

# DEM gets 453 letters on highway barn site

By Dotti Farrington

State Department of Environmental Management officials are evaluating 453 letters they have received from townspeople in response to the Town Council's Feb. 1 workshop on dual engineering plans to officially close the former landfill and to build a highway barn there as part of the project.

DEM spokeswoman Laurie Grandchamp said Monday that the letter response "was more than we ever anticipated."

She and DEM officials were to meet Tuesday, March 7, to consider a response to the town within a week and draft a "form response summary" that will be sent to each letter writer. If the DEM approves the dual plan, the next step would be a semi-final, 90 percent complete, plan in about eight weeks, and going out to bid this summer. DEM officials are also reviewing results of tests DEM ordered on a dozen Jamestown wells. (See related story on pages 1.)

The written comments to the DEM included a total of 382 printed form letters that represented six basic positions: two versions, totaling 183, are for the barn at the landfill; three versions, totaling 171, are for more specific tests and studies before doing anything at the landfill site; and 28 copies of one form are against the barn at the landfill location. Some form letters include brief hand-written messages.

Most letters that are original are against the current proposed highway barn plan, but some are for assorted positions on the issues. Some, such as one by Jane and C. Richard Koster of West Reach, asks the DEM "to err on the side of caution." Several letter writers pleaded for safety for children in homes within about a mile of the landfill. Two letters are from people who said they had cancer, with Dwight Smith of Intrepid Lane pointing out his inability to prove a

connection with landfill pollution. Both urge the DOT, "Don't take the risk."

The letters have addresses throughout town. Those most strongly opposed are from people who live within a mile of the landfill site. Those most strongly in favor of the dual plan seem to live in the village area. Bob Dolan of Coronado Street, for example, said the garage "logically belongs" at the landfill. However, at least two supporters live within a mile of the landfill. One is Carol Nelson Lee of Buoy Street, who believes adding the barn adds better monitoring and "will result in a cleaner site." Most who called for more tests have addresses throughout the island.

### Last month

About 110 people attended the Feb. 1 Town Council workshop on the landfill closure plans, designated as 50-percent complete. DEM officials said Jamestown is the first community in the state to have its landfill closure done under the 1991 extension of the federal so-called "superfund" program. That is when the DEM was given the job of supervising closures. Some 24 other closures, among about 200 needing plans, are pending in Rhode Island.

At the Feb. 1 workshop, GZA GeoEnvironmental of Norwood, Mass., consultants to the town for the landfill closure and the proposed garage there, explained its plans to date for Jamestown's landfill. During the session, a testy review evolved about implications of tainted water wells at the former Viera Farm that abuts the landfill site on the south. One group of 80 form letters to the DEM asked for retesting those wells before proceeding with the dual plans. Those signers recall that tests in 1987 and 1992 showed the well water contained vinyl chlorolide and toluene, both cancer-causing contaminants

blamed on the landfill. The issue caused a proposed housing subdivision on the Viera land to be stopped, the town payed a settlement to the owner, and the property given to the Conanicut Island Land Trust.

### For more studies

Another group of form letters, signed by 63 people, call for a hydrogeological study before putting the garage at the landfill site. They say such a study was a standard procedure that includes sonar and X-ray analysis of water distribution in a bedrock system. A third form letter, with 28 signees, says that pump testing is needed to draw water from the bedrock to determine how contaminants would travel, and asks the DEM for the extra test before building the garage. Some residents have been arguing for years for more comprehensive testing and protections.

Last month, GZA reported that its findings total 16 rounds of testing showing exceedances "that are not statistically significant." Residents disputed that interpretation of the test results.

### People want...

Some 93 residents signed a two-sentence form letter to "urge (the DEM) to stand up to the pressure you're getting from a vocal minority and let the town put the highway barn at the landfill. That's where most people of Jamestown want it and, if there's no evidence that it's going to hurt the ground water, that's where it should go."

Other letter senders, including Andrew Yates of Mount Hope Avenue and Richard Kingsley of Clinton Avenue, referred to residents having voted or otherwise being overwhelmingly in favor of putting the highway barn at the landfill.

