

# Gardner sludge landfill expansion put on hold for study

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Gardner News



GARDNER — City officials have requested an environmental study of a proposed expansion of Gardner's sludge landfill to determine if the plan is the city's best option.

Sludge is a byproduct of sewage treatment at the Gardner Wastewater Facility, 52 Plant Road in East Templeton. It is a semisolid material that is later mixed with sand to reduce odor, then placed in the sludge landfill at 850 West St.

At a July 25 Conservation Commission hearing, the City Council determined that a third-party investigation needs to be funded by the city before the plan for the 4.3 acre landfill expansion can move forward.

"I am pleased that the commission will be requiring a peer review of the notice of intent and that the public hearing [for the expansion] has been continued," said Alan Rousseau, who lives near the landfill, is co-founder of Gardner Clean Air and is also a director on the board of the North Country Land Trust.

"This expansion is a 1980s type sludge solution and no other Mass. community is pursuing a new or expanded sludge landfill," added Rousseau. He has been advocating for several years for a third-party investigation and wants to identify an alternative option to the sludge landfill.

In the next several weeks, Conservation Commission members will request money from the city to hire an independent environmental consultant to determine whether an expansion is more feasible than any other sludge landfill alternative.

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Dane Arnold, the director of the Gardner Public Works Department, filed a notice of intent with the Conservation Commission. Because the project is less than 200 feet from two vernal pools located in Wildwood Cemetery Forest and the Cummings Otter River Conservation Area, a permit is required before construction can begin.

"The third-party review is the decision of the commission and the concerned citizens," Arnold said. "There is still time until the landfill is at capacity, and if this peer review makes the council and the residents more comfortable then it's their decision."

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In 2015, the state Department of Environmental Protection approved a 30-foot vertical expansion and since then the city of Gardner has not done an alternative analysis.

Since November 2016, Gardner Clean Air and the Millers River Watershed Council have partnered to inform the public about the issue and to advocate for a more sustainable solution instead of expanding the landfill.

"The city needs to re-examine the alternatives that are currently used for the disposal of over 80% of Massachusetts' wastewater sludge," Rousseau said. "I am concerned about the current design with two outfall pipes and an emergency overflow spillway from two infiltration basins into two wetland buffers."

The Conservation Commission will again discuss the sludge landfill at its Aug. 8 meeting.