

## Dalton's concerns over landfill safety surface in DES's public input session



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Concerns about landfill safety in New Hampshire and industries wielding too much power in environmental regulation decision-making have taken root in the North Country town of Dalton.

Residents have been fighting against Casella Waste Systems, a waste-management company that wants to locate a 72-acre landfill near Forest Lake.

At this week's annual town meeting, residents voted down two petitioned warrant articles seeking to abolish the planning board and conservation commission that would make it easier for Casella to establish a new landfill, which is about 10 miles away from an existing landfill the company owns in Bethlehem that received trash from in and out of state.

The fight has pitted the small town, which has a limited capacity to wage legal battles, against a powerful corporation looking to expand its profits and operations. By comparison, Dalton's town budget is less than \$1 million, while Casella, a publicly traded company, is worth nearly \$4 billion.

At an online public input session hosted by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES) on Monday, a day before town voting, Dalton resident and landfill opponent Adam Finkel, suggested the state should consider establishing a sighting commission to identify suitable landfill sites before applicants select a location. This proactive approach would reduce the likelihood of permit rejection for unsuitable sites and ensure environmental safety.

"Why would it not be a good idea in the decades that we have to proactively find some sites and allow applicants to choose among them, rather than proffer to the state?" Finkel said.

The waste management division of the DES conducted the session to give the public an opportunity to provide feedback and weigh in on the proposed changes to solid waste administrative rules, specifically those related to landfill requirements and financial assurance.

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Revising setback requirements and updating liner system requirements are some of the areas in which the department is looking to update its rules. It is also proposing more robust inspection, monitoring, and reporting from landfill operators.

However, the department will not propose any rules specific to setbacks until the legislative session concludes.

The proposed landfill near Forest Lake might face problems if several existing bills making their way through the State House pass.

Sarah Doucette, a member of the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change urged that it's important now more than ever to preserve the environmental purity that we have today.

"I hope that you can find the footing to stand up to the corporate entities that have a great deal of power over the future of all of us," said Doucette. "For the sake of all of us and every generation to come, I would beg the DES to err on the side of environmental protection, rather than corporate protection and advancement."

To ensure post-closure landfill care, the DES is considering a \$2 million base amount plus an additional \$10,000 per acre of landfill footprint. This would provide extra funds for possible corrective actions if something went wrong during the post-closure care period.

The current administrative rules for solid waste will expire in July 2024, and DES will continue to gather public feedback and ideas as it prepares to propose changes. The public can submit comments in writing to NHDES at any time before April 7.