

Grand Central Sanitary Landfill denied rezoning request for expansion

Updated Jul 09, 2020; Posted Jul 09, 2020



Waste Management applied in February 2020 to change the zoning designation of 211 acres next to the Grand Central Sanitary Landfill in Plainfield Township so landfill operations can be expanded.

By [John Best | lehighvalleylive.com contributor](#)

Residents who object to a landfill expansion in the Slate Belt can breathe a sigh of relief, for now.

The Plainfield Township Board of Supervisors voted Wednesday to deny [Waste Management's request to rezone property needed to expand its Grand Central Sanitary Landfill](#).

The denial passed 3-0 with two abstentions. Supervisors Randy Heard, Jane Mellert and Glenn Borger voted to deny the rezoning request.

Supervisor Steve Hurni said he abstained from the vote because he is a board member of the Green Knight Economic Development Corp., which operates a power plant using landfill gas at Grand Central.

Supervisor Joyce Lambert said she abstained because she was undecided on the request.

Waste Management representative Adrienne Fors said the company is weighing its options on how to proceed after the denial.

Waste Management asked the township to consider changing the zoning designation of 211 acres adjacent to the current landfill off Route 512 between Wind Gap and Pen Argyl. The company struck a deal with the neighboring property owner to buy 325 acres in all if the rezoning request was approved.

The land on the east side of Pen Argyl Road is zoned for farm and forest uses. Waste Management wanted that changed to solid waste processing and disposal.

Based on the landfill's current inbound trash tonnage of about 3,000 tons of trash per day, the existing landfill has about eight more years of availability to accept trash, according to Waste Management representatives.

The proposed expansion would extend that lifespan by 20 years.

Waste Management representatives stated that the expansion would mean a combined \$7.1 million in annual tax revenue for the township, Northampton County, Pennsylvania and the Pen Argyl Area School District.

Neighboring boroughs Wind Gap and Pen Argyl also receive tonnage fees from the landfill. Waste Fors said she estimates a 20-year extension would generate \$101 million for the three municipalities over that time.

Several members of Wednesday's audience said they object to the expansion. No one in the audience spoke in favor of Waste Management's request.

People who spoke said they understand the loss of tax revenue from the landfill might mean property taxes would eventually go up.

Increased taxes would be preferable to reduced quality of life from noxious odors and potential health hazards from the landfill, many said.

Mellert, one of the township supervisors, said the township has been building a trust fund in anticipation of lost landfill tax revenue.

When zoning ordinances were adopted, the township carefully considered the area of the township that should be zoned for solid waste management, according to Mellert. Adding another area where a landfill could be built would be inconsistent with that planning, she said.

"It was not the intent to entertain another complete solid waste zoning district," Mellert said.

The board's Heard said the township residents voted to establish an earned income tax in 2007 to preserve open space. Changing an area designated as farm and forest use would betray the will of the residents, he said.

Township Solicitor David Backenstoe said he believes the legal ability to rezone an area in the township is a legislative act that falls entirely under the purview of the board of supervisors.

As such, the supervisors' decision is not subject to review by an appellate court, he said.

However, Waste Management's counsel argued the decision should not be made without going through an appropriate planning process, including being reviewed by the township's planning commission.

"We are weighing our options in terms of how we will respond to the Board of Supervisors' decision," Fors wrote in an email after the meeting. "We do not believe it is in the community's best interest to dismiss an environmentally and economically important proposal like ours without thoughtful and thorough review."

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