

TOWN OF ASHLAND
WASTE TO ENERGY COMMITTEE (WTE)
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2024 5:00 PM
UTILITY CONFERENCE ROOM 6 COLLINS STREET

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Alan Cilley called the meeting to order at 5:05 pm. In attendance were Alan Cilley, Selectman Charlie Bozzello, Craig Moore, Harry Gallien and Bonnie Bethune. Mike Myshrall and Will Hess were excused; Fred Welch, Town Manager and 9 residents were in attendance.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

- a) **MOTION:** Charlie Bozzello made a motion to accept minutes from 1/24/24 WTE Committee meeting as written.
SECOND: Harry Gallien
VOTE: Motion passed 5-0

III. OLD BUSINESS:

- a) None

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

Roundtable Committee Review of results of SB2 Deliberative Session on February 3, 2024.

Charlie Bozzello expressed disappointment of change from \$135M to \$1 for the Waste to Energy Warrant Article 15.

- Unfortunate there is a group of people against project with shortfall of capital in Town
- Not perfect solution but Town faced with having to make difficult financial decisions
- WTE Committee needs to encourage residents to vote for \$1 as a referendum to show support at Town level

Alan Cilley concurred.

Bonnie Bethune expressed that, due to change in Warrant Article to \$1, all residents would not have a chance to vote for the entire \$135M project on voting day (yes or no).

- Noted vast experience on WTE Committee and own multiple visits to the Wheelabrator WTE facility in Penacook, NH as well as of the visits to ecomaine WTE facility in Portland, Me. Also, in line of work, visited 3 landfills in NH in 2023 (Bethlehem, Berlin & Rochester).
- Proposed facility provides a local and regional solution to a real solid waste capacity problem
- Noted that Waldron said plant would surpass new, upcoming EPA 2028 standards

Craig Moore spoke of 3 bills in the NH Senate right now to ban new landfills in NH.

- Casella refiled for State to approve siting a landfill in Dalton, NH
- Emission concern – research online did not cite medical issues due to Waste to Energy plants – pollution and asthma due to vehicle traffic cited often
- Prevailing wind concern – when look at Bridgewater Plant stack – steam plume is most often seen going south over the wastewater treatment plant
- Would not put a plant in town that would cause harm
- Particulates produced in small quantities
- Benefits outweigh negatives

Harry Gallien concurred with Charlie, Bonnie and Craig.

Alan Cilley thanked residents for coming to WTE Committee meeting.

- Acknowledged lack of enough information given to public prior to deliberative session
- Noted delay in establishing WTE Committee
- Harry Gallien sought out companies to work with and found Waldron
- There was a huge learning curve for WTE Committee and Town Officials -could not have had a better committee to understand issue and solution

Charlie Bozzello felt WTE Committee did not get across impact Town is facing by not implementing this solution.

- Infrastructure problems need to be addressed or Town will be diminished over time
- If took today's tax base, doubled it and ran it out 10 years, this project would bring in money for infrastructure changes to maintain Ashland's quality of life
- Not sure how to get there without this project coming to fruition as nothing would pay the bills like this project

Alan Cilley stated there is a 50/50 split of homeowners and renters in Town so heavy financial burden on homeowners and no way that 500 people can pay Town's bills or \$40 of infrastructure work.

- Taxes are high with few to pay
- Potential of town going bankrupt within 3-5 years

Alan Cilley welcomed and thanked Fred Welch, Town Manager, for being present at meeting and his work to keep Town going.

Alan Cilley invited questions from residents.

Comment: Resident Joe Mazzone

Town Audits: Joe presented a handout named Ashland's Auditor's Reports (see below) after looking at Town Audits (2021 not available) to get an overall picture of town's expenses. Joe noted that the auditors said adverse or unmodified in most line items and handed a copy to the WTE Committee. By means of definition, unmodified = financial statements are honest representations. Joe mentioned past issues with Town finances, even possibility of fraud.

