

Water contamination decreasing at landfill

By MIKE DICKERMAN
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BETHLEHEM--Echoing sentiments expressed a year ago at a similar town forum, North Country Environmental Services head Jim Bohlig said last week his company remains committed to being a responsible member of the Bethlehem community.

Bohlig, speaking at last Wednesday's public information meeting at the elementary school here, said his firm, which operates the controversial landfill on Trudeau Road, "is trying to amend the past practices" of landfill operators. "We feel we have an obligation to this community. We're a different people from the people who operated the landfill before us," he said.

Bohlig went on to say that NCES would like to "position" itself for an expansion of the landfill somewhere in the future. Acknowledging that local zoning ordinances prohibit any further expansion of the Trudeau Road landfill, Bohlig said the fate of any such expansion will depend on "the quality people we're perceived to be" by community members.

"We'll work within the constraints of the community. There's plenty of time...for the community to make up its mind about us," said Bohlig.

In the course of the two-and-a-half-hour long forum, residents were updated on several joint community projects undertaken this year by the town and NCES. They also learned that, as predicted a year

ago, groundwater contamination levels near the landfill have dropped over the course of the past 12 months.

In reviewing the joint community projects, Bohlig and Selectman John L. Wedick Jr. said the permanent closure of the old town dump off Prospect St. was completed at a cost of \$219,468. The town picked up a little more than half the cost (\$117,549), while NCES picked up the rest of the tab.

Bohlig said the closing of the dump is the first for any community north of Franconia Notch. Additionally, the town was able to get the job done for far less than the \$350,000 that was originally estimated.

NCES also worked with the town in developing the new recreation and playground facility behind and across from the town building. As of Dec. 7, \$106,125 had been spent on the project, with NCES shelling out \$71,076 for the project.

Bohlig took exception to a remark by local resident Nick Mike that the joint community effort had all the earmarks of "collusion" between selectmen and NCES. "That's a strong word," responded an irritated Bohlig.

Ongoing water quality monitoring at the Trudeau Road landfill prompted a considerable amount of discussion, as expected.

NCES officials noted the latest test samples drawn from monitoring wells last month show that contaminants are barely traceable at off-site locations, such as the seep near the Ammonoosuc River and down-gradient of the double-lined landfill area.

The problem area remains in and around the old unlined section of the landfill, from which buried trash was

excavated two years ago and placed in the lined section.

Bohlig said the water quality is "universally improving" in all the wells being monitored, just as state and landfill officials predicted would be the case.

Bohlig, in response to allegations that the landfill's liners were failing, said no evidence backing up that charge exists. In fact, he noted, the Department of Environmental Services, in a recent letter to Nick Mike, addressed that very allegation and wrote that facility's liner was "functioning properly."

Victor Hofmann, owner of the Wayside Inn on nearby Route 302, told landfill officials he's concerned about persistent odor problems related to the landfill. "What assurance do we have that this is not something that is going to happen again and again and again?" he asked.

Bohlig said he could not guarantee that odor problems won't exist from time to time, but he did vow to address any such future episodes as quickly and efficiently as possible, as has always been NCES' practice.

The final half hour of the meeting was spent discussing the establishment of a local recycling program. Wedick asked for community members to step forward and volunteer their time to put together a program that could work for the town's residents.

"Everything we put into the landfill we pay for," said Wedick. A recycling program would reduce waste disposal costs and actually generate income for the town, since NCES, which has offered to run the program for the community, has vowed to turn all money collected from recyclables back to the town.

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