At the last town financial meeting, almost a year ago, 265 people — less than one percent of the

town's more than 4,000 registered voters — agreed the town should spend up to \$75,000 to design a barn at the landfill. If a design were adopted by the Town Council, it would go to a November vote on a bond issue. A November 2004 vote asking for approval to spend \$2.4 million to build a highway barn at Taylor Point was rejected 2,111-1,008 as too costly and not appropriate.

The other pro-barn form letter, signed by 90 people, specified they favored the closure project and building the barn at the landfill site. They ask the DEM to base such a decision "on good science and engineering and not influenced by political pressure."

### Brownfields

Twenty-eight people signed a form letter asking "for the highest level of protection for our well water." The form states "Of course the Jamestown landfill is unique. It sits on an island which is a sole source aquifer. Industrial activity and brownfield reuse could trigger release of pollutants into the bedrock."

Brownfields are former landfills engineered for mostly commercial or industrial construction, or passive recreational uses. Other letter writers refer to the brownfield option, some for and some against. Opponents note that brownfield success stories all involved locations with available municipal water.

Jamestowners against the dual landfill plan cited at least three reports that the town cannot extend town water to the north end if wells there were to become contaminated. The limited water supply from the town's two reservoirs is already a cause of seasonal water-use restrictions.

If the garage were allowed, Norma Willis, a leader of the North End Concerned Citizens, asks in her letter that the DEM require all excavated waste to be removed and not allowed to be scattered around the site, as is currently proposed. "(When younger) We didn't know better and used lead paint and asbestos. Today we know these are dangerous," she wrote to the DEM.

### If the plan fails

Richard Amirault, an engineering technician at the state Department of Health, was among several who urged that a contin-

gency plan be developed before the garage is constructed.

Pat Bolger of Fore Royal Court, a former member of the Conservation Commission, was one of several who said the garage option represents a belief that it would be least expensive at the landfill. He said that view "does not address the enormous cost to all" if the plan fails.

Susan Little of North Main Road, another leader of a group of north-end residents, was among the numerous people who told the DEM that the town has an extensive "history of ignoring regulations." The north-end group has gathered and circulated copies of dozens of landfill violations the DEM has filed against the town since the 1980s. "There is a precedent of ignoring wells that are dirty," Andrew Nicolett of Prospect Street said.

Others cited the town's long-term underbudgeting for maintenance as a reason to suspect that the town will not keep up with safeguards for the landfill site, that they consider too few, if the dual plan is approved.


Ray Iannetta, another landfill abutter and north-end resident leader, emphasized that new federal policies are developing. Based on findings that some combinations of low levels of some substances previously considered acceptable "are even more dangerous than a single substance at high levels." He suggested that the town be required to post a bond to cover costs should need for alternate water supplies be needed.

The North End Concerned Citizens' lawyer and engineer are both landfill consulting specialists who previously worked for the federal Environmental Protection Agency on superfund landfill closures. Each sent detailed letters from their respective firms about concerns that they also outlined Sunday to more than 100 residents at the NECC forum.

Steven Jepson of Columbia Lane cited court cases resulting in settlements to people affected by unsuccessful landfill closures. "The town is recklessly pursuing the plan and is ignoring high risks," he said.

Nancy and Robert Halstead, landfill neighbors, say in their letter to the DEM that they were not active in "the supposed NIMBY (not in my back yard) NECC." They wrote, "GZA reports were contradictory with much misinformation, the Town Council is less than forthcoming and the town is without a contingency plan." They

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**NOTICE**  
**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**TOWN OF JAMESTOWN**

The Town of Jamestown is considering filing an application for a Small Cities Community Development Block Grant. A maximum of \$250,000 is available to undertake the following range of activities:

- a) Provisions of employment opportunities for low and moderate income individuals.
- b) Improved housing opportunities for low and moderate-income families and individuals.
- c) Provision of community facilities and services principally benefiting low and moderate-income families and individuals.

A public hearing will be held at the Town Hall on March 16, 2006 at 4:30 P.M., for the purpose of obtaining the views of citizens on community development and housing needs and on program performance.

Citizens with handicaps needing sign language or other assistance should call TDD number 1-800-745-5555 for an interpreter 72 hours in advance.

Bruce R. Keiser, Town Administrator

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