to locate in this area would represent a dereliction of this responsibility to our environmental values.”

On Friday, seven state representatives — Sean Durkin, R-Northumberland; Jim Tierney, R-Northumberland; Seth King, R-Whitefield; Linda Massimilla, D-Littleton; David Rochefort, R-Littleton; Matt Simon, R-Littleton; and Jared Sullivan, D-Bethlehem — issued a letter to DES, and sent copies to the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and USACE.

“After careful consideration and engaging with the constituents of our districts, we find it our duty to express absolute opposition to this initiative,” said the state representatives.

New Hampshire prides itself on its natural landscapes, pristine waterways, and rich biodiversity, all of which could be threatened through PFAS-contaminated runoff into the Ammonoosuc River and adjacent Forest Lake State Park, costs associated with PFAS runoff and uncertainty of who would be responsible for them, negative impacts on tourism and outdoor recreation, trash-related truck traffic through local towns, and negative impacts the businesses that depend on tourism dollars, they said.

“While we understand the need for effective waste management solutions, these must be balanced with the imperative of preserving our environment for future generations,” said the legislators.

“We urge you to deny the applications for the GSL project and consider alternative waste management strategies that have less environmental impact, such as increased recycling programs, the adoption of zero-waste initiatives, and investment in more sustainable forms of waste processing,” they said. “It is imperative that we take a stand now to avoid the long-term consequences that

the Granite State Landfill project might impose. We owe it to our constituents, our communities, and our state to protect the resources that make New Hampshire the place we love and are proud to call home.”

The state representatives said they agree with the reports submitted to DES by the Bethlehem and Dalton conservation commissions as well as the letters submitted by both the Grafton and Coos county commissions that ask DES to deny the wetlands permit.

Citing similar environmental, PFAS, pollution, traffic, and tourism concerns, the three-member Grafton County Commission issued its opposition letter to DES on March 26, followed by the Coos County Commission on April 17.

“The proposed development would represent yet another commercial landfill sited in the North Country, far removed from the primary sources of waste generation,” said Coos County’s commissioners, who added that southern Coos is home to “iconic” New Hampshire tourist destinations that include Santa’s Village, the Cog Railway, Mt. Washington Auto Road, Mt. Washington Hotel, and the state’s largest ski area, Bretton Woods.

“Mixing trash and tourism does not seem to be a winning strategy,” said Coos County’s commissioners.

On April 15, the Whitefield Select Board wrote Trowbridge to say, “The Board of Selectmen are in full support of the Whitefield Conservation Commission’s letter dated April 10, 2024 stating they wish to go on record as being strongly opposed to the granting of a permit to the Casella Corporation for the purpose of siting a landfill on land in close proximity to Forest Lake and wetlands in Whitefield that feed into the town’s water supply.”

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