

https://www.caledonianrecord.com/news/local/local-rep-residents-weigh-in-on-landfill-moratorium-bill-resolution/article_653a94d9-36e8-5915-a2ac-643ba1476392.html

Local Rep., Residents Weigh In On Landfill Moratorium Bill, Resolution

Robert Blechl rblechl@caledonian-record.com Staff Writer
Jan 28, 2025



During a public hearing Tuesday before the N.H. House of Representatives' Environment and Agriculture Committee, state Rep. Jared Sullivan, D-Bethlehem, spoke of a House resolution he is sponsoring that urges the state to deny any permitting for a landfill beside Forest Lake State Park in Dalton, saying there's been "so much drama around siting this particular landfill." Along with local residents who attended the hearing, he also voiced support for a House bill seeking a 5-year moratorium on the permitting of new landfills.

As the 2025 legislative session ramps up, so are a number of locally and statewide-supported bills and a resolution targeting landfills, among them a new House bill seeking to place a 5-year moratorium on permitting new landfills.

Involving local lawmakers and residents arguing for support, both went to two hours of public hearings in Concord on Tuesday before the New Hampshire House of Representatives Environment and Agriculture Committee.

Resolution

House Resolution 13, sponsored by state Rep. Jared Sullivan, D-Bethlehem, “urges the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services to deny any permitting for a landfill next to Forest Lake State Park in Dalton, New Hampshire.”

“I decided to put in the House resolution because there’s so much drama around siting this particular landfill,” Sullivan said to the committee.

The resolution is being floated when New Hampshire’s solid waste management laws are outdated, he said. It recognizes that Forest Lake, “in one of the most beautiful parts of our state,” is in an area with porous soil that doesn’t make a good location for a landfill if it begins leaking, he said. Contaminants enter the lake or the Connecticut River, he said.

Forest Lake is one of the original state parks with a lake, said Sullivan.

Carolyn Choate, of Nashua, said, “We do care in southern New Hampshire about this lake.”

A two-time cancer survivor, Choate also voiced concerns about PFAS chemicals, their link to cancer, and PFAS “working their way into our lives.”

Whitefield resident Nancy Morrison, of the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change (NCABC), asked the House committee to support HB 13 and added that the landfill applicant, in its application to the state, stated that up to 50 percent of waste would come from out of state.

“We are talking about the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil we grow our food in” for future generations, said Morrison.

Although the resolution is non-binding and would not go to the Senate, Sullivan said its passing would show the position of the New Hampshire House of Representatives and elevate the issue.

“Showing bipartisan support is a great message for New Hampshire” and would “magnify an issue that is important to us,” he said.

Save Forest Lake founder Jon Swan, of Dalton, said, “It’s a symbolic gesture, but this is the people’s House.”

Many local residents couldn’t attend Tuesday’s hearing, but their lives and properties would be impacted by the project, said Swan.

Resolution co-sponsor and state Rep. Nicholas Germana, D-Keene, said the resolution, coupled with Gov. Kelly Ayotte’s opposition to a landfill beside Forest Lake, would “send a message to the body on the other side of the wall.”

In past years, a full bipartisan House has passed several landfill bills only to see many of them die in the Senate.

Online for the hearing, 296 people supported HR 13, six opposed, and one was neutral.

Moratorium

Germana is the lead sponsor of House Bill 171, which is co-sponsored by state Rep. Seth King, R-Whitefield, and seeks to place a moratorium on the permitting of new landfills until July 2030.

The bill, which is similar to prior moratorium legislation, does not prohibit the expansion of existing landfills, which Germana said is a vital point.

Concerns persist about New Hampshire being significantly behind other states in New England and the nation when it comes to protecting Granite Staters regarding solid waste management decisions, he said.

Although HB 171 opponents might argue that a moratorium would result in a capacity shortfall, New Hampshire has capacity until at least the 2040s, with the Turnkey landfill in Rochester having capacity until 2034, and its owner on record saying an expansion will be applied for, and the Carberry landfill near Berlin have capacity until 2041 and likely to 2043, said Germana.

“There’s no crisis in New Hampshire,” he said. “Our statutes do not require us to be the dumping ground for other states ... Another landfill is not needed for New Hampshire’s solid waste needs.”

And with Ayotte’s stance, the state is in a good position to press pause when capacity is not an issue and to explore new policies and technologies to reduce the need for land-filling and get New Hampshire in line with neighboring states, which have reduced the amount of interstate waste trucked across their borders, he said.

Germana said a state food waste diversion and composting initiative is also set to begin next week.

Opposing HB 171 is the New Hampshire Business and Industry Association (BIA), whose vice-president of public policy, Natch Greyes, said the capacity question is a cost question, and transportation would add additional costs.

State Rep. Kelley Potenza, R-Rochester, an HB 171 co-sponsor, asked Greyes, “How will costs go up if we put New Hampshire waste first?”

“You keep saying the word ban,” Potenza said to Greyes. “This isn’t a ban. It’s a pause.”

She also asked if Waste Management, which runs the Turnkey landfill, and Casella Waste Systems, which is proposing the Dalton landfill, hold BIA membership.

“I believe that’s the case,” said Greyes.

Both companies are BIA members.

“I’m hearing about shipping trash to Ohio,” committee member and state Rep. Barbara Comtois, R-Center Barnstead, said to Greyes. “New Hampshire doesn’t have a capacity problem. We have to take some of these red herrings off the table.”

Speaking in support of HB 171 was Whitefield resident and NCABC president Wayne Morrison, an opponent of the Dalton proposal who said the “elephant in the room” is out-of-state trash.

Regarding the Interstate Commerce Clause, Morrison said other states, such as Massachusetts, have found ways to get around it to reduce the amount of interstate waste land-filled within their borders.

“Because we’re a neighboring state and haven’t acted sooner, we’re a magnet for it,” she said.

In what is now a 6-year fight in the North Country, Morrison said he is more optimistic than ever because of the discussions in Concord.

If New Hampshire would work toward its previously set goal of a 25-percent reduction of land-filling by 2030, which equates to about 370,000 tons a year, it would eliminate the need for another landfill, he said.

Nicole Dillon, a resident of Lancaster, also spoke in support of HB 171.

The New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services is neutral on HB 171, said Mike Wimsatt, director of NHDES’s Waste Management Division, who suggested some language tweaks in the bill to address technical issues.

Speaking in support, Sullivan said a moratorium would allow the time “to get our regulations more modern when it comes to landfill siting” and prevent siting in places that would impact future generations.

“This has been a contentious issue in our state,” Sullivan said to the committee.

HB 171 drew 292 online supporters and six in opposition.