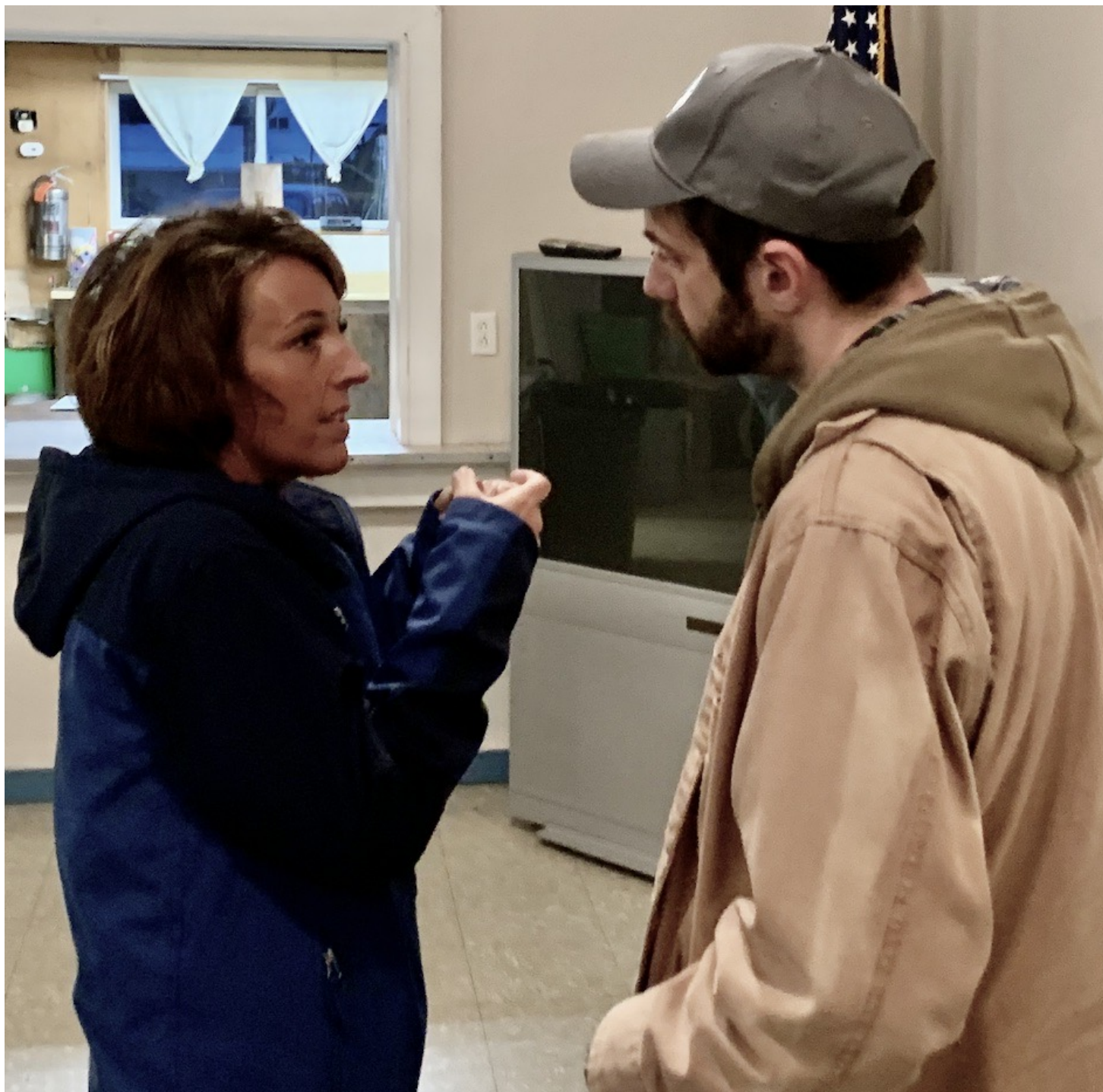


Town Supervisors in Steuben Fear DEC Will Let Casella Import Sludge From Long Island Despite Local Moratoriums

[Peter Mantius](#) April 17, 2023 [Uncategorized](#)



THURSTON, Apr. 17, 2023 — The supervisors of two small Steuben County towns say they fear state officials are about allow new imports of municipal sewage sludge from Long Island into their community in violation of the towns' moratoriums on waste project expansions.

"It's imminent. It's coming pretty quick, I think," Michael Volino, Thurston Town Supervisor, said Saturday.

Volino said officials with the state Department of Environmental Conservation told him Thursday they are poised to announce what they term a "minor modification" to Leo Dickson & Sons Inc.'s [2019 permit](#) to spread municipal sewage sludge on more than 2,000 acres in the Bonny Hill area of Thurston, Cameron and Bath.

