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Bethlehem Board Implores Governor To Oppose Override Of Local Control

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The Bethlehem Select Board has sent a letter to the governor imploring her to publicly speak out against a budget amendment that seeks to let the state override local control in the siting of major landfills, specifically expansions to existing landfills. Pictured here is the NCES landfill in Bethlehem. (Photo contributed by NHDES)

A week after a June 2 amendment was made to the New Hampshire budget to allow the state to override local control regarding the siting of major landfills, the Bethlehem Select Board is imploring the governor to oppose it publicly.

The amendment favors expansions of existing landfills — Casella Waste Systems' NCES landfill in Bethlehem is an existing landfill that its operator at the local level unsuccessfully sought to expand seven years ago — and would leave proposed new landfills on greenfield sites subject to existing law and local approvals.

A greenfield site would include the land in Dalton where Casella proposes a new commercial landfill to replace the NCES landfill, which is currently scheduled to reach capacity and close after 2026 or 2027.



On April 3, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services denied Casella's standard permit application for the Dalton site. The company has appealed that decision and has also sued NHDES in the superior court. Both actions remain in their early stages, with, as of Wednesday, no significant case filings.

On Tuesday, the Bethlehem Select Board issued a letter to Gov. Kelly Ayotte, expressing concerns about the amendment to the state budget, also known as HB 2, which was proposed by state Sen. Howard Pearl, R-Loudon, and adopted by the full Senate.

Bethlehem's letter was signed by all five board members — Nancy Strand, April Hibberd, Mike Bruno, Andrea Knowles, and Casey MacDonald.

"This amendment poses a serious threat to municipal self-governance and to the environmental integrity of our region," they said. "Bethlehem residents have long demonstrated a clear and consistent stance against landfill expansion."

Casella's campaigns for the 2017 and 2018 town meetings to amend Bethlehem's zoning ordinance to allow for a 100-acre NCES expansion in the town's landfill district, which has been limited to 61 acres, were rejected by Bethlehem voters.



"Over the past two decades, our citizens have voted repeatedly against landfill expansion projects," said the Bethlehem board. "These votes reflect deep community concern about the long-term environmental and economic consequences of landfill development in our town."

The NCES landfill, located close to the Ammonoosuc River and a major aquifer, has been a source of "significant division" in the community, they said.

“The facility’s environmental footprint, its location near critical water sources, and the broader impacts on property values and public health have caused ongoing anxiety among residents,” said the board. “The people of Bethlehem, like many throughout the North Country, want thoughtful, locally-informed land use decisions — not sweeping state-level interventions that ignore decades of local planning and public input. Simply put, this amendment does not reflect the will of our community or of the North Country broadly.”

Rather, they said, it “undermines democratic decision-making statewide and opens the door to long-term harm to one of the most environmentally sensitive areas in the state.”

“We urge you to speak out publicly against this amendment and to defend the rights of municipalities to make decisions about major projects that will affect their land, their water, and the future,” board members said to the governor. “We stand ready to work with your administration to ensure that local voices remain central to New Hampshire’s environmental policy.”

As of Wednesday evening, the board had not received a response from the governor.

An email sent to Ayotte’s office on Wednesday afternoon asking if she supports or opposes the amendment and if she will be speaking out against it was not returned by press time.

An email sent to Pearl on Wednesday asking if he spoke with anyone from the solid waste industry regarding the amendment, if anyone from the industry proposed it, and if anyone from the industry had any involvement in the crafting of its language, and if so, who, was not returned by press time.