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Littleton Board Backs Commission In Opposition To Landfill Wetlands Permit

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As a federal public comment period ends on May 8, more towns, conservation commissions, and now counties are issuing letters to federal permitting authorities and to the state in opposition to the commercial landfill in Dalton being proposed by Casella Waste Systems, whose two MBI trash haulers (red cabs) are seen here off Interstate 93 in Franconia in June 2022 waiting for the company's NCES landfill in Bethlehem to open. (File photo by Robert Blechl)

LITTLETON — As the state possibly nears a decision on a wetlands permit application for a proposed commercial landfill in Dalton, the Select Board of one abutting town this week went on the official record backing its conservation commission, which is in opposition to a granting of the permit.

During last week's Select Board meeting, Linda MacNeil, chair of the board, also cited a 2021 town vote.

"I've gone back and I've done a little bit of research and in 2021 we had a warrant article that was passed by a vote of 758 yes to 264 no, in opposition of a new landfill in the North Country," she said. "The 758 supported that opposition. The 264 did not support it."

In March, the Littleton Conservation Commission issued a letter to Philip Trowbridge, administrator of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services' Land Resource Management Program in opposition to an approval of the wetlands permit, citing a number of environmental concerns.

In April, the commission's letter was read into the Select Board record by MacNeil.

"Their primary focus is on keeping the environment safe, keeping it as pristine as we possibly can with whatever development we have in the area," said MacNeil.

The commission is active with the Ammonoosuc River and with the spring cleanup, she said.

"They are a commission that's appointed by the Board of Selectman and we support them 100 percent," said MacNeil. "So in that spirit of supporting the commission, we have written a letter that will be sent to New Hampshire DES."

The letter to Trowbridge regards the wetlands permit and Douglas Drive in Dalton, which would be the access to the landfill.

It reads, "The Select board is in full support of the Littleton Conservation Commission's letter dated March 15, 2024, stating opposition to the granting of a permit for the purpose of a landfill ... We support the commission's work and opinion on the matter and request that their findings and thoughts be considered during the DES review for the permit application."

“We want to be able to send this letter,” said Select Board member Kerri Harrington. “Many other towns did beyond Dalton, and surrounding towns. We just want them to know that the majority of people in 2021, by quite a bit, spoke up. It’s not an individual voice. We’re trying to represent the people that voted.”

MacNeil and Harrington voted to send the letter to NHDES and Selectman Roger Emerson abstained, for a 2-0-1 vote.

The conservation commission’s March 2024 letter follows a previous commission opposition letter sent to DES in 2021.

“From an environmental standpoint, NOTHING HAS CHANGED,” commission chairman Tom Alt wrote in the 2024 letter. “The same affected wetlands and watersheds STILL EXIST, the same porous soil conditions STILL EXIST, the same Ammonoosuc River still receives whatever is discharged from this proposed project area. What HAS changed is the more recent occurrence of two accidental discharges of TOXIC landfill leachate from two of the applicant’s landfill sites (Bethlehem, NH and Coventry, VT). What HAS changed is the increased recognition of the huge impact of PFAS on human health.”

“The Littleton Conservation Commission (and ALL Conservation Commissions) share a primary responsibility towards the protection of wetlands and watersheds,” wrote Alt. “This same responsibility is reflected in the mission statement of the NHDES. Allowing the proposed Granite State Landfill or ANY landfill to locate in this area would represent a dereliction of this responsibility to our environmental values.”

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