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New Statewide Coalition Seeks Alternative to Gardner's Planned Sludge Landfill Expansion

The Millers River Watershed Council (MRWC), an Athol-based environmental non-profit organization, is pleased to announce the creation of a new statewide Coalition for a Sustainable Alternative to Expanding Gardner's Sludge Landfill. Comprised of local, regional and statewide groups, the Coalition aims to garner support for an approach to managing Gardner's sewage sludge that will keep the City's air and water clean and will not disturb environmentally sensitive City forest land.

"Just about everyone wants to find an economical solution to dealing with Gardner's landfill sludge that is also environmentally friendly, and we are confident the City would find such a solution if it chose to look for one," said MRWC director Ivan Ussach. Some City Councilors, along with hundreds of Gardner residents, have been trying to get the City to do just that since 2016, when, during a City Council hearing attended by many residents, the only voice in favor of the current plan was then-mayor Mark Hawke. "Hawke is gone, but the City Council has not been eager to take a fresh look at the options," said Ussach.

The Coalition currently includes MRWC, Gardner Clean Air, Athol Bird and Nature Club, Clean Water Action, Connecticut River Conservancy, MassPIRG, Mass Rivers Alliance, Mount Grace Conservation Land Trust and North County Land Trust. It's efforts will help ensure that alternatives to dumping more sludge get the attention they deserve--such as anaerobic digestion, composting and hauling out. Various public, private and hybrid funding mechanisms could be considered by the City.

"Threatening water supplies and stinking up the Cummings Conservation Area that the City, State, and Federal Government paid to protect is not the way to go," said Alan Rousseau of Gardner Clean Air, who is also an abutter. "Neither is destroying rare geological features and vernal pools in the City-owned Wildwood Forest," he added.

"No other municipalities in the state are planning to open or expand sludge landfills, and that should tell you something", said Ussach. "If the City thinks this is some sort of economic windfall to handle sludge from the entire state--well, all I can say is, that idea stinks worse than the landfill itself. That's not the legacy the Chair City needs or deserves," Rousseau said. More information can be found on the MRWC website at www.millerswatershed.org.

photo credit: Alan Rousseau

