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EDITOR'S PICK

## Landfill Bill Passes House Thursday, Gov. Ready To Sign Into Law

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May 21, 2026



After it passed the New Hampshire House of Representatives on Thursday, Gov. Kelly Ayotte is ready to sign into law a landfill bill that seeks to create a new solid waste site evaluation committee while preserving local control and existing legal agreements, such as the agreement that the town of Bethlehem has with Casella Waste Systems to prohibit further expansion of Casella's landfill, a part of which is pictured here on Monday from the end of River Road. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

After passing the New Hampshire Senate last week and the House of Representatives on Thursday, a landfill bill seeking to create a new solid waste site evaluation committee while preserving local control for communities is bound for the governor's signature.

House Bill 707 passed the House on a voice vote, without amendment.

In a statement issued after the vote, Gov. Kelly Ayotte called it "a bill to protect New Hampshire's outdoors and ensure local communities have a say in the siting process for new landfills."



"This is a win for our North Country and the local communities who have been fighting for years to have a say in the landfill siting process," said Ayotte. "I said from day one we wouldn't let beautiful areas of our state become a dumping ground for out-of-state trash, and I thank the members of the Legislature and leaders from the North Country who worked with us on a solution to this critical issue. I'm thrilled to see this legislation coming to my desk and look forward to signing it into law."

On Monday, before the vote, the Bethlehem Select Board issued a statement about HB 707, which several weeks ago was amended to preserve local control and existing legal agreements that a community might have with a landfill company, such as Bethlehem's 2012 settlement agreement with Casella Waste Systems in which then-Casella CEO John Casella agreed in writing to not buy new land for expansion or seek expansion once the company's landfill there reaches capacity at 61 acres, which is now expected to occur in 2026.

"The Bethlehem Select Board supports the amended HB 707 because it creates a more comprehensive review process for major solid waste facility proposals by allowing consideration of impacts beyond the traditional environmental permitting review conducted by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services," said Select Board member Andrea Knowles.

“So the amended legislation specifically allows evaluation of broader regional and community impacts such as property values, tourism, traffic, noise, odor, recreation, aesthetics, economic impacts, and overall public interest considerations, which broadens our opportunity,” she said. “Because of the site evaluation committee model, we are able to now look at even more and provide a more transparent forum that balances statewide needs with local and regional concerns.”



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Knowles thanked the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change (NCABC) for what she said is its continued support and advocacy on behalf of Bethlehem, state Sen. David Rochefort, R-Littleton, for protecting the interests of the town, Ayotte for her leadership in moving the legislation forward, and state Sen. Howard Pearl, R-Loudon, for his willingness to address Bethlehem’s concerns about the original language of HB 707.

That original language and bill — which new Casella CEO Ned Coletta, in an earnings call to company stockholders on Feb. 20, said was being headed up by John Casella — would have dissolved any existing legal agreements between towns and landfill companies and opened the way for possible landfill expansion in Bethlehem for years beyond 2026, using more than 100 acres of adjacent land that Casella bought in 2015, and after residents in 2017 and 2018 voted down additional expansions.


“So we’re now optimistic that this legislation will move into law at the betterment of the entire state and the town of Bethlehem,” said Knowles.

Bethlehem town administrator Mary Moritz thanked resident Rich Southwell for attending statehouse hearings on HB 707 and advocating on behalf of the town, thus constituting what she said was a presence before lawmakers that made a difference.

“I was very happy to do it,” said Southwell. “Don’t want to ever do it again.”

Before Thursday’s vote, NCABC, which continues to do the “lion’s share of the work,” sent a letter to all 400 state representatives asking them to support the bill as amended, said Bethlehem Select Board member Nancy Strand.

“They also mentioned that it took seven years to get this far,” said Strand. “Sometimes these things take a long time and I commend all the people who stuck with it all this time.”



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