



Natalie Abruzzo / WSKG News

Thurston Town Hall in Steuben County.

Waste management company Casella wants to turn its halted sewage sludge business in Steuben County into

a composting business, despite a moratorium in place since February.

In a letter dated Aug. 5, Casella Organics' lawyer told the town of Thurston it is moving forward with a permit modification from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to begin construction on a composting facility at its Bonny Hill location.

Bonny Hill is the location of its sewage sludge operation, which has been halted due to a ban on landspreading passed by the town last year, due to concerns about PFAS found in the town's water systems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency links PFAS, also called "forever chemicals", to several health issues, such as reproductive effects, developmental delays in children, and some cancers.

Thurston officials said Casella cannot move forward with its plans to modify its current sewage sludge

business because there is a one-year moratorium on anything related to modification or new solid waste management facilities in the area. The moratorium is separate from the town's ban on landspreading operations.

The letter also stated the company would agree to forgo any continued legal action to repeal the landspreading ban, if the town board agreed to the permit modification, regardless of the state's decision on the company's right to farm. Currently, Casella is waiting for a response from the state's Department of Agriculture and Markets on its Right to Farm law with regards to sewage sludge operations.

Thurston Town Supervisor Michael Volino said he and the board were surprised by the letter from Casella lawyers last month.

"DEC should not be allowing any permits in the town of Thurston, as it relates to the solid waste management, because the towns have the ultimate say on land-use issues," Volino said. "And we have stated

there are to be no new permits, no major modifications in the town of Thurston.”

The DEC said in an email to WSKG that it “subjects applications for environmental permits to a rigorous review process to protect public health and the environment. DEC is reviewing Casella Organics’ renewal application, received March 3, 2024. The application has no proposed changes. Permit renewals with no changes are considered Type II actions under SEQR and are not [subject to] public notice unless for a federally delegated permit.”

The plans Casella presented to the Thurston board also included trucking to import and export materials such as Class B biosolids six days a week, 12 hours per day.

Volino said Thurston’s town roads cannot support that amount of truck traffic and it is a public health concern for their rural community.



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In 2023, representatives from Casella Waste Systems and Leo Dickson & Sons attend the public hearing and the Thurston board’s vote to ban the use of sewage sludge as fertilizer.

"Class B biosolids are highly contaminated with PFAS compounds," said Volino. "PFAS compounds are being linked to cancer, and there is really no plan in place at this point by New York state to filter out the PFAS compounds from the sewage sludge."

In a statement provided by Casella, the company said it is "currently assessing the potential for future composting operations at Bonny Hill Organics while continuing our work to revitalize the facility, including the closure of existing lagoons and other improvements to the site's infrastructure."

The statement went on to say: "We're proud of the work we have accomplished in improving the site and bringing the facility up to modern standards thus far and we look forward to engaging with the appropriate local, state, and federal agencies on the potential for restarting composting operations."

The company did not respond to the question about the one-year moratorium in place on new or expanded solid waste management facilities in Thurston.