

Despite strong opposition at Littleton Town Meeting, developer says it's moving forward with proposed Dalton landfill

- By John Koziol Union Leader Correspondent
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LITTLETON – Despite strong opposition at Tuesday’s Littleton town elections and a lawsuit that questions if the state can issue the needed permits, a Vermont company says it’s moving forward with a proposed landfill in Dalton.

Known as the Granite State Landfill, the facility has been criticized for its potential adverse economic and environmental impacts, including on Forest Lake State Park, which is directly east of it.

On Tuesday, by an almost three to one margin -- 758 to 264, according to the Town Clerk’s Office -- Littleton voters supported a non-binding advisory warrant article opposing the landfill.

The article resolves to oppose the the state Department of Environmental Services’ approval of “any application for another commercial landfill to be built in the North Country.”

Joe Fusco, a vice president with Burlington, Vt.-based Casella Waste Management, said because landfills evoke “an emotional and visceral response that’s not always positive” in some people, votes, like the one in Littleton, “don’t surprise us.”

He said it was “interesting that voters in neighboring towns feel it’s important to tell the good citizens of Dalton they shouldn’t have the opportunity to benefit from the significant economic value this project represents.”

As much as criticism is expected when landfills are proposed, said Fusco, so are lawsuits, “and we are prepared to address those.”

In particular, Fusco was referring to the lawsuit filed on Feb. 11 in Merrimack Superior Court by the Conservation Law Foundation, which alleges that the NHDES ignored

state law that required it to update New Hampshire's solid-waste management plan every six years.

The updated plan would be the basis for the agency's permitting of new and expanded landfills, but the CLF said the DES has not updated the plan since 2003 and therefore should be precluded from issuing new permits, including the GSL, until it does.

A hearing on the lawsuit is scheduled for March 23.

CLF claims that the GSL would have "an enormous impact on waste management in New Hampshire for decades to come" and that it would be built "dangerously close to Forest Lake and Forest Lake State Park."

Reagan Bissonnette, executive director of the Epsom-based Northeast Resource Recovery Association, and Marc Morgan, a member of the NRRRA and Lebanon's solid waste manager, said landfills will remain a part of New Hampshire's solid-waste management for the foreseeable future.

About half of the trash that ends up in Granite State landfills comes from out of state, said Bissonnette and Morgan, and a lot of it is from Massachusetts, which has in recent years closed landfills and/ or limited their expansion.

To reduce municipal solid-waste tipping fees, Bissonnette said the key is to "find ways of reducing the amount of trash you're generating," noting that "pay-as-you-throw" has been shown to "reduce the amount of trash that people dispose of because they're generating less waste or looking to recycle more."

Morgan, who was on the DES committee that wrote the 2003 solid-waste management plan, concurred with Bissonnette that landfills are unjustly stigmatized and that folks are riled up about them because of the out-of-state trash they accept.

Trash has "got to go somewhere and I'm not saying that Dalton is the 'somewhere,'" said Morgan, adding that "It's a complicated issue."