

Casella aims to drum up support for possible 2028 reopening of Massachusetts landfill

If reopened, the landfill could accept about 350,000 tons of MSW and C&D waste a year. The site was previously closed due to community pushback and zoning issues.

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[Megan Quinn](#)
Senior Reporter



Cole Rosengren

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Casella says its newest proposal to reopen a landfill in Hardwick, Massachusetts, by 2028 will need full support from the local community in order to have a chance of moving forward. Yet past attempts to expand or reopen that location have been met with community pushback.

Casella wants to reopen its Patrill Hollow Road location, a landfill that has an estimated 13 years of capacity left but has been inactive since the town voted in 2007 to reject a zoning amendment Casella needed to continue operating, said Jeff Weld, Casella's director of communications, in an email.

Brian Oliver, vice president of Casella's eastern region, [presented a proposal](#) to Hardwick's Board of Selectmen meeting on July 18. Casella envisions offering the town a \$6-per-ton "host fee" totaling about \$2.1 million a year, and would also pay Hardwick about \$500,000 per year to

treat leachate at the nearby Gilbertville municipal wastewater treatment plant, he said. This latest proposal would call for accepting about 1,125 tons a day of combined MSW and C&D waste — about 350,000 tons annually — on a 48-acre footprint served by about 50 trucks a day.

Casella also wants to generate renewable natural gas at the facility, but that idea wouldn't be fleshed out until operations were underway, Oliver said. "We'd like to have a discussion with the town about whatever renewable energy project we can come forward with, [including] some sort of revenue-sharing agreement with the town," he said.

To make all of that happen, residents will need to vote favorably on several facets of the plan, including an approval to rezone the landfill property and to permit a landfill in an industrial district, Oliver told the board.

The plan also hinges on a "robust review and permitting process" that includes a site suitability report from MassDEP, plus authorizations to construct and operate and other applicable permits, he said.

Casella sees reopening the landfill as a benefit to the region, Weld said. Several landfills in the state have closed in recent years, and capacity, particularly for C&D waste, is shrinking quickly. Casella purchased the Hardwick landfill in 2003 and has proposed several plans to reopen at that location since then. Another of Casella's Massachusetts sites, the Southbridge landfill, closed in 2018, also due to community pushback and litigation.

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The Hardwick landfill has also been the subject of legal battles, as well as zoning issues. The town's zoning enforcement officer ordered the company to stop accepting waste in 2007, saying the landfill's location was zoned for residential use and couldn't continue to operate. Casella asked the town for approval to create a landfill district, which was voted down. Casella had also filed several complaints in state land court against the zoning board, the Telegram & Gazette reported.

Weld said Casella recently renewed its focus on the property because a group of residents "interested in spurring economic development" approached Casella about the possibility of reopening the landfill, Weld said. However, the new proposal "will only be viable with the appropriate support from the community, and we are at the stage where we are assessing if that interest exists."

CEO John Casella also discussed the possible project during the recent Q2 earnings call, where he said the company would be "happy to push forward" with updating the landfill but reiterated that community support would be critical to making that happen.

Kirstie Pecci, executive director of Massachusetts-based zero waste solutions nonprofit Just Zero, said she is skeptical of Casella's assessment that the landfill has a 13-year lifespan and expects that if the project goes forward the company will continue applying for permits to repeatedly expand the landfill.

"Waste companies say over and over again that we have a capacity problem, but what we actually have is a waste problem, and whenever we try to reduce waste or make the system more circular, the waste companies fight us tooth

and nail because they make money off of how much waste is produced,” she said.

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Pecci advocates for the state to work more diligently on waste diversion practices and believes landfill expansions and reopenings are counter to that goal. The state has a solid waste management plan that calls for a 30% reduction in waste disposal volumes by 2030, and it banned mattress, textile and organics disposal in 2022. But Pecci said Massachusetts has more work to do to improve its recycling and waste diversion rates.

Members of the Hardwick Board of Selectmen did not offer reactions to Casella’s pitch, saying only that it was the first time they had heard Oliver’s presentation and wanted time to make sure the public was aware of the proposal and had opportunities in the future to ask questions and submit comments.

Casella proposes holding a town meeting sometime in the fall, Oliver said, with the permitting process possibly beginning in November. Construction could take place between November 2026 and September 2027, with operations starting as early as January 2028, he said.

The project is part of a larger regional debate over how to manage waste in the Northeast. Casella says there’s already a disposal capacity shortfall, leaving waste-to-energy as a main option for managing waste in

Massachusetts. Casella also wants to open a landfill in Dalton, New Hampshire, and plans to apply for permits soon. That project is also facing community pushback.