The permit allows Dickson to import sludge from more than two dozen relatively small sewage treatment plants across the Finger Lakes, the Southern Tier and northern Pennsylvania.

The proposed modification would add an important site to that list. The Bay Park sewage treatment plant on Long Island has a capacity roughly equal to the total capacity of all the other plants.

[Dickson applied](#) to the DEC last April to add Bay Park as a sludge source while it was in negotiations to transfer its Bonny Hill spreading operations to Casella Waste Systems Inc.

Three months later, Dickson sold or leased 2,789 acres to Casella Organics, a Casella unit that plans to continue spreading on most of that land. Casella didn't inform local officials of [the transactions](#), and they went virtually unnoticed for months.

At the time, Bay Park already had a relationship Casella-run landfills, according to a recent email from Mary Rayeski, manager of Casella Organics' Bonny Hill team, to the DEC's Kimberly Merchant.



Casella Organics' Mary Rayeski makes a point to Thurston Supervisor Michael Volino after a public meeting in Cameron earlier this month.

In 2022, the Chemung Landfill took 11,809 tons of Bay Park sludge, while the Hyland Landfill took 13,944 tons and the Ontario County Landfill took 1,621 tons. (The email dated those shipments in 2002, but when asked today, Rayeski said the correct date was actually 2022).

From: [Mary Rayeski](#)
To: [Merchant, Kimberly \(DEC\)](#)
Subject: Other outlets for Bay Park Sludge information for your Negative Declaration
Date: Friday, March 10, 2023 11:46:26 AM

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Beyond that, all of Bay Park was disposed of in the following site in 2002:

Chemung County Landfill: 11,809 tons
 Clean and Green Biosolids Dryer (on Long Island): 2426 tons
 Hyland Landfill: 13,944 tons
 Ontario County Landfill: 1621 tons.

Mary Rayeski
 Division Manager

From: [Mary Rayeski](#)
To: [Merchant, Kimberly \(DEC\)](#)
Subject: Bay Park
Date: Friday, March 10, 2023 11:48:39 AM

ATTENTION: This email came from an external source. Do not open attachments or click on links from unknown senders or unexpected emails.

, Bay Park was added to a land app permit by Kelli on one of the Watertown farms also that we have available for an outlet outside of Bonny Hill.

Mary Rayeski
 Division Manager

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Mary Rayeski's March 10 emails to the DEC's Kimberly Merchant refer to Casella's various efforts to help Bay Park dispose of its municipal sludge.

according to Casella's Larry Shilling.

That prospect has caused quite stir.

In recent weeks, Thurston has replaced its supervisor, its town attorney and its code enforcement officer, while the town board voted unanimously to enact a [one-year moratorium](#) on new or expanded waste projects.

"We — the town board — felt that adding Bay Park violates our moratorium because it's an expansion," said Volino, who rose from his position on the town board to town supervisor last month.

In neighboring Cameron, the town board voted 5-0 last week to enact a moratorium with identical wording after rejecting a draft moratorium from Rayeski with Casella-friendly language that would have excluded sludge spreading.

Another Mar. 10 email from Rayeski to Merchant noted that "Bay Park was added to a land app(lication) permit by Kelli (Timbrook) on one of the Watertown farms ... that we (Casella) have available for an outlet outside of Bonny Hill."

Timbrook is a Casella manager in Clifton Park, north of Albany.

When news broke last Fall that Casella planned to take over the Dickson sludge spreading operation, some local residents assumed the company planned to develop the site as a landfill.

But company officials have repeatedly insisted they only want to spread sewage on the fields, which the Dickson family promises to continue farming.

If the Bay Park modification is approved, Bonny Hill will accept six or seven tractor trailer loads of Long Island sludge a day,

Cameron Supervisor Robert Manley said board members and town residents aren't eager to begin taking sludge from Long Island.

"Certainly we're concerned about it," Manley said. "What's in it? We feel that it should be tested (for PFAS 'forever chemicals')."



