Bethlehem Transfer Station Committee

Bethlehem, NH

Minutes of the Meeting

March 17, 2021

Note: Virtual via “Zoom”

Committee members participating Nancy Strand (host), Barry Zitser, Andrea Bryant, Julie Seely, Katherine Darges. Guest: Margaret Gale

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm.

Barry Zitser provided updates on the ongoing litigation involving North Country Environmental Services (NCES)/Casella, the Waste Management Council that ultimately impacts the operation of the landfill in Bethlehem; and the case against the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) regarding their lack of a valid solid waste plan.

The March 10 hearing went ahead as scheduled. The court took the exhibits under advisement. The court may make a decision at any time. Apparently, NCES has asked for a jury trial. Barry is not sure of the significance for that, but he noted that jury trials in Connecticut “can age a bit before they happen.” If the ruling is against a preliminary injunction this matter may be mooted depending on how long it takes for the Waste Management Council to render a judgement. There are filings that have not been decided that may impact this case.

Regarding the suit against NHDES, two dates were set for hearings, February 23, and March 23, 2021. At the February 23 preliminary hearing the judge indicated that he was inclined to be liberal in allowing interventions by other parties with a germane interest in the case. These have included waste haulers, public interest groups, landfill operators and others. The judge also noted that there were a number of filings that had not been reviewed about legal issues as to whether the plaintiff has standing, whether he can make certain kinds of statements, etc.

Barry said that he was not getting the feeling that there was any immediate need for the Select Board to spend money on bags and other supplies and equipment. He thinks that they should continue to have a “watchful waiting” attitude. Barry will continue to monitor the cases. It is a bit early to spend $12,00 or so on bags. We may have other short-range options such as using another service.

Nancy Strand asked that, with all of the legal things going on, do we as a town have any more information about what is going to happen – in Spring of 2021, or 2026…? Barry answered that the judge in the first case could rule any day. The March 23 hearing on the merits of the case is still going to happen. We just have to wait to see what will happen.

In the NHDES case, the state has admitted that they failed to update the solid waste plan as required. The judge has to decide whether or not to grant the “sweeping relief” that was requested.

Andrea Bryant reported that she has heard that NHDES has not granted NCES the permit for Stage Six expansion at the Bethlehem landfill. Julie Seely said that she had heard the same thing. Julie believes that if NCES is intending to operate Stage Six then the 2012 agreement should still stand.

Nancy asked if the Town attorney has given Select Board an opinion about whether Casella is, in accordance with the 2012 agreement, required to continue providing Bethlehem with trash removal service if the landfill closes. Barry said that we don’t have any information about whether the Select Board has discussed the issue. They could have done so in the closed session. Barry also said that if there is a temporary injunction stopping work on the expansion then Casella should pick up our trash while the injunction is in place.

A good thing that may come out of this is that NHDES may have to update the state solid waste management plan. A judge may make it an order to do so for the benefit of the state. Barry, Andrea, and Julie will monitor this whole situation and message TSC members if there is any news.

Nancy reported on her research into pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) bags. She got quotes from Waste Zero and Bags & Boxes using the quantities used in 2009 when Bethlehem previously had a PAYT plan. Bags come in rolls of 10, with 20 rolls to a case. The order was to Bags & Boxes for 200 cases of large bags and 128 cases of small bags.

The quotes for the above quantities were $14,066 from Waste Zero and $13,380 from Bags & Boxes. Nancy said that, aside from being the lower bid, Bags & Boxes had a better reputation with other local towns than its competitor did. That makes it easy to choose a from which company we should buy bags. Normally, it takes four to six weeks to receive the bags from either company, but they are a bit slower now because of Covid-19. The bags can be stored for years if we don’t need them immediately. Bags & Boxes said that it usually is necessary to order a minimum 150 cases of each size bags. The previous order of 200 cases and 128 cases counted as a 300-case order so the company accepted it.

Nancy pointed out that ordering a large quantity of bags is not unreasonable because the prices will always go up, providing we need the bags at all. We should not buy them until we are sure that we need them.

Barry talked about other ways of getting revenue to cover costs such as a PAYT system that has people put stickers on their own bags so that we only have to print and sell stickers instead of special bags.

The Northeast Resource Recovery Association (NRRA) is having its annual sale of compost bins ($58) and kitchen pails ($10). Towns purchase quantities of the items and then re-sell them to townsfolk. TSC members thought it may be too early to take on this project and will revisit it for next year. NRRA also has “cooperative purchasing” for members for all kinds of materials that we may need in the future, so we should keep them in mind as a source.

Barry turned the conversation to “Just Be Greener.” He showed the committee a copy of the “Green Energy Times”, a free publication that is available at the Village Store in Bethlehem and the Littleton Co-Op. He suggested that we might like to contact them to see if they would be interested in putting some of our “Greener” articles in their publication.

Nancy expressed her concern about Bethlehem residents not seeing “Just Be Greener” because they don’t participate in social media. She is open to ideas for getting the publication into the hands of more Bethlehem residents.

Nancy asked several questions about “Just Be Greener”:

* What do we want it to be?
* How are we going to get people interested in it?
* How will we address the negative opinions of people who want our trash service to stay exactly as it is?

Nancy said that she is not sure that what she envisions may not be what others on the committee envision.

* It is targeting Bethlehem – about our future, what we are doing with our trash, how we are reducing our waste.
* Really engage the people who are very upset about changes that are going to come.
* Education about moving toward zero waste.

Andrea commented that the publication has to be eye-catching and fairly simple to read. She also suggested that we put the publication in Facebook with its own location

Julie noted that is important on Facebook to turn “comments” off because we are submitting a Town publication and we cannot interfere with people’s freedom of speech, but we don’t want others arguing about the information we present in “Just Be Greener”. They have other outlets for their opinions. We should put a statement saying that

Barry thinks it is critical that we educate people on why the changes are coming and why they are necessary and good. We need to build esprit de corps.

Katherine suggested that we consider adding photos of people from Bethlehem doing fun (?) things with trash. People like to look at themselves and their neighbors in the news.

Nancy reminded us that it is early in the life of “Just Be Greener” and it is going to take time for people to recognize what the publication is. She said that, when the transfer station opens, we can hand patrons a copy as they drop off their trash.

Nancy would like to feature Meadowstone Farm in an issue because they are composting and urge people to drop off food waste for free.

Katherine asked if we could get sponsors for “Just Be Greener” to pay for printing. Would the Select Board allow us to do this? Alternatively, we could ask them for a small budget.

Nancy will take Barry’s article and use pieces of it for the next issue.

Under “New Business”, Nancy talked about Ecosmith Recyclers, Inc., a company that offers a free recycling bin for textiles. They take any clothing, curtains, towels, shoes, etc. and repurpose the materials, keeping them out of landfills. Website <https://www.apparelimpact.com/> The committee members will review the website and we will talk more about this at our next meeting.

The TSC held off reviewing and approving the minutes of the February 2021 meeting because all members had not received a copy to review. They will be reviewed at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday, April 20, 2021 on Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55 pm.