

Newport City Council votes to refuse landfill leachate

By **Elizabeth Gribkoff**

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A marina on the shores of Lake Memphremagog in Newport. Photo by Anne Wallace Allen/VTDigger

The city of Newport has officially expressed its opposition to a 51-acre expansion of the neighboring Coventry landfill.

On Friday, the state's solid waste program issued a final permit to Casella Waste Management's subsidiary NEWSVT for a 10-year renewal of the existing 78-acre lined landfill and an expansion to its south. At a City Council meeting Monday night, council members and Mayor Paul Monette voted unanimously to "take a stance" against the expansion and to stop accepting leachate.

Newport has little say as to whether the landfill perched above Lake Memphremagog grows, but the city's wastewater treatment plant has accepted much of the leachate produced by the landfill.

Opponents of the landfill expansion hope this move by the city will lessen what they perceive as potential impacts to water quality. "We had a little victory," said Charlie Pronto, head of citizen's group DUMP who put the motion before the council to consider. "We need a lot more of them because we oppose the expansion. Period."

Newport Mayor Paul Monette said the council agreed to formally come out against the expansion because of increased truck traffic and a lack of a long-term plan for waste management, among other concerns. The landfill is expected to be filled in 22 years with the expansion.

"The state really had no plans 20 years out" for disposing of waste, he said.

The Coventry landfill expansion will, like the current operation, be double-lined with a leachate collection system. Until yesterday, up to 15,000 gallons of leachate a day were treated at Newport's wastewater treatment plant on the Clyde River, for which Casella paid about \$185,000 annually. The council's vote to stop accepting the leachate "came down to unknowns regarding PFAS," said Monette.

“We’re getting all their garbage,” Pronto said of Burlington and Montpelier. “Let the leachate go there and they can pollute their rivers instead of ours.”

He hopes sending the leachate further afield will spur opposition to the landfill beyond the Northeast Kingdom. “We would love to see Montpelier say, you know what, we don’t want this crap either.”

Monette said that while the city does not have Act 250 party status, the city as “one of the larger municipalities up near the landfill” will send a letter to the environmental review board opposing the expansion.