

Landfill expansion moves forward

July 3, 2009

Conditions of DEC permit require Rapp Road facility to restore Pine Bush wetlands

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The state Department of Environmental Conservation has issued an expansion permit for the Rapp Road Landfill.

Gene Kelly, regional director for the DEC, said Thursday, June 25, that the permit is "effective unless the city [of Albany] objects," but said he is unaware of any contentious provisions between the DEC and the city.

City officials have not indicated any objections as of press time.

The Army Corps of Engineers must still grant a second permit for the project to move forward, although one is expected soon, officials stated.

Albany City Mayor Jerry Jennings has been pushing for the expansion in order to deal with waste management issues he said he inherited from previous administrations.

It calls for a 15-acre expansion of the landfill, Kelly said, but has several "special conditions," including odor controls and a 255-acre restoration in order for the city to be allowed to expand the landfill.

The expansion calls for an additional 15 acres, eight on city-owned land off site, and seven on site. It is expected to keep the landfill operational for seven more years.

Bob Van Amburgh, an executive assistant to the mayor, said the expansion buys time to come up with another trash solution.

"It certainly provides, not only for the city, but the ANSWERS community and the greater Capital Region, an opportunity to study alternatives," Van Amburgh said. "That's really the bottom line."

The Solid Waste Management Plan, formerly known as ANSWERS, or the Albany New York Solid Waste Energy Recovery System, is a group of municipalities that use the landfill and includes Guilderland, Bethlehem and New Scotland.

Guilderland Republican Board members Warren Redlich and Mark Grimm expressed a desire to leave the coalition, stating they did not favor the landfill expansion at a May 27 meeting.

Guilderland Supervisor Ken Runion said he did not support the expansion of the landfill either, but the town had no alternative to dump its trash.

Much of the land designated for mitigation rests in Guilderland and the City of Albany. The permit allows the expansion to go into

Dump

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Pine Bush wetlands but not the federally protected preserve.

Kelly said after the landfill has reached capacity, the city will be responsible for restoring some of the land the landfill sits on.

He said this is the best long-term solution for a number of reasons.

"This forces the city to go to a very forward-looking process," he said.

Kelly highlighted the conditions the city must comply with. They include the creation of a recycling coordinator funded by the city, the prohibition of dumping recyclable materials, the prohibition of rodent poisons, the improvement and extension of a nearby stream, the explicit prohibition of another expansion, and the ability for the DEC to decrease the maximum tonnage per day dumped at the landfill if the town does not actively mitigate odor issues.

The maximum daily tonnage is 1,050, and the DEC can knock off 200 tons per day each time the city is found to be in non-compliance.

Approximately 5 acres of wetlands will need to be used for the landfill, but Kelly said the benefits outweigh the detractors.

"A multiple of that number of acres will be created," he said. Approximately 20 acres of wetlands will be made.

In addition, \$10 per ton of garbage dumped will be put into a separate account for planning. There will be an increase to \$1.50 per ton going to the Pine Bush Preserve Commission for stewardship and land acquisition and that number jumps to \$2 after three years.

There will be 13 new acres added to the Pine Bush Preserve as well. Kelly said the expansion is expected to last for a minimum of 6.5 years.

Lynne Jackson of Save the Pine Bush said the group is "outraged and horrified" by the DEC decision to grant the permit. Jackson said she suspects somebody is "making a lot of money off this."

She said the town will need to bond part of the expansion and mitigation and that bond will only bring taxpayers deeper into debt.

"We are very hopeful that the Army Corps of Engineers will deny the second permit," she said.

Bill Bruce, an environmental management consultant the not-for-profit organization the Albany Local Development Corporation, said the permit needed from the Army Corps of Engineers deals mainly with the mitigation process.

"They are fairly far along in the process," he said. "And things are going pretty well."

Jackson questioned why the landfill was filled earlier than its expected expansion date.

Jackson said she was not satis-

fied with the conditions the DEC laid out for Albany, and said she is skeptical they will undergo the mitigation process.

"You have to ask the question, are they actually going to do this restoration project," she said.

Jim Travers, of Selkirk-Coeymans-Ravena Against Pollution and Save the Pine Bush, said he suspects, like Jackson, the landfill will not be profitable. Travers said the bond will be too great to overcome in the next six or seven years.

Van Amburgh said the finance committee held a hearing on Thursday, June 25. It is expected to make a determination about bonding the expansion sometime in the near future, he said.

City officials have stated the landfill brings in nearly \$11 million per year, with between \$5 and \$6 million of that profit.

Chris Quirk, chief fiscal officer for the department of general services, said the project is expected to cost is \$41 million, with \$18 million being dedicated to the restoration effort. He said the project is expected to take five years.

He said for the first year, a \$9 million bond will likely be needed for the expansion and a \$2.4 million bond for the restoration.

Quirk also said accusations that the landfill will operate at a deficit have no creditability.

Christopher Hawver, executive director for the Pine Bush Preserve Commission, said the permit is the best option presented so far, although the commission preferred not to see any expansion.

"The mitigation package is much better than any other proposal than the city has come up with in the past," Hawver said.

This proposed expansion does not include plans to expand into federally protected wetlands, an important factor he said.

Hawver said he is hopeful new technologies will be explored for waste management.

"My hopes are that this is the last expansion at this site," he said.

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