

Mount Carberry could be trash solution

By LYN BIXBY

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SUCCESS TOWNSHIP—Dave Marcotte, the 57-year-old supervisor of the Mount Carberry Landfill, says the facility that he helped create is going to outlive him. He estimates it has another 30 to 40 years of life before it reaches capacity.

“We’ve got everything in place,” he said. “We’ve got the land, and we’re outside of town.”

That’s welcome news for people in many other North Country communities who are worried about what they will do with their trash if the commercial landfill on Trudeau Road in Bethlehem is shut down in two years.

“What they are doing up there [at Mount Carberry] is an extraordinary attribute to the North Country, to have a publicly-owned landfill facility available to us and not have it be owned by some major corporation,” said Jane Higgins, a Sugar Hill resident active in recycling and waste issues who toured the landfill with Marcotte last week. “I love seeing it done well, and Mount Carberry is an example of it being done well.”

Littleton Recycling Manager Anthony Ilacqua, who joined Higgins and several others for the tour, said the emergence of Mount Carberry as a solid waste option set his mind at ease, particularly after seeing it firsthand. “The buyout couldn’t have come at a better time for towns and businesses in the area,” he said.

The Mount Carberry Landfill, nestled in a natural bowl of glacial till behind a high ridge just east of Berlin, had an uncertain future until December 30, when it was purchased for \$10 million by the Androscoggin Valley Regional Refuse Disposal District.

The landfill was established in November 1989 by the James River Corporation to dispose of sludge from the company’s paper mills. A few years ago the landfill and the mills were sold to Pulp and Paper of America, which filed for protection from creditors in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in September 2001. That company’s assets were acquired a year ago by Frazer Paper Co., which put the landfill up for sale.

Among the bidders for Mount Carberry was Casella Waste Systems, Inc. of Vermont, which owns the Bethlehem landfill through a subsidiary, North Country Environmental Services, Inc. Casella has engaged Bethlehem town officials in a series of high-stakes legal battles during the past five years over expansion of the Trudeau Road landfill.

Casella lost the latest round last month when Grafton Superior Court Judge Jean K. Burling ruled that Bethlehem officials may enforce an ordinance prohibiting expansion of the 51-acre landfill, which is scheduled to reach capacity in 2005. Casella is appealing the ruling to the state Supreme Court.

Casella, a \$400 million company, also lost in the Mount Carberry bidding. The Androscoggin disposal district, a regional government entity, is financing the purchase of the landfill with \$14 million in bonds. The money covers the sale price, as well as needed capital improvements, including \$2 million to begin construction of a state-approved 29-acre expansion of the landfill.

Overall, the district acquired 1,200 acres surrounding the landfill, which covers about 36 acres. District officials estimate the landfill area can be increased to about 120 acres.

This spring the state Department of Environmental Services approved a new permit for Mount Carberry, increasing the amount of waste it can receive annually from 32,500 tons to 120,000 tons.

“That is the permitted amount projected for the landfill for the next 20 years,” said Christopher Way, a supervisor in the solid waste section of DES. “One could see where [Mount Carberry] could probably take over some of the Bethlehem tonnage that might be left over should Casella not succeed [in court]. Market forces will certainly dictate that. But Mount Carberry is going to be a force up there.”

The 51-acre NCES landfill in Bethlehem took in about 132,000 tons of waste last year from New Hampshire towns and businesses, and it is projected to reach capacity in mid-2005. In March state regulators approved an 11-acre expansion of the landfill, but whether the company can proceed with the expansion will be up to the state Supreme Court.

Casella’s appeal of Judge Burling’s ruling could take 12 to 18 months before the Supreme Court issues a decision. But in order to prepare the state-approved expansion area to accept trash by mid-2005, the company would have to begin construction by next summer. That poses a gamble for Casella: whether to ask state regulators for permission to begin construction at the risk of losing the investment if the Supreme Court upholds Burling’s decision.

While the growth of the Bethlehem landfill has generated intense opposition from town residents for more than

a decade, the sudden expansion of the Mount Carberry landfill has not given any complaints. One of the challenges for Mount Carberry's new owner will be to attract enough trash to make debt payments on the bonding. Sharon Gauthier, the Androscoggin district's executive director, is working hard to sign up customers.

"We feel confident we'll be able to generate the business we need," she said. "We're looking at working with New Hampshire's communities. That's what we want to do."

Lisbon looks like it could become one of those towns.

Monday night the Lisbon Board of Selectmen seemed inclined to end their relationship with the NCES Bethlehem landfill when the town's trash contract expires in August and to switch to Mount Carberry. Members of the board determined that the costs of doing business with the two landfills were roughly comparable during a meeting with Dan Woods, a waste coordinator with the North Country Council, a regional planning agency. "It's safe to say probably nobody in this room is going to have to worry about trash again as long as Mount Carberry is there," Woods said.

James Steele, another North Country Council staffer who works on solid waste, was among those who toured the Mount Carberry landfill last week.

The Androscoggin Valley Regional Refuse Disposal District contracted with one of New England's largest construction companies, Cianbro Corporation of Pittsfield, Maine, to operate the Mount Carberry landfill, and Cianbro hired Marcotte, who was laid off when the mill went into bankruptcy.

"They're committed to doing what they've got to do to be in compliance," Marcotte said of his new employer, "and they're committed to being good neighbors."

He said he works closely with Gauthier and with Raymond Danforth, the Androscoggin district's environmental consultant who is familiar with the landfill from his job as environmental director for the Berlin paper companies for almost two decades.

Marcotte, having managed the landfill since it was created, knows every square foot of the facility and talks about it like it's a member of his family.

He said he stumbled on the location by accident while he was in the woods one day. Geologists, looking for a landfill site, had been analyzing an area about 10 miles from the paper mill, and he suggested they check out the spot he found. It turned out to be perfect with an impermeable natural liner of silt.

As for the name, Marcotte said he noticed on maps of the area that two hills flanking the natural bowl that formed the landfill site, were both named Mount Carberry. "So," he said, "that's what I called it."