

Brattleboro Reformer

Landfill's effect on business queried

By [HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN](#) *Reformer Staff* Article Published: Thursday, October 02, 2003

BELLOWS FALLS -- Land along the Connecticut River is the wrong place to put a landfill, according to a panel of environmental and natural resource specialists.

The Rockingham Selectboard hosted its second in a series of five public information meetings Wednesday night on a landfill proposed for a site along Route 5 in Rockingham. Casella Waste Systems Inc., a Rutland-based company, wants to buy the land and construct a solid-waste facility. Neighbors and Rockingham residents opposed to the plan asked for the series of information meetings.

Two representatives from Casella introduced themselves, but sat quietly in the audience, scribbling notes in a legal pad. Around 200 people came out to hear the expert opinions and ask questions. The meeting opened with each specialist talking for five or 10 minutes.

Norton True, a member of the Friends and Neighbors of Missing Link Road, the group fighting the landfill, talked about efforts to clean the Connecticut River. After showing a series of slides on the recreation possibilities of the area, and commenting on the history and beauty of the surrounding land, he asked, "What would you rather have upstream, a recreational area or a landfill."

The soil in question is prone to erosion, said Connecticut River Steward David Deen, and the possibilities are great that contaminants could flow into the river from the proposed site. Erosion occurs naturally, Deen said, but building a large landfill along the banks of the river, and the streams flowing into it, will exacerbate the condition.

Eighteen months ago, Doug Thurber bought the Green Mountain Marina, just down river from the proposed site, and his business has taken off, he said. But he wondered out loud what a landfill would do to potential boaters.

"It would kill my business," he said. "I worked pretty hard to get it going ... I guess I would have to leave."

A representative from the Toxic Action Center, a Montpelier-based group that works with communities facing toxic threats, cited a study conducted by the New York Department of Health on the effects landfills have on the health of people who live nearby. The representative said the amount of various cancers are elevated in both men and women, and a long list of toxic chemicals were found in the air and water of the surrounding area.

"The town must decide, is this the best location for a landfill," she said.

Citing 24 years experience in evaluating geo-technical issues, civil engineer John Lens gave a geological history lesson of the area, and spoke of the fine silt and clay that make up the proposed site.

"Any development needs significant exploration," he said. "This site is subject to change. It is not an easy site to develop."

After a succession of technical discussions, Sharon Francis, executive director of the NH/VT Joint River Commissions, roused the crowd with a passionate plea to stop the project. "Putting a landfill near the Connecticut River flies in the face of common sense," she said.

The neighboring states have worked for years, and invested millions to clean the river. She also mentioned the revitalization of Bellows Falls.

"I don't believe the town of Rockingham wants to take the responsibility for all the divisiveness this dump will bring," she said. "Are the interests of one property owner strong enough to throw this community into years of battle?" she asked to resounding applause.

Selectboard member Thornton Lillie, who owns the land and wants to sell it to Casella, was not at the meeting.

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources representative Chris Wagner gave a brief overview of his agency's permit process. He said once the process begins, it could take up to a year. No permit has yet been filed, Wagner said.

Selectboard Chairman Lamont Barnett then opened the floor to questions, though most of the audience members offered comments.

Leonard Bingham, whose land abuts the site, talked about the wildlife he sees outside his window. He listed deer, turkey, fox and bear.

"I have lived there for 23 years, and I have cancer," he said, his voice cracking with emotion. "I hope we can live there a few more. This is not a place for a landfill."

For most of the two hours the discussion was orderly and respectful, but the meeting broke down as Barnett tried to end the meeting at the appointed time of 9 p.m.

A selectboard member from Bethlehem, N.H., rose and asked to speak, but Barnett said they were out of time. Jeers arose as Barnett turned off the microphone.

The man spoke without the public address system. Casella built a landfill in Bethlehem, he said, and now the town spends 10 percent of its budget on yearly fees. He said toxic, orange, oily substance leaks from the site.

"Learn from our mistakes," he bellowed out, as the selectboard sat at their table, waiting for the night to end.

The next meeting will be held on Nov. 5.