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Ontario OKs landfill lease

By ANDREA DECKERT

CANANDAIGUA — It's official. Ontario County will lease its landfill to Casella Waste Systems starting Jan. 1, and the money generated will be used to keep taxes down and pay for capital projects.

The Board of Supervisors last night approved two resolutions: a 25-year lease with the Rutland, Vt., firm and a plan for allocating the roughly \$100 million the county will be paid.

"I often find that something that seems too good to be true, usually is," said East Bloomfield Supervisor Patrick Crowley. "(But) I've searched for an Achilles heel in this proposal, and I can't find one. I hope everything we've been promised will come about."

Casella was one of three companies that county officials considered doing business with; supervisors began pursuing the option of leasing the landfill and recycling operation in Flint after it was estimated earlier this year that it would run a deficit in the next few years.

Casella will pay the county about \$100 million, plus several million more in economic development incentives over the life of the lease. The company has said it plans to retain the landfill's current employees.

Geneva Town Supervisor Mary Luckern cast the only vote against the lease, citing concerns about increased truck traffic along County Road 6 and Routes 5&20.

Geneva City Supervisor Rocky LaRocca, vice president of Seneca Meadows, abstained. IESI, one of the other companies interested in the lease, is buying Seneca Meadows landfill in the town of Seneca Falls.

A representative of the other company, Republic Services, thinks the county got a good deal, but could have gotten a great one by going with his firm.

Will Flower, vice president of communications for Republic, said both Republic and IESI offered more money. Republic, for example, was willing to give the county more than \$130 million to lease the 300-plus acre site.

County officials have said they felt Casella's offer was the best because in addition to the money, Casella will install utilities to attract business to the site, provide scholarships for county residents

studying environmental science, and build a modern recycling facility there.

Flower said Casella would likely do a good job, but the county would have gotten more money from Republic.

Manchester Supervisor Bill Eddinger, who chairs the county's Financial Management Committee, said the money from the deal will provide tax relief for county residents.

He added that the finance committee will look at some options for the 2004 budget proposal at its meeting at the end of the month.

The financial plan for the landfill lease money includes using \$21 million for projects where the county has incurred debt, including the new jail; \$500,000 for economic development programs; \$2 million per year for 25 years for new construction projects, and \$18 million that will be received in the next three to seven years toward tax relief measures. Money that is not used will be placed in various reserve funds.

Some county residents have been worried that leasing the facility would mean more garbage, noise, odor and traffic. A Casella representative met with them to help alleviate their concerns.

In Clinton County, where the company has leased that county's landfill since 1995, a debt of \$17 million has been nearly wiped out under private operation.

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