

Ayotte endorses one-year moratorium on new landfills in New Hampshire

BY: **CLAIRE SULLIVAN** - FEBRUARY 13, 2025 1:30 PM



The landfill moratorium will be included in House Bill 2, or the policy section of the budget. (File photo by Amanda Gokee/New Hampshire Bulletin)

Gov. Kelly Ayotte, a month after she vowed to prevent a contentious project from coming to fruition in the North Country, endorsed a one-year moratorium on new landfills in the state. She also proposed creating a new site evaluation committee for future landfills.

“To me, it’s pretty common sense to say that our North Country, our Lakes Region, our beautiful open spaces throughout the state shouldn’t be scarred by poorly envisioned projects that detract from our quality of life,” Ayotte said Thursday in her budget address to the Legislature, “which is why I am announcing today a landfill moratorium and a revamped regulatory process for approving these projects coming forward to ensure that our state’s beauty is not compromised.”

The moratorium will be included in House Bill 2, or the policy section of the budget, said Ayotte spokesperson Caroline Hakes. The budget bill will go through months of revisions by the House and the Senate before it lands on Ayotte’s desk.

Solid waste advocates celebrated the announcement. Many of them are residents who have spent the last six years fighting to prevent Vermont-based Casella Waste Systems from building a landfill near a lake in the tiny, northern town of Dalton, the project that Ayotte promised to stop in her inaugural address last month. That company has recently violated state regulations hundreds of times at its nearby landfill in Bethlehem.

A Casella spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the governor’s announcement and what it means for the company’s pending permit applications.

“We applaud Gov. Ayotte’s continued leadership in defending the North Country and ensuring that the next landfill is responsibility sited and takes into account the immense community impacts new landfill development brings,” said the citizen advocacy group North Country Alliance for Balanced Change in a statement. “We look forward to working with the Governor and legislature to put in place a common-sense moratorium on new landfill development, a new site evaluation committee for future locations and other important legislation priorities.”

Adam Finkel, a former federal regulator who has advocated for stronger landfill regulations in the state, said he was glad to see a governor take a stand. Former Gov. Chris Sununu had been friendly to the proposed Dalton landfill, and had vetoed a bill that would have tightened restrictions on siting landfills near water bodies.

“We’re thrilled that she sees this,” Finkel said. He pointed to the need to make the state’s landfill rules more protective to prevent a similar – in his view, ill-conceived and dangerous – project from materializing once the moratorium runs out. Ayotte’s call to revamp the regulatory process comes on the heels of recent updates to the state’s landfill rules, which critics have described as among the weakest in the world. So weak, they say, that they would allow a landfill to be put virtually anywhere in New Hampshire.

Solid waste issues made it into Ayotte’s message on the campaign trail this fall. Days before she was elected governor, she visited Forest Lake, the pristine water body less than half a mile from where Casella has been fighting to put a landfill. With her was David Rochefort, then a state representative from Littleton and now the North Country’s state senator. He has been a prominent voice in the Legislature advocating for changes to solid waste policy, including finding ways to stem the flow of out-of-state trash that makes up about half of what is dumped in the state each year.

“Governor Ayotte is a woman of her word,” Rochefort said in a statement released by Ayotte’s office following her budget address. “When I first brought this landfill issue to her in 2023, she immediately recognized how important it was to the North Country. I thank the Governor for protecting beautiful areas like Forest Lake State Park in my district, as well as the natural beauty of our entire state.”

On her first day as governor last month, Ayotte made a promise: “There will be no landfill at Forest Lake in Dalton. We will not allow that beautiful part of our state, and that beautiful area, to become a dumping ground for out-of-state trash. It’s just not going to happen.”

From her words on the trail, then in her inaugural address, and now in her budget speech, Ayotte has demonstrated a change in tone at the top of the party and state government on landfill issues. Legislation aimed

at addressing those problems has traditionally failed to pass the Senate, but advocates are hoping the push from the corner office will make the difference this year.

Several solid waste bills – including one that would put a moratorium on new landfills until 2030 – have been proposed in the Legislature this session. The fate of the moratorium bill, in light of Ayotte’s announcement, was not immediately clear Thursday. Other proposals would strengthen the state’s siting requirements, require landfill applicants to weigh the potential benefits and harms of their projects, and mandate that those applicants more thoroughly manage leachate, the “trash juice” created when water mixes with waste that has been an issue at landfills across the state, including the Casella facility in Bethlehem.