Electricity Value: Joe mentioned that three towns in area went away from producing own electricity and went with Eversource.

Response: Charlie Bozzello: In producing own electricity, Town pays \$.04/kilowatt for power.

Q: Joe Mazzone asked why go to \$135M, why not take \$20,000 from taxes to explore project?

A. Charlie Bozzello said revenue bond would not cost Town anything

Response: Joe Mazzone said once in for \$135M, fears cost could go up "in for a penny – in for a pound" – felt Town asked for a feasibility study and the WTE Committee came in with \$135 M project.

Comment: Joe Mazzone stated that the WTE Committee did a great job; mentioned \$50K that went to Waldron.

Comment: Charlie Bozzello thanked Joe for the handout which shows clearly Town's financial situation.

Q. Joe Mazzone - Why can't the Town hire a financial analyst for this project?

A. Charlie Bozzello – would cost money that WTE Committee/Town does not have.

As far as getting bond, this plant stands on its own with a revenue bond.

Bond is based on whether the plant makes sense to bond owners.

The WTE Committee needs to see if project was viable or not and could get the money to build it.

Deliberative Session was discussed amongst WTE Committee and attendees.

Vote to amend Warrant Article 15 from \$135M to \$1 (**Article 15 amended with 49 for - 21 against**)

- Bonnie Bethune stated was unfortunate all residents will not be given the opportunity to vote on the \$135M on March 12th
- Alan Cilley stated that 24 residents left before the amendment vote was taken
- Alan Cilley stated that “fraud’ is a broad statement in regard to Town’s finances and mentioned past mismanagement to produce auditor’s report in hand

Comment: Resident – appreciates the struggle for the Town financially; knows the NH Solid Waste Plan is being updated after 20 years. Goal to reduce waste in landfills and incinerators to 25% by 2030 and 45% by 2050. This to be accomplished by increased recycling, composting, reuse and developing local markets.

Response: Harry Gallien stated that the Waste to Energy plant is a renewable resource.

Response: Bonnie Bethune mentioned Town is member of Northeast Resource Recovery Association (NRRRA), her employer, and each resident pays \$.08 annually to be a member. NRRRA assists the Town with brokering recyclables at the Transfer Station. Also, one of the positives of Town owning and operating this plant is the Town does not have to take out-of-state trash like private businesses do who must adhere to interstate commerce laws.

Response: Alan Cilley stated 1.2 M tons of waste in NH each year; WTE Committee will continue to look at concerns of health risks.

Comment: Resident – “bankruptcy” mentioned – how about letting the town to broke and let State take care of us.

Response: Fred Welch, Town Manager, has been in the situation where he handed over the keys from a town to the State in a bankruptcy situation.

2 options from the State:

- 1) Fix it
- 2) Fred in charge until paid off county and schools – took 5 ½ years to do so.

Fred mentioned that waste is being shipped out of Wellesley, MA, where he once worked, as far as the Finger Lakes in NY.

Q. What are Town’s needs?

A. Fred Welch listed a few:

- 1) Ashland Transfer Station landfill costs increasing
- 2) Electric substation in need of replacing
- 3) Town Hall cannot be insured with Police Department in same building

4) 3-4 problem areas in Town need handling (water issues on Thompson St. etc.)

Municipal tax rate had not gone up in 3 years, Fred's goal is no increase in municipal taxes as cannot control county and school tax increases. Residents would own this waste to energy facility just like Ashland Electric.

Q. Resident – See Casella closing (Bethlehem landfill) is a waste issue.

What other options were considered besides \$135M and what is the accuracy of these numbers?

EPA to have new regulations out.

Huge project – a different beast than Waldron presented.

High risk – moving too fast – is this the best alternative?

- A.** Alan Cilley – could not come up with another revenue source for \$30 - \$40M in infrastructure projects in Town
- A.** Charlie Bozzello that tipping fees anticