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Casella Gives Dalton Landfill Status, Expects Public Hearings After Mid-2024

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During Monday's Dalton Select Board meeting, Joe Gay, engineer for Casella Waste Systems, presented the current status of the company's proposed commercial landfill near Forest Lake.

During a Dalton Select Board meeting on Monday, a representative for Casella Waste Systems presented the status of the company's new commercial landfill proposed near Forest Lake State Park and said a series of public hearings on the permit applications could take place in the late summer or early fall of 2024.

Among the questions asked by board members were if any expansion is being eyed beyond what is now an 18-year landfill life capacity beginning after 2026 and if Casella will be reaching out to nearby towns that would also be impacted by the project, with impacts including truck traffic.

In late 2023, following a landfill footprint that had been reduced from the originally proposed 137 acres to a current footprint of 70 acres, the company submitted revised applications for the state solid waste, wetlands, driveway, and alteration of terrain permits.

Later in January, Casella intends to submit applications for federal permits, including one for water quality.

Permits since filed for what Casella is calling the Granite State Landfill LLC are under preliminary review by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services to determine if they are administratively complete, after which the department, upon determining completeness, would begin a formal application review.

The driveway permit is under review by the State Department of Transportation.

“I think we mentioned before that all of these permit processes take a long time,” said Casella engineer Joe Gay, who gave the informal presentation. “We’re in the beginning stages of that ... Our landfill in Bethlehem is going to be at capacity some time in 2026, maybe 2027. Ideally, what we’d like to do is be able to transition our operations from that facility to this facility in Dalton.”

Once all permits are obtained, Casella has about three years of construction before it could begin accepting trash in Dalton, and there is a window of four or five years before it would need that capacity, he said.

While the new footprint is 70 acres, which would contain all of the waste, there would be disturbances outside of that to build the landfill and storm-water ponds, roads, and other features, said Gay.

“That encompasses about 150 acres, so just over double what the landfill footprint itself would be,” he said. “As proposed, this facility would provide about 18 years of capacity for our customer base in New Hampshire.”

There is also the potential for renewable energy projects (decomposing waste produces landfill gas that can be converted to energy) that could involve input from the community, said Gay.

He said the landfill would be sited near Chick's Sand and Gravel, with the footprint just beyond where the stone is crushed.

NHDOT is requiring safety improvements at the intersection of Route 116 and the driveway entrance, said Gay.

"What DOT wants to see is the entrance to the facility perpendicular to 116 for safety reasons," said Gay. "And they are going to require an access lane or a right-turn lane coming from the Whitefield side. Trucks and vehicles entering the landfill can get into the right-turn lane and allow vehicles to pass by. There will be an island with good sight distances on both sides."

He called the access road from Route 116 "in pretty good shape," wide, and able to hold up well for heavy vehicle traffic.

The infrastructure area would provide a collection and management point for the landfill gas that is produced by lined landfills as well as a capture point for the wastewater, or leachate, collected from inside the footprint.

"That wastewater is pumped into tanks before it's hauled offsite," said Gay.

Casella would not build the entire 70 acres in the first years of operation and would instead divide the landfill into six separate cells of about 12 to 14 acres each, as is typical in the development of modern landfills, he said.

"The wetlands application is proposing to take about 11 ½ acres of wetlands for the project, so we'll be talking about mitigation efforts for the taking of 11 ½ acres," said Gay.

Mitigation can include such measures as preserving wetlands in other areas, he said.

As for the project timeline, the state is requiring Casella to keep its Bethlehem landfill open until 2026, though the company will likely keep that facility open into 2027 before it reaches capacity, said Gay.

"At that point, we hope we're over here, built the first cell, got our infrastructure in, and begin accepting waste," he said.

In 2024, if the company begins to gain permit approvals, it can begin building certain landfill features as it goes, said Gay.

While Monday's presentation during what was a Select Board work session did not provide an opportunity for residents to ask questions, Gay said that he would be open to holding a future question-and-answer session.

He also said a host community agreement first proposed by Casella to the town several years ago when the landfill was twice as large could be revisited by other Casella staff members.

In response to a question by Dalton Select Board member Jo Beth Dudley, Gay said that while the landfill site would have renewable energy opportunities, it would not have a commercial composting facility or a transfer station because it would be an end disposal site.

Casella has proposed to build and operate a large-scale recycling facility for the state of New Hampshire, but it would not be located in Dalton, he said. Previously, Casella representatives have said that a recycling facility would be located in another part of the state.

Dudley also asked if the Dalton Conservation Commission and its experts would be able to visit the property during the time when it's most beneficial, such as when vernal pools are active.

Gay said an opportunity was extended previously for the commission to visit during the growing season, but that offer was declined, and any future visit "would be a legal question at this point."

Select Board member Carol Sheltry said the original permit application was for 38 years, and now Casella is proposing a landfill with a life of 18 years.

"Are there future expansions to go to 38?" she asked. "Are we starting out at 18 and going to 38 years?"

"We're starting at 18 and staying at 18 at this point," said Gay. "There are no plans for future expansion."

"Have you reached out to Whitefield since they are bordering all of this, and the trucks will be coming through their town?" asked Sheltry.

“Yeah, it’s a good question,” said Gay. “I don’t think we’ve gone to Whitefield. I know that we had some conversations with DOT about Whitefield, looking at some safety questions down there, but I have not been to the Whitefield Select Board.”

“Are you going to reach out to them?” asked Sheltry.

“That’s a good question,” said Gay. “That is something I will take a note of.”

“They will be affected by this as well,” said Sheltry.

“Yeah,” said Gay. “I appreciate the question and will put some consideration into that.”

“It seems like the surrounding communities, not just Whitefield, but Bethlehem, Littleton, etc. would be impacted as well,” said Dudley. “Are there plans to reach out to the broader community?”

Gay said he’s been focused on Dalton.

“I also oversee our lined landfill in Vermont and I’ve been to many of the towns for that landfill, answering questions that they might have regionally, so that is something that we can take into consideration here, I think,” he said.

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