

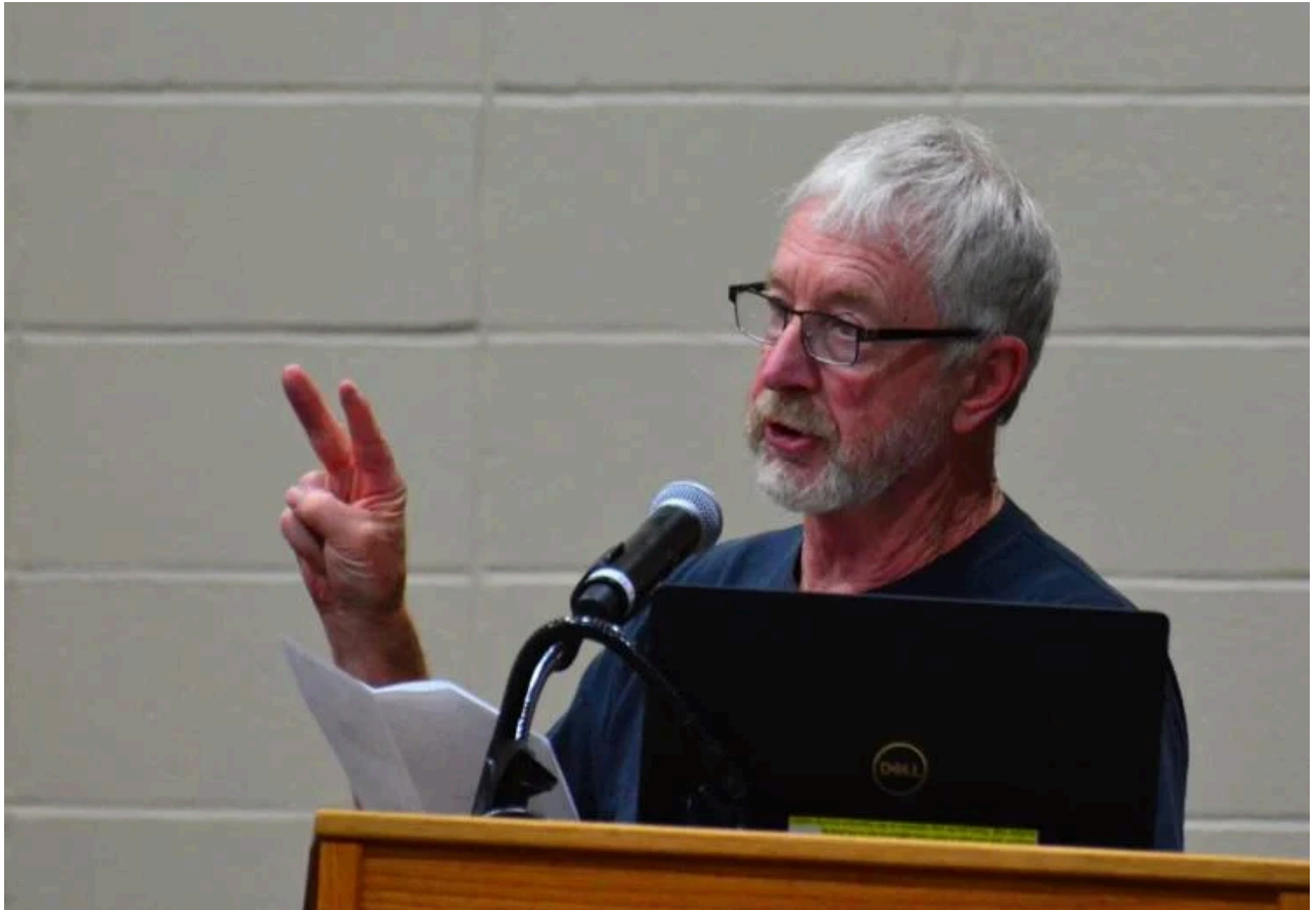
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DES Continues To Request More Information From Casella

Landfill Topic Goes To Unplanned Debate In Littleton

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Tom Alt, of Littleton, asked state officials during a public hearing at White Mountains Regional High School on Wednesday to deny the wetlands permit sought by Casella Waste Systems for a landfill in Dalton. (Photo by Robert Blechl)

As a federal public meeting nears in Dalton, the issue of landfills went to an unplanned debate in Littleton on Monday, the same day state officials issued letters of incompleteness to Casella Waste Systems and requested that the company provide more information in its permit applications.

Littleton

Raising the topic of solid waste facilities during Monday's Littleton Select Board meeting was new board member Kerri Harrington, who plans to attend Wednesday's U.S. Army Corps of Engineers meeting at 5 p.m. at Dalton Town Hall, where Casella's proposal for a 70-acre commercial landfill in Dalton near the town lines of Littleton, Bethlehem and Whitefield will be presented, followed by a question-and-answer session and roundtable discussion on environmental justice.

"I plan to attend because this topic is important to me," she said.

Harrington gave a brief history of the subject that included the Littleton Conservation Commission's letter sent to the state opposing the landfill (which was read into the Select Board record in April) and a 2021 town meeting resolution to oppose a new landfill in the North Country that drew 758 Littleton residents in support in 264 against.

"There have been so many comments and letters, and on the street, people want to talk to me about it a lot," said Harrington. "It's probably the number one topic. So I've been listening and realizing it's really important to people."

She is writing a letter supporting the conservation commission's position and said that although the proposed landfill is a touchy subject, it should be talked about civilly, involving those on all sides.

In July, Steve Bean, manager of the Littleton Transfer Station, will brief the Select Board on possible costs and options after Casella's NCES landfill closes, said Harrington.

NCES is currently projected to close in 2026.

Former Littleton Select Board member Marghie Seymour said if the goal is to have both sides speak, then the discussion would have to involve North Country Alliance for Balanced Change, a landfill opponent, and Casella.

One side, though, “will be heavily weighted with resources to put their side forward,” she said.

Seymour also said that Select Boards should support their appointed boards any chance they get, and the Littleton Select Board not backing up the conservation commission’s position “seems like a shame to me.”

Not all agreed, including resident Lilo Rheinstein, who said Select Boards should not simply follow what an appointed commission does.

Littleton had a town-wide vote on the matter, and while she doesn’t agree with the 2021 vote, it’s what the town wanted, and the people’s voice was heard, said Rheinstein.

In 2021, following a state public hearing in Whitefield on Casella’s wetlands permit application, the Littleton Conservation Commission sent its first opposition letter to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, said Tom Alt, LCC chairman.

“There was a public hearing at White Mountain High School, and it had a huge turnout,” he said. “Representatives from DES sat in the front of the room ... and judging from their decisions since that time, apparently their hearing aids were turned off the whole time that anyone spoke at that hearing. It’s true that now the Army Engineers are part of this process and we’ll be having a meeting in Dalton on Wednesday. And they are only having a meeting in Dalton instead of having it at some down-south point because of a lot of pressure from people in the North Country, which is where this extra garbage would be coming to.”

He said he appreciates Linda MacNeil, the Littleton Select Board chair, reading the LCC’s letter into the Select Board record.

“Our letter only addresses environmental concerns,” said Alt. “And these are environmental facts — this is destruction of wetlands, this is leakage of landfills, this is sending toxic waste down the river, which is already, 24/7, coming down this river now.”

Littleton, he said, has much going for it.

“Never mind the environmental scientific facts that totally sink the idea of this project going in on a sandpit by Forest Lake, but if you’re concerned about buying the garbage bag for \$5 or \$6 instead of \$3 now, you have your whole value structure mixed up because the same tourists that we are grooming every day to come here and see our wonderful town are not going to want to be here with another huge landfill,” said Alt.

He said many other town boards and elected officials have taken a stand on the issue.

Rheinstein said what bothers her is that one side is being put forth, and if there’s a trash discussion, everyone should participate.

“Whether we pay more or not for trash is an issue,” she said.

MacNeil said everyone’s opinion is valid and Harrington will bring information from Wednesday’s USACE meeting and Bean will have taxpayer-related numbers.

“We will have more information and we will regroup and go from there,” she said.

DES Requests More Information

In February, DES suspended its standard permit application review for Casella because the company did not provide the required information in dozens of areas.

On Monday, DES issued new letters of incompleteness, notifying Casella that it still has insufficient information in its permit applications and the department is requesting more information before it can grant any approvals.

A second letter of incompleteness was issued for the company’s standard permit application.

An incompleteness letter was also issued for its wetlands permit application.

In the standard application, Mary Daun, an engineer with DES's solid waste management division, outlined ten areas of deficiency, including evidence needed of notifications to state departments, the town of Dalton, and local and state river commissions.

Casella, which has entered into an option to purchase some parcels of land from Douglas Ingerson Jr., has not provided all the relevant legal agreements to demonstrate that it meets the landowner requirements and that all easements and rights-of-ways meet state requirements, she said.

Drainage information is also deficient, and the hydrogeological report is missing at least the first ten pages of results, Daun said.

She also said that details in the operating plan are deficient, including leachate removal during extenuating circumstances.

DES's 14-page incompleteness letter for the wetlands permit application has a focus on "avoidance and minimization" and requires the company to demonstrate that the least impacting alternative has been selected and to address concerns outlined by the Bethlehem and Dalton conservation commissions and the Ammonoosuc Local River Management Advisory Committee.

The alternative analysis for Massachusetts includes only a narrative of unsuitability for sites in Massachusetts, but maps that demonstrate site restraints and unsuitable conditions need to be provided, wrote Emma Berger, inland wetland section supervisor for DES.

Casella's alternatives analysis for land in Shelburne, N.H., states that there would be 15 acres of wetlands impacts, but the National Wetland Inventory did not map wetlands within the vicinity of the conceptual landfill footprint, she said.

According to Berger, an alternative site in Carroll appears to have sufficient developable upland space if the landfill was reconfigured, and another alternative site in Carroll appears achievable if the footprint is located in available upland space.

For the Dalton site, DES asks Casella to clarify and depict the acreage and limits of construction to address impacts and demonstrate avoidance and minimization.

A monitoring program throughout the landfill's life is needed, as are mitigation plan details, wetlands delineation, and documentation showing property ownership, said Berger.

"As discussed on June 4, 2024, the landfill design is intended to be purchased by Casella, however, discussion on June 4, 2024 regarding the future business park located within the project boundary will be subdivided and later operated by Mr. Ingerson, the current owner," wrote Berger.

The required information must be received by DES by Aug. 23, or the wetlands application will be denied.

Leachate Violations In Bethlehem

On June 14, DES issued a letter to Casella informing the company of not complying with state requirements on the management of landfill leachate at NCES.

The violations were identified through a review of the facility's 2023 third and fourth-quarter reports, 2024 first-quarter report, and leachate management system records from April to June 12, 2024, wrote Tyler Davidson, enforcement program coordinator with DES.

"Based on NHDES' review of the above-referenced reports and documentation, violations related to leachate management, and leachate data collection and reporting have been identified," he said.

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