



Lawmakers move to scrap proposal for buffer between state parks, landfills

By **Amanda Gokee** - June 14, 2021



BRIEF



Casella Waste Systems has proposed a landfill near Forest Lake in Dalton. (Amanda Gokee | New Hampshire Bulletin)

On Monday, lawmakers from the House and Senate met to negotiate legislation that would create a two-mile buffer between state parks and landfills. The Senate, which had previously voted down the proposal, was unwilling to agree with a compromise proposed by Rep. Andrew Bouldin, a Manchester Democrat, that would've reduced the buffer to 5,000 feet and set a sunset date of five years on the measure.

"This compromise proposal represents the House meeting the Senate more than halfway," Bouldin said.

But the Senate was unwilling to budge.



“At this point, it doesn’t work for the Senate,” said Rep. Kevin Avard, a Nashua Republican. Avard said senators were concerned with the state “usurping” local zoning ordinances.

This negotiation process, which is called a committee of conference, is the latest in a heated statewide debate that began when Casella Waste Systems proposed siting a landfill on a piece of land that abuts Forest Lake Park in Dalton, a proposal that has divided the town. After the Senate voted to kill House Bill 177, the House tacked it onto another unrelated piece of legislation, Senate Bill 103, which addresses disaster or emergency-related work in the state.

Lawmakers from the House and Senate were appointed to negotiate the changes that the House had made to the piece of legislation originating in the Senate. Members of the public attended the Monday negotiation carrying signs that read “Save Forest Lake” and “No Landfill.”

Sen. James Gray, a Rochester Republican, said the Senate could live without Senate Bill 103, indicating that a majority of senators would rather let both pieces of legislation die than agree to a compromise regarding the buffer issue.

“You can take your bill, go back, and do a better job next year, or we can walk away, and the whole Senate Bill 103 dies,” he said.

A committee of conference recommendation requires consensus among all seven members, four appointed by House leadership and three appointed by the Senate president. But Bouldin and Sen. Kevin Cavanaugh, a Manchester Democrat, both voted against removing the buffer from the bill.

House and Senate leadership are expected to remove the dissenting members from the committee of conference, replacing them with lawmakers who agree to remove the buffer, so that the two bodies can reach unanimous agreement. In this case, Senate Bill 103 would go to the governor’s desk without any language regarding a buffer between state parks and landfills.

The town of Dalton recently voted to extend temporary emergency zoning, a measure that those opposing the landfill hope will protect the state park from development.



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