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**Rockingham dump proposal received coolly by neighbors**

By TOBY HENRY, Reformer Staff

ROCKINGHAM -- Sparks flew before the subject of the proposed dump for Upper Meadows Road could even be formally presented at a selectboard meeting Tuesday night, although Chairman Lamont Barnett said the board alone should not decide the issue.

Casella Waste Systems Inc. of Rutland has proposed to site a dump on property owned by selectboard member Thornton Lillie, who did not attend the meeting. As the subject came up about halfway through the two-and-a-half-hour meeting, many of the approximately 30 members present, including many Upper Meadows Road residents, said they have serious concerns regarding the proposal.

Barnett initially refused to hear a statement delivered by Dorothy

Carvalho, a member of the group Missing Link Preservation LLC, which opposes the dump, but allowed the statement to be summarized at the meeting's conclusion.

"We're going to schedule public hearings for input for questions as far as environmental impact (and its) effect on the (Connecticut) River," Barnett said, stressing that the meeting at hand was only for discussing how the subject should be addressed publicly. "The entire community will have the opportunity to come and ask those questions. I think the public would be better served at a hearing. Right now, we have to find out how we're going to move forward with this."

In April, Casella president Joseph Fusco told the Reformer that Lillie had approached him about a year earlier with the proposal to site a dump in the region to serve local garbage disposal needs. Lillie owns a large plot of land on Upper Meadows Road.

The proposal was first discussed in executive session at a meeting two weeks ago, and although the meeting soon moved to open session, many local residents took issue with what they saw as a secret meeting.

"I was totally in the dark about this," said local resident Loren

Lorenzetti. "I happened to see an ad in the local newspaper that brought me here tonight."

"Those people had an illegal meeting," said local resident Tim Doherty. "It was discussed in executive session, by (Lillie), no less."

Prompted for an answer on the matter, Barnett responded later that he didn't have one.

According to the minutes of the June 3 meeting, Municipal Manager Shane O'Keefe said he was concerned that the issue had been discussed in executive session, which is a possible violation of the open meeting law. Lillie was asked to excuse himself from any further meetings where the subject would be discussed.

On Tuesday, Select Board members Ann DiBernardo and Edward Soboleski both said they had no idea about the proposal before it was brought up in executive session.

"I absolutely did not know that was going to be discussed," Soboleski said.

Barnett tried to corral discussions back toward the general proposal that was being presented that night by Casella representatives Charles Leonard and Michael Viani, but questions about the initial closed-door session kept arising.

Viani began his presentation by stating that he only wanted to state some preliminary thoughts on the project, adding that "millions of dollars" could potentially be spent on the subsequent traffic, wildlife and water studies.

According to Viani, the dump would operate for about 20 to 25 years and take in about 150,000 tons of garbage yearly. As a benefit, he said, a rate of $2 or $3 per ton of garbage could mean an annual income of $375,000 for the town from out-of-area trash importation, but the audience seemed unimpressed. Offers to buy properties affected by traffic or other factors for up to twice their fair market value also evoked no response.

Much of the discontent seemed to center around how Casella hit upon the idea to propose the dump in Rockingham. Local resident Mike Cheslock asked Viana how the idea came about. Viani initially sidestepped the question, saying Casella typically gets proposals from a variety of sources, including municipal sources and landowners. Unsatisfied, Cheslock asked Viana outright if Lillie came to Casella with the proposal, and Viani offered a weak "yes" in response.

"Why didn't you just answer the question like you were asked?" returned Cheslock.

Local resident Margaret Perry noted recent improvements to the Connecticut River, warning that the dump could destroy efforts to re-establish the body of water as a recreation area.

"It's virtually on the river," she said. "The river is going to become a

place that a lot of people enjoy."

Lorenzetti observed that although there may be a promise of jobs at some point in the future because of the dump, the matter has to be considered along with its potential for adverse impacts.

"You know, just as the prison matter was, up there in Springfield, there would be people who would like a dump because of jobs," he said. "It's bad enough you have people depending on prisons for a living, but a dump is a step down."

Summarizing the board's approach, Barnett insisted that the issue will be held up for full public input not only from abutters and neighbors, but from the wider community.

"There's no question that this is an emotional and political issue for the community," he said. "I also think that this is a decision the selectboard should not be making (because) there is a board member directly involved in the issue. What I am recommending is that there should be some kind of wider vote."

Barnett suggested that the issue could be presented to the public over the course of two or three warned public hearings and then put to a town-wide vote. No motions were made, and O'Keefe said the issue would be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

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