

FINGER LAKES ***TIMES*** ***ONLINE***

Violations worry residents *Tuesday, September 09, 2003*

By ANDREA DECKERT Times Staff Writer

HOPEWELL — Questions, concerns and outright “no ways” were heard at a public hearing last night on Ontario County leasing its landfill to a private waste management company from New England.

More than 100 county residents came from as nearby as Seneca, where the landfill is, to as far away as Geneva, Bloomfield and Naples to hear the proposal from Casella Waste Systems of Rutland, Vt., the leading contender to lease the facility for 25 years.

Audience members said they were concerned about Casella’s track record, noting there have been lawsuits filed against the company by municipalities, regarding expansion projects and failure to make payments, and the company has been fined several times by the Department of Environmental Conservation for violations.

County officials were given 15 pages of alleged offenses committed by Casella.

“They’re our homes, and we’re here to fight for them,” said Sheila Blair, who lives across from the landfill and recycling center on Routes 5&20.

James Bohlig, Casella president and chief operating officer, defended the company’s record and said that it works with municipalities; he pointed to the success Casella has had with Clinton County’s landfill, which it leases.

Eric Amberg, of Clifton Springs, wants Casella to keep the landfill’s height where it is now.

“The last thing we need is a mountain, a temple to garbage,” Amberg said.

Bohlig said there are no plans for expansion beyond the 13 acres already determined and noted that the the height limit of about 990 feet, also would remain the same.

Under the lease proposal, Ontario County would retain ownership of the site, including the permit from the state DEC. Any changes to that permit, which would include increasing the daily tonnage, would need to be approved by the county.

The meeting turned political as the two men running for mayor of the city of Geneva asked questions.

Mayor Donald Cass asked if there would be more truck traffic and what impact that would have on Geneva and its recent revitalization efforts. The current permit allows 2,300 tons of garbage daily, but the county traditionally takes in about half of that.

“Geneva is a beautiful city whose efforts ... have placed us in a position to be a tourist destination,” said Cass. “Surely, tourists will tend to shy away from a place where truck after truck filled with trash is driving through.”

Bohlig said taking full advantage of the permit would increase the truck traffic by about 30 vehicles, which he said would have little impact on a road such as 5&20 that can handle 10,000 vehicles per day, according to the state Department of Transportation. Bohlig also said the trucks would be routed down County Road 6 not through the city.

Vincent Scalise, the Republican mayoral candidate, questioned why city officials hadn’t gotten involved in the matter before now.

“This is a major, major issue, and Geneva officials should have been involved earlier,” Scalise said.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Donald Ninestine, a Geneva city supervisor, said he and the two other city supervisors, Charles Evangelista and Rocky LaRocca, have kept abreast of the issue since the start, have updated City Council at its monthly meetings and are looking out for city residents and their best interests.

Ninestine said the Geneva supervisors may not have been so vocal about the plan because they are not seeking election this year.

“That comment was out of order,” said Scalise.

Others in the audience asked why the county needed to lease the facility and doesn’t continue doing the job itself.

County Administrator Geoff Astles said the lease option is being pursued because the county could have to use taxpayer dollars to subsidize the landfill in future years.

If the county continues to run the operation, the expansion would have to move forward and roughly half of the \$8 million for the project would have to be borrowed, Astles said, noting that a private company would not only pay for the project, but would also know how to better run the operation.

Bob DeLeo, who doesn’t live far from the landfill, asked why the expansion was needed, noting that after the current land is filled, the landfill could be shut down.

Astles said the expansion was needed because the current site would be full in another 10 months. With no landfill, there would be no place to put waste generated in the county.

Ken Niles of Stanley asked why the option to lease was being voted on by the Board of Supervisors and not the public, noting that the 21 supervisors make up a small part of the community and could be bought off by Casella to move ahead with the deal.

County officials were offended by the statement and told the man he was out of order.

“This is a representative form of government,” said Ninestine. “If you don’t like the elected representatives, change them.”

Some residents also said they felt there wasn't enough notice about the hearing, that it appeared in the newspaper only three days before and that more people may have attended if they'd learned about it sooner.

Ninestine said the county tried to give people enough notice and felt the meeting was needed.

"I guess I didn't think fast enough," said Ninestine.

The public will have more opportunities to speak, including the Sept. 11 and Oct. 2 supervisors' meetings, which start at 7 p.m. on the third floor of the county courthouse in Canandaigua.

The Seneca Town Board also will have representatives from Casella at a meeting later this month, which has not yet been set. That town is working with the company on a host agreement since the landfill is within its borders.