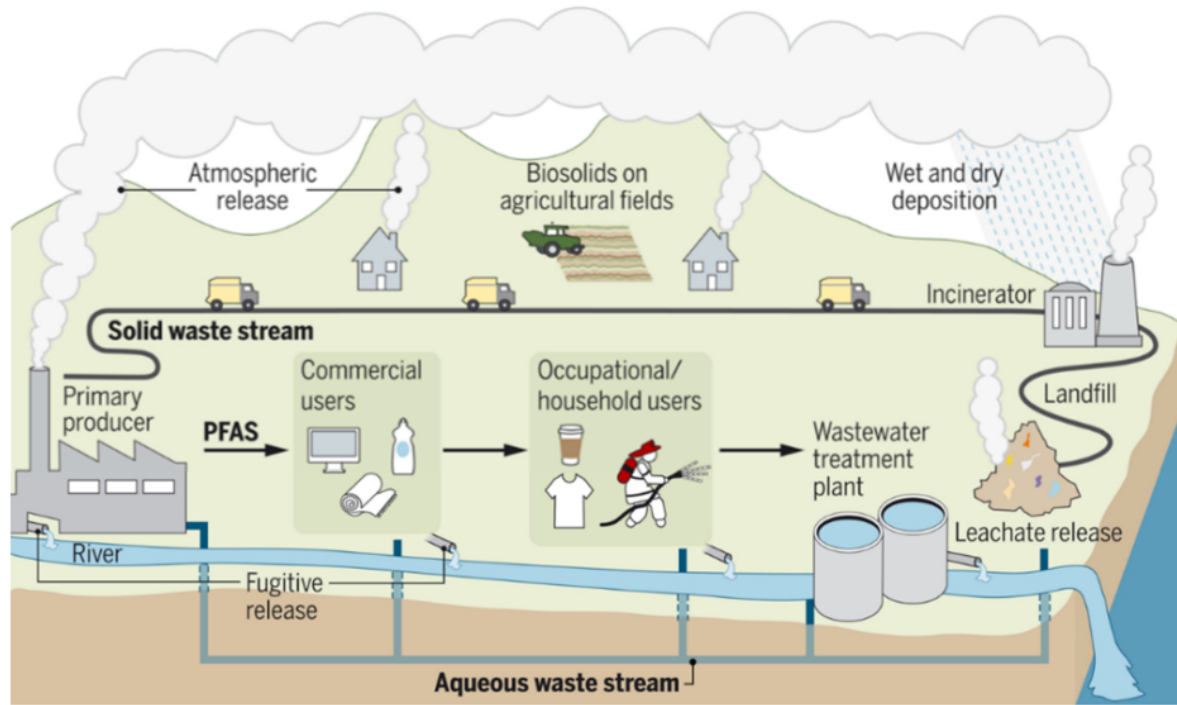
Cameron Town Supervisor Robert Manley (white goatee) and the town board enacted a one-year waste project moratorium identical to Thurston's on Apr. 12.

Volino noted that field spreading of municipal sludge is now illegal in the state of Maine due to widespread PFAS contamination of sludge-spread fields. Crops and milk were ruined, and several farms were forced to close.

Last July, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine identified the dangers of PFAS in sewage sludge, or "sludge-derived biosolids."

In a 300-page [guidance report](#), the academies noted evidence linking PFAS to kidney, testicular and breast cancer as well as a host of other endocrine and immune system problems.

The report said physicians "should offer PFAS (blood) testing to patients are likely to have a history of elevated exposure."



As shown in this graphic produced by the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, biosolids produced from sewage sludge contribute to PFAS contamination, especially for people who live near fields where biosolids were or are spread.

Those likely to have such an exposure history “include those who have lived in areas ... near ... farms where sewage sludge may have been used,” the report said.

In a phone conversation Thursday with three DEC officials, Volino asked whether the agency planned to test for PFAS in each load from Bay Park.

He said the three — Merchant, DEC Region 8 director Tim Walsh and permit administrator Tom Haley — declined to commit to such tests, or to state a limit that would define a “bad load,” or to identify where “bad loads” would be sent.



DEC's Kimberly Merchant

Meanwhile, the Sierra Club has sponsored PFAS tests for water drawn from 34 private wells around Bonny Hill. Volino said the board will hear a report on the results of those tests at 6 p.m. Wednesday before the Thurston Town Board's regular monthly meeting.

Both Volino and Manley have invited DEC officials to attend town board meetings to get a sense of **public mood** and to explain the agency's criteria for determining that adding Bay Park sludge is only a “minor modification” to the Dickson spreading permit.



Region 8 Director Tim Walsh

Volino said a DEC official told him Casella does not consider the Bay Park modification to be an expansion — or a violation of the moratoriums — because the company plans to discontinue accepting food wastes, which have been roughly equal in volume to the planned Long Island sludge. Volino said he responded that food waste and municipal sludge are in no way equivalent.

“Clearly, Casella and DEC Region 8 are talking and coordinating and getting their stories straight and aligned,” Volino said.

By labeling the modification “minor,” agency officials get to skip the public hearing that would be required under the State Environmental Quality Review Act if the change were deemed as major.

“I’d love to see DEC come down here and do a public hearing,” Manley said. “I honestly think they owe it to the people of these towns.”

The DEC immediately acknowledged detailed questions Waterfront sent by email early this morning. But it had not responded five hours past the requested noon deadline. This post will be updated if and when the agency does respond.