



MILLERS RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL, INC.
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Gardner Conservation Commission
City Hall
95 Pleasant Street
Gardner, MA 01440

July 25, 2022

Subject: Notice of Intent (NOI), 850 West Street – City of Gardner Sludge Landfill Expansion

Dear Conservation Commission Members,

The Millers River Watershed Council (MRWC) is writing to comment on the NOI for the City of Gardner’s proposed Sludge Landfill Expansion. MRWC is a nonprofit organization established in 1970 and dedicated to protecting the lands and waters of the Millers River watershed for the benefit of all its inhabitants, human and wild. MRWC educates area residents about local watershed issues and works in all areas and tributaries within the basin. MRWC has been active in protecting the Otter River Watershed and promoting the Otter River for recreation purposes. In 2017, in collaboration with Gardner city officials, MRWC established the Upper Otter River Blue Trail. That Blue Trail segment runs nearly five miles from the Gardner Airport to Bridge Street in Gardner—close to the site of the sludge landfill. The area around the proposed project expansion is within 1,300 feet of the Otter River and contains three vernal pools certified by MRWC through the state of Massachusetts’ Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP).

MRWC opposes the sludge landfill expansion on various grounds, and urges the Conservation Commission to withhold its approval.

Inadequate Alternatives analysis: First and foremost, the NOI documentation includes an Alternatives Analysis that provides conclusions without detailed supporting data. Gardner and

its residents deserve a long-term sludge management solution that is both environmentally sustainable and economically feasible. Up to this point, the City has not conducted a sufficiently detailed feasibility study on any alternative to the expansion of the existing Sludge Landfill. The City has not attempted to partner with any neighboring communities, pursue a private sector partnership, or apply for grant programs that would support an alternative solution. Other Massachusetts communities are pursuing sludge disposal solutions that include Anaerobic Digestion, Composting, and Gasification facilities. According to MA-DEP, no other Massachusetts cities or towns are pursuing new or expanded sludge landfill projects.

Threat to water resources: According to the NOI Narrative section 3, the expansion will be constructed with a double composite groundwater protection system with leak detection. This liner is not guaranteed to never fail and man-made infrastructure ultimately fails. As such, state regulations prohibit landfills from being sited in a Zone II area for an existing or potential public water supply well (310 CMR 19.038 (2)(c)(1)(a)). The NOI Narrative mentions two public drinking water wells within one-mile and an unspecified number of private wells in the .5-mile. In addition to the two Templeton Public Wells, MRWC is aware of approximately 70 private residential wells within the 1-mile radius. The Commission should require the Applicant to list and show on a plan all the private wells within a 1-mile radius. The SLF Expansion Engineering Report January 2022 Appendix F Hydrogeological Evaluation Report, (submitted to MA DEP with the WP33 permit application) indicates that **groundwater in the expansion area flows south and south east**, towards these critical water resources and the Otter River. The project proponent has failed to indicate what corrective actions and remediation procedures would be provided if nearby wetland resources and drinking water supplies become contaminated if—or shall we say WHEN--this system fails at some point in the future. In fact, adequately restoring contaminated potable water supplies is notoriously difficult, expensive and rarely successful.

Destruction of natural resources: The Sludge Landfill expansion will result in the destruction of 4-5 acres of Gardner's natural resources including wildlife habitat, forest, and an intact esker in the Wildwood Cemetery Forest. The Gardner Conservation Department has established a frequently-used trail system on this property. Odors emanating from the existing Sludge Landfill have been a problem for many years. The odors negatively impact the public's use of the Otter River Blue Trail, Wildwood Cemetery Forest, Cummings Otter River Conservation Area, and Ebenezer Keyes Conservation Area. The sludge landfill expansion project will increase and prolong the number of years that odors are present in this area.

Stormwater Management: The NOI documentation indicates that the City of Gardner is seeking approval for disturbances within the 100' buffer zones for Wetlands C and D that are located to the south and southeast respectively of the proposed Sludge Landfill Expansion footprint. The disturbances are to construct new infiltration basins with outfall pipes to Wetlands C and D

buffers, and an emergency overflow spillway to Wetland D. This area to the south and southeast of the expansion has many interconnected hydrological resources consisting of wetlands, spring-fed ponds, and streams that comprise this watershed for the Otter River. Wetland C is located on both the 128 +/- acre Wildwood Cemetery Forest (WCF) and City-owned abutting 122-acre Cummings Otter River Conservation Area (CORCA). Wetland D is located in both the WCF and abutting 69 +/-acre Rousseau property. The Rousseau property has small spring-fed ponds. Two of these ponds each have exiting streams that flow through culverts under the Pan Am Railways railroad line and to the Otter River. **Infiltration basins should not be constructed with outfall pipes to Wetlands C & D.** MRWC is aware of incidents that have occurred in 2020 and 2022 involving washout of material through the current southwestern outfall pipe to Wetland D. Any City failure in the future to properly maintain these basins will pose risks to Wetlands C & D. Other options should be exercised in the stormwater management plans for this expansion that do not involve outfalls to Wetlands C & D.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Ivan Ussach, director

MRW

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