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| Rutland HeraldMarch 5, 2004Landfill location remains a mysteryBy BRENDAN McKENNA Southern Vermont BureauROCKINGHAM - When the objections of Rockingham residents caused Casella Waste Management to withdraw their proposal for a landfill on the banks of the Connecticut River, company officials said they still hoped to start a partnership with the town.James Bohlig, president of the Rutland-based company, said in mid-January that Casella engineers had identified five other sites in town that might be suitable for a regional solid waste facility.Though details of the alternative sites were sketchy, Bohlig did say the company was looking at sites of at least 50 acres with good access to either Route 103 or Interstate 91.Joseph Fusco, a Casella vice president and spokesman, was similarly reticent to spot locations, but he did confirm that large sites with good highway access - and the right geological foundation - are what the company is looking for."Obviously we don't want to pick a site in a swamp or near groundwater," Fusco said. "It's way too premature to speculate about any site; the situation is so fluid."Fusco also said larger sites are preferable, offering a better return on the investment of building a major regional landfill."We want to invest in a facility to serve the region's needs for the long term," Fusco said. "It's too much work to do it for the short term."Generally, Fusco said, each acre of actual landfill translates into about a year's worth of usefulness. So a 30-year facility - the best investment from Casella's perspective - would require at least 30 acres, and probably more."We're looking for as much space as possible," Fusco said. "Even if we're only building a 30-acre landfill, it would be great to have it in the middle of a 500-acre parcel. We're not looking for a 31-acre parcel."He added, "Globally, ideally you're looking for the biggest buffer you can have."Fusco said the company is committed to being a good neighbor and keeping the public informed about its proposals."The partner benefits for the host community can be quite substantial," he said. "We're more than willing to keep people informed at the appropriate times.""This is a process that takes time. It will come when it comes," Fusco said. "I don't think anybody has anything to fear."Though Casella has identified locations, the potential sites remain a mystery - even for some landowners whose properties suit Casella's criteria.Selectman Edward Soboleski, who owns about 140 acres off Route 103 around Whiting Road, said he wasn't following the footsteps of former selectman Thornton Lillie, whose property was the subject of Casella's first proposal."Not at any time have they contacted me, nor have I seen them looking," Soboleski said.Soboleski, a former lister for Rockingham and member of the Vermont-New Hampshire Solid Waste Commission, said he is no longer sure the company is interested in Rockingham."I'm usually around, so if they were anywhere near my property I'd expect to observe them or see them," he said.Soboleski, who said he could support of landfill if the right site could be found, said he would expect Casella to be looking northwest of his property, toward the Vermont State Police barracks."I haven't heard anything from those folks, though," Soboleski said of his neighbors.Hanson Savage Jr., a Chester farmer who owns about 175 acres at 1650 Rockingham Road, also said he hadn't been approached by the waste company. He added that his property would pose challenges for a landfill."It's steep, just about straight up. I don't believe it would work for them," Savage said. "And where I am, there, it's too wet for a landfill, I'm sure."However, Savage said he might be open to an offer if Casella could overcome the engineering challenges."I don't know," he said. "Right now, I'd say no, but money does talk."Knox Divoll, who owns almost 400 acres close to the Grafton border with his sister Marcia, also said he was pretty sure his property wouldn't work for a landfill."I think they'd have problems. My lot is right in view of the (Saxtons River) Meeting House," Divoll said. "It's a designated historic area - I can't even put aluminum siding on my house."He added, "I don't think they want the Meeting House looking out on a landfill."Divoll, who was born in Rockingham but now lives and works in Manchester, said his family was committed to keeping that property forested."Anybody's for sale, but for me no. That property's been in my family for 200 years," Divoll said. "We pay very dearly in taxes because we want to keep Vermont green."Eminent domain, which allows a town or state to take over a property, could force him to accept a landfill, but Divoll said nothing short of that would be likely to work."We would definitely oppose selling it for that or any other purpose," he said.Contact Brendan McKenna at brendan.mckenna@rutlandherald.com. |

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