

Chris Jensen Our Town News: Bethlehem, NH2h · 

Monday night, the select board decided to ask state officials to change their plan and give the town the \$1.9 million Casella Waste Systems is paying to settle allegations of regulatory failures at the Bethlehem landfill.

Under the agreement announced earlier this week with the state attorney general, as much as \$219,000 will go to clean up a former landfill in the town of Bartlett. State officials say due to erosion material from the Bartlet landfill is getting into the Saco River.

The remainder of the \$1.9 million will go to the state.

The board said it is concerned that at some point the town might be faced with cleaning up problems at the landfill and the funds should be put aside for that contingency.

"Our concern is not hypothetical. In Casella Waste Systems, Inc.'s most recent annual report, the company explicitly identifies challenges in obtaining adequate insurance coverage within the solid waste industry," a letter approved by the board says.

"This disclosure underscores the very real risk that future environmental remediation costs may not be fully insurable or recoverable, leaving host communities such as Bethlehem exposed to significant financial liability should conditions change or unforeseen impacts emerge."

"Of particular concern is the documented tear in the landfill liner system and the landfill's close proximity to the Ammonoosuc River," according to the letter.

Bethlehem resident David Van Houten raised the issue at the board's public-input session. Mr. Van Houten said the alleged violations occurred in Bethlehem and the select board should ask the state for the money.

Board members said that was a good point.

Board member Mike Bruno said when he read the legal agreement, he thought there should be some way the town could benefit. For example, the money could go into a fund should Bethlehem need to correct a future problem caused by the landfill.

"I wondered why Bethlehem isn't getting anything," said select board chair Nancy Strand.

The board quickly agreed to send a letter to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services arguing it is unfair for the money not to be given to Bethlehem.

The attorney general's office did not immediately respond to an email from "Our Town News" asking why Bethlehem is not receiving any funds.

In agreeing to pay the fine, Casella did not admit any wrongdoing and said it was paying to avoid an expensive trial.

Here's the legal agreement and news release:

<https://www.doj.nh.gov/.../north-country-environmental...>