

Dear Editor - Breaking news!
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For immediate release

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State rules Environmental Impact Report required for proposed Gardner sludge landfill expansion

The state's new Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) has ruled that the City of Gardner must submit an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for its proposed sludge landfill expansion. The ruling comes after a public comment period that ended January 31st. The Environmental Notification Form (ENF) Certificate, signed by Rebecca Tepper and dated February 10th, was posted February 14th on the webpage of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) office, which coordinated the project review process.

The landfill site is located close to public and private drinking water wells in Gardner and Templeton, and to the Otter River, the main tributary to the Millers River, which flows into the Connecticut River, New England's largest river. The Millers River Watershed Council (MRWC), Gardner Clean Air and the Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) were among the groups submitting comments; all are members of the *Coalition for a Sustainable Alternative to the Gardner Sludge Landfill Expansion* (Coalition), which was formed by MRWC in 2021 and includes nine local, regional and statewide environmental organizations.

"This is a tremendous victory for the people of Gardner, the surrounding environment and the watershed," said Ivan Ussach, MRWC's long-time director. "MRWC and Gardner Clean Air have been advocating for a more serious look at alternatives since 2016," he added. Alan Rousseau of Gardner Clean Air said, "Requiring an EIR was

GCA's goal. We want clean air and water in Gardner and to protect Gardner from yet another landfill expansion."

A total of 29 comments, some detailed and some brief, were submitted by Gardner and Templeton residents, the state's Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP), the Coalition and others.

Tepper's 15-page ruling is part of a 108-page document that includes all the comments submitted through the MEPA process. Issues of particular concern, she noted, "include a desire for the City to evaluate alternatives to the continued operation of the landfill; odor and air quality impacts, including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; potential for contamination of groundwater, including drinking water supplies; alteration of wetlands, wildlife habitat and recreational open space; and impacts to environmental justice (EJ) populations." MADEP's seven-page comment letter raised several issues, including capping the existing landfill sections prior to expansion, constructing the landfill in phases, and implementing a gas collection system.

In addition, Tepper noted, the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) must include a comprehensive response to comments on the ENF that specifically address each issue raised in every comment letter submitted to the MEPA office. The DEIR should establish a public involvement plan to engage nearby EJ populations and the City should hold at least one public information meeting about the project before filing the DEIR.