

https://www.caledonianrecord.com/news/local/state-rep-town-highlight-waste-diversion-legislation-for-2022/article_ea132cb7-746c-5652-9bf1-5314c23bd360.html

State Rep., Town Highlight Waste Diversion Legislation For 2022

Robert Blechl rblechl@caledonian-record.com Staff Writer

Dec 28, 2021



State Rep. Timothy Egan, D-Sugar Hill, upper left on the Zoom video, was invited to speak earlier this month by the Bethlehem Conservation Commission and Bethlehem Transfer Station Committee on several bills seeking to divert waste from landfills.

What began three years ago as a concern about a proposed new landfill beside Forest Lake State Park in Dalton has today grown into several pieces of waste diversion legislation that will be taken up at the statehouse in 2022

If successful, they could reduce the amount of solid waste going into landfills across New Hampshire.

At the invitation of Bethlehem Conservation Commission co-chair Cheryl Jensen, state Rep. Tim Egan, D-Sugar Hill, highlighted four bills to members of the conservation commission and the town transfer station committee during a joint meeting on Dec. 14.

The bills seek to increase fines for littering to deter littering; allow for more recycling of construction and demolition debris as well as the composting food waste to reduce the solid waste that goes into landfills; and create a “bottle bill” to allow for the redemption of up to 10 cents for each bottle, can, or beverage recyclable to also deter littering and decrease the solid waste stream.

Jensen has been a member of the conservation commission since 2007, and since then said she has been picking up roadside trash during the town’s annual roadside cleanup.

Once she learned of Egan’s bills, they piqued her interest.

Upon first becoming a state representative in 2018, Egan said environmental bills were on his list.

He supported legislation by former state Rep. Elaine French, D-Littleton, and current state Rep. Edith Tucker, D-Randolph, to create a 2-mile buffer between any state park and any new landfill, and said he couldn’t understand why those bills did not succeed.

The next step came, he said, when local residents concerned about a new landfill reached out to North Country lawmakers to say New Hampshire has a solid waste problem and something needs to be done.

“How can we begin to address that so that we don’t need new landfills or need more of them because we’re filling them too fast?” said Egan. “We are a commercial society, we are going to create waste, and need to put it somewhere. But why don’t we take a harder look at how to not create more solid waste and protect the environment?”

The littering bill that would apply to state parks and state roadways would increase fines for violators by 20 percent, with that additional money going to support more New Hampshire Fish and Game Conservation officers for enforcement and put more teeth into the state’s littering laws to change the behavior of those who don’t think twice about throwing something out of their car, he said.

“If we’re looking at New Hampshire’s second-largest economy as being tourism, then beautifying our roadways and parks is essential,” said Egan. “That was the one bill that got it started for me.”

The second bill, to make composting easier, would allow transfer stations to put a bin at their facility to collect food waste.

“They can either partner with a business or local farm to collect the food waste and consumers will be able to separate out their food waste when they drop off their recycling,” said Egan. “If we put less food waste into the solid waste stream, we are reducing the need for landfills or more landfills. If we reduce the amount that goes into the dumping facility, then the tipping fees are less for the town. We can begin to save the town money that way. That helps with towns bottom lines don’t have to increase taxes at the transfer station.”

Consumers also save money by having to buy fewer bags and small farms can utilize the waste as fertilizer or animal feed, he said.

“Now, you’re helping small businesses cut their costs and we’re helping to prime the pump of the local economy,” said Egan, adding that the bill has a lot of bipartisan co-sponsors and support and that New Hampshire’s commissioner of agriculture noted that it wouldn’t need a lot of regulation.

The third bill would promote at transfer stations more recycling of construction and demolition (C&D) debris, allowing for the reselling of doors, windows, pillars, bricks, moldings, and other items, such as those sold at the former Admac Salvage in Littleton, and thereby reducing the cost of materials and construction, he said.

The C&D diversion would reduce the landfill tipping fee per ton for towns and allow towns to generate revenue while taking something else out of the waste stream, said Egan.

The bill only allows those licensed contractors who live in the district of a transfer station to bring the material to the station to be offered.

The fourth bill, which Egan said is the most difficult in getting passed, is the bottle bill.

“Look all around New England and every [state] has a bottle bill except New Hampshire,” he said. “There have been bottle bills in this state attempted in the past.”

Manufacturers of beverage products will say a bottle redemption is an expense to the industry, but in the last six months aluminum can manufacturers have said recycling is needed because the cost of raw materials is rising, and in the last month some bottle manufacturers have expressed the same, he said.

Egan's bill sets the redemption at 10 cents, whereas other New England states currently have 5 cents, though at least two are looking at an increase to 10.

"The push-back I get from grocery chains is redemption is unclean [and] negatively impacts grocery stores ... [because] the machines are upfront, that stuff that draws bugs and animals, and what do we do with the bottles and cans once they're redeemed," said Egan. "The idea is it allows for businesses to get a tax incentive if they build a separate redemption facility."

Redemption centers, such as the one in south St. Johnsbury that has a laundromat and convenience store, are a point of economic development and it makes sense for towns to have one, said Egan.

"If done the right way, it becomes an economic boon," he said.

Not currently addressed in the bottle bill are the much smaller alcohol "nip" bottles and plastic franchise coffee cups, he said.

But the plan is to pass a bottle bill first and then begin to explore the others, said Egan.

For the littering bill, the commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has voiced support because DOT crews, before they can mow roadsides, have to first pick up trash and take it to recycle, which costs money, he said.

The bills have the strong bipartisan support of North Country legislators, who Egan said realize solid waste is a problem and is impacting the region with the threat of two landfills [the existing one is in Bethlehem] within several miles of each other and in "a place that is supposed to be the bastion of tourism and the environment."

Egan said he has had several conversations with representatives of Casella Waste Systems about one bill.

"They came out publicly about supporting composting, which potentially for them is a revenue generator because composting can then be used in creating energy," he said. "I've had similar conversations with Waste Management Inc. They were more proactive with C&D ... and were surprised it hadn't gotten more interest or traction. They understand the impact it would have in reducing housing costs and construction costs ..."

Transfer station committee member Barry Zitser said the committee will discuss a resolution supporting the bottle bill because it's common sense.

"I love what you're proposing for the food waste," said Mt. Cleveland Road resident Paul Karpawich. "It's a no-brainer."

A nonprofit called Grow Nashua has a curbside composting program that takes food waste to a digester in Maine, where it's converted into bio-fuel that drives turbines, he said.

In New Hampshire, Egan said Casella wants to collect food waste because they have a digester in Vermont.

Whether it's Meadowstone Farm in Bethlehem that wants to fertilize their organic growing, a farmer in Lisbon that wants food waste for pigs, or another entity seeking another use, the idea is to get a location to drop off and pick up food waste, said Egan.

"People move to New Hampshire for the quality of life and we have to protect that quality of life," he said. "If we want fewer landfills, we have to put less into the solid waste stream. Reclamation, recycling, redemption, and composting we have to do."

Robert Blechl