

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Ayotte Signs New Law Creating Siting Committee for Landfills, 100 Celebrate In Dalton

By PAULA TRACY, InDepthNH.org 3 minutes ago



Paula Tracy photo

Gov. Kelly Ayotte signs new law at Forest Lake State Park Thursday. Behind her are Sen. Howard Pearl, Wayne Morrison, and Sen. David Rochefort.

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By PAULA TRACY, InDepthNH.org

DALTON – More than 100 people came to Forest Lake State Park Thursday to celebrate the state’s creation of a site evaluation committee for the siting of landfills, which will take local concerns into consideration.

The bipartisan legislation under House Bill 707 https://gc.nh.gov/bill_status/billinfo.aspx?id=586&inflect=2 (https://gc.nh.gov/bill_status/billinfo.aspx?id=586&inflect=2) is considered by state Sen. David Rochefort, R-Littleton, to be the most consequential legislation passed in the state in the past four years.

Republican Gov. Kelly Ayotte, who came to the shores of the lake that once was threatened by the development of a massive landfill at its edges and state Sen. Howard Pearl, R-Loudon, were singled out for their efforts to secure passage of the bill by those who spoke at the ceremonial signing.

“The legislature and the executive branch recognize that the selection of sites for major solid waste disposal facilities may have significant statewide, regional, and local impacts that are not fully evaluated through existing regulatory review,” the amended bill reads.

“Accordingly, the general court finds that it is in the public interest to establish a procedure to evaluate the local, regional, and statewide benefits and burdens of a new major solid waste facility that are not captured by existing regulatory reviews, including public health and safety, noise, odor, aesthetics, local and regional economic impacts, property value impacts,

nature and source of waste, need, impacts on tourism, recreation and traffic, and other similar impacts...Furthermore, the general court recognizes there is a compelling state interest in maintaining adequate, reasonably priced, and environmentally protective disposal capacity for solid waste generated in New Hampshire.”

The seven member committee established under RSA 21-O:9 shall be administratively attached to the Department of Environmental Services, and shall review applications for major solid waste disposal facilities.

The law also creates a Solid Waste Evaluation Committee Fund, and temporarily suspends approvals authorizing new capacity for major solid waste disposal facilities until committee rules are adopted or July 1, 2027, whichever is later.

The bill authorizes the Solid Waste Site Evaluation Committee to assess civil penalties and fines for violations of the provisions of the act and certificate requirements. Any revenue received from such penalties or fines would be deposited into the Solid Waste Evaluation Committee Fund.

State Rep. Peter Bixby, D-Dover, prime sponsor of the bill, said it was Ayotte who refused a preliminary Senate version of the legislation, which he said was watered down to protect landfill developers.

Instead, what was passed is a new committee which will take into consideration what the benefits of the projects may be, the down sides, the economics and set or reject a proposal based on a much broader range of concerns than currently exists in law.

He was greeted at the celebration by Ayotte as she came in, who said she is surprised that the state did not have such a site evaluation committee in the past, noting they exist for other project sitings, including renewable energy proposals.

Supporters of Save Forest Lake <https://saveforestlake.com/> (<https://saveforestlake.com/>) and the North Country Alliance for Balanced Change <https://northcountryabc.net/> (<https://northcountryabc.net/>) were among those in attendance who urged the state to oppose a proposal by the Vermont-based Casella waste corporation to build a massive landfill adjacent to Forest Lake State Park.

Also attending were many state Representatives, neighbors of the lake who worked on the bill and state park employees.

Ayotte again vowed that the project would go forward over her dead body and as loons called on the lake behind her, framed by Mount Lafayette and Cannon Mountain obscured by rain clouds, people applauded her words.

In June, Casella pulled its permit application for the project. Tom Tower of NCABC said no hurricane could wreck the day.

He called it “one of the most significant landfill siting reforms in New Hampshire’s history.”

Tower said about 90 years ago, the park was created by Civilian Conservation Corps workers who would be grateful that the place is still protected.

“Today’s ceremony marks the culmination of years of hard work by countless individuals...who came together with a common purpose to improve the way our state evaluates proposals for new landfills and major landfill expansions,” he said.

President of NCABC Wayne Morrison also spoke and said how gratifying it was to see so many gathered to celebrate the passage of the bill.

He recognized Fred Anderson, Michael Wright, Adam Finkel, and Eliot Wessler for their efforts and also Jon Swan whom he called “a one man Army” for their efforts to Save Forest Lake.

He said four words come to mind on this day: Thankful, Grateful, Hopeful and Committed.

“We are hopeful that impacted community voices will not only be heard but given equal weight in reaching transparent, fair, and smart landfill decisions going forward,” Morrison said.

Before the ceremonial signing of the bill into law, Ayotte said she knows it takes great leaders like Tower and Morrison to lead the effort and that has been instrumental in bringing all together.

The governor said the new law ensures local voices are heard “and when you think about it, it is kind of shocking that we did not have that local voice heard in the way that we do now.”

“There will never be a landfill here at Forest Lake. It will be over my dead body,” Ayotte said.

Sen. Pearl said it was a long bumpy road to passage and more than an eight year process.

“It was a major challenge to get everybody on the same page but we did it. We didn’t give up,” he said. “We had to look at a policy for the state of New Hampshire and that was the challenge. We had to find a policy where we have to deal with the trash we make every day. The bill we put together, I think provides a very fair process; it provides a path forward for anyone looking to establish a landfill facility – we have to have them – it’s just the reality of what we have to deal with. I think we put together a good process.”

He said his takeaway is that the new law “puts together a balanced statewide approach that secures our future without sacrificing our values.”