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## Town, Commissions Petition State With Landfill Truck Traffic Concerns

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Jan 24, 2022



Before selectmen met on Monday to accept public input on possible landfill truck traffic through town, some two dozen local residents turned out to Bethlehem Town Hall to protest Casella Waste Systems' proposed truck route along Bethlehem's Main Street to the company's proposed landfill in Dalton. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

One town and two conservation commissions have reached out to state agencies with concerns.

After holding a public input session on Dec. 20 about possible landfill truck traffic through town, Bethlehem selectmen have formally sent a letter to two state agencies, informing them that no one who spoke at the session wants any trucks through downtown.

The conservation commissions of Dalton and Whitefield have now issued letters to state officials about traffic in their towns about adverse environmental impacts they said would result from a new landfill facility in Dalton.

In their Jan. 18 letter to New Hampshire Department of Transportation Commissioner Victoria Sheehan and New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Commissioner Robert Scott, Bethlehem Board of Selectmen called the proposed southbound truck route by Casella Waste Systems a “disaster for Bethlehem.”

The board, they said, “is formally registering its dismay and objection to the Granite State Landfill’s plan to route large trucks along Bethlehem’s Main Street and down its Route 116. The board feels that there would be an enormous adverse impact on the town’s health, safety, economy and residents.”

The plan also does not clearly meet DES’s standard of “minimizing adverse environmental, public health, and long-term economic impacts,” and the impact would be so great that it eliminates any public benefit, particularly since the Mt. Carberry landfill near Berlin has the ability to handle New Hampshire’s needs, said selectmen.

Casella is proposing the commercial GSL landfill in Dalton, near the Bethlehem and Littleton town lines, that would take up to half of its waste from out of state during a period of several decades.

DOT is the agency that would grant or deny a driveway permit for the landfill.

Bethlehem selectmen are asking DOT to reject the permit (the driveway begins on Douglas Drive, off of Route 116, in Bethlehem) “because there would be a huge and unacceptable increase of heavy truck traffic on a short stretch of road” that “is already heavily traveled and frequently the scene of accidents, including fatalities” and “would not only endanger our residents, but it would be a burden for our volunteer fire department and small police department.”

Out of a total of 100 vehicles, or 200 round-trips, to and from the landfill on a daily basis, anywhere from 18 to 24 big trucks would along Bethlehem’s Main Street, they said.

In addition to concerns of noise, air quality, negative impacts to a growing tourist area, and trash flying off the trucks along Main Street as they said occur along Route 3 en route to Casella’s existing landfill along Trudeau Road in Bethlehem, selectmen told Sheehan and Scott “there is no guarantee that truck traffic won’t increase as Casella’s interstate business grows.”

If the project obtains approval, they ask that the southbound trucks along Interstate 93 that would take Exit 40 and go through Bethlehem along eastbound Route 302 be routed instead to Exit 36, about an additional 12 minutes, where they can pick up northbound Route 3 and bypass Bethlehem's downtown.

"Some residents suspect that Casella picked the route through Bethlehem because the town has repeatedly voted against an expansion of its landfill on Trudeau Road," Bethlehem selectmen told Sheehan and Scott.

On Thursday, Nancy Comeau, chair of the Dalton Conservation Commission, wrote DOT District 1 assistant engineer James McMahon about "grave concerns and strong opposition" to the granting of a driveway permit.

"There is a plethora of environmental concerns that already exist on and around the property chosen for the driveway permit," she said. "These include alteration of terrain and wetland issues yet to be resolved ... The property landowner has initiated conversations with the Dalton Planning Board proposing the construction of a drag strip with the potential for 500 vehicles per event as well as a 500-site campground located on 294 acres on the property closed to Forest Lake State Park. The accumulative traffic would all be entering and exiting from the requested driveway permit."

The proposed developments are located in the New Hampshire Action Plan's highest-ranked biological and ecological habitat in the state and would negatively impact the state park, said Comeau.

On Jan. 12, the Whitefield Conservation Commission, noting that trucks would come through Whitefield to reach Route 116, issued a letter to DOT District 1 Engineer Phil Beaulieu, stating its opposition to the granting of the driveway permit.

The WCC said that Douglas Ingerson Jr., who owns 1,900 acres that he would sell to Casella if the landfill obtains the needed permits, has recently proposed the campground, which commission members said would add more traffic as well as a "questionable environmental impact on Forest Lake and surrounding woodlands/wetlands in addition to an increased traffic load to a driveway that does not meet NHDOT minimum standards."

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