

International crowd disapproves of lakeside dump expansion

- Sherbrooke Record
- 12 Sep 2018
- By Steve Blake Special to The Record



About 100 people from both sides of the border participated in a meeting Monday about the proposed expansion of the Casella landfill near Lake Memphremagog and its tributary, the Black River.

Many residents who live around the Casella landfill in Coventry, Vermont, and residents of Quebec, don't want the facility to nearly double in size. But the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) says the expansion would be safe.

Casella is the only operating landfill

Vermont, receiving municipal in garbage from all around the state, and "special waste" like sludge and construction waste from several other states. It is located near the Black River,

a major tributary of Lake Memphremagog, from which more than 170,000 people in the Eastern Townships get their drinking water.

About 100 people from both sides of the border crammed into the Gateway Center in Newport, Vermont Monday night to participate in a panel discussion on the proposed expansion.

Casella has applied to the ANR for a permit to expand its operation by 51 acres, which would allow it to stay open for an additional 22 years. Without the expansion the landfill would be full in four years.

If the ANR grants the permit, the company would have to apply for a permit from the Act 250 commission, the state's land use regulator.

The meeting Monday night was set up by a Vermont group of expansion opponents known as DUMP, an acronym for "Don't Undermine Memphremagog's Purity."

Included on the panel were Robert Benoit and Arieane Orjikh of Quebec's Memphremagog Conservation Inc. (MCI); environmental lawyer Jen Duggan of the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) of New England; Chuck Schwer and Cathy Jamieson of the ANR; and Charlie Pronto of DUMP.

The MCI representatives expressed their concern over contaminants entering the lake.

"It's like my neighbour putting his garbage near my well," Benoit said. "This garbage is close to the water we drink. To tell you the truth, we are very worried."

The leachate that gathers at the bottom of the landfill after rainfall passes through the garbage is treated at the municipal sewage treatment plant. According to Benoit, Newport City had not been testing the leachate after treatment before it is released into the Clyde River, a short distance from Lake Memphremagog. Pronto referred to it Monday as "garbage juice."

The Newport treatment plant has recently resumed testing the leachate after treating it, Jamieson said.

"This site should never have been authorized as a landfill in the first place," Orjikh said of the Coventry dumpsite. She pointed out that the earliest cells at the landfill are not even lined.

Journalist Robin Smith reminded the ANR that the state had several years ago thought about moving the garbage from the unlined section to a lined area but reconsidered because disturbing it could release more contaminants.

Jamieson said the agency is still considering that, but it wants to do more testing to determine the levels of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website, PFAS is a chemical that can cause a variety of health problems. "Drinking water can be a source of exposure in communities where these chemicals have contaminated water supplies," the website says.

Schwer said PFAS is "very dangerous." It is measured in parts per trillion.

Pronto said the EPA has evidence that leachate will migrate from a landfill.

Liners are subject to deterioration," he said. "All landfills will eventually leak."

The CLF has asked the ANR to deny Casella's application until it can show that the landfill is not leaking, and it's cleaned up, Duggan said. She called on Vermonters to reduce the amount of waste they generate.

"Sixty-seven per cent of waste can be composted or recycled," she said.

Neighbours of the landfill complained of the odour the landfill emits and of the mountain of garbage that is piling up. Others said surrounding towns are affected by the amount of truck traffic heading to and from the landfill.

"Irasburg gets 90 per cent of the traffic," said Tom Stelter. Towns other than Coventry should get benefits, he suggested. And the trucks are contributing to climate change, Lindy Sargent of Barton added.

"What makes it the perfect site?" Newport resident Mike Deslandes asked.

"It's not the perfect site," Schwer replied. "But Casella has met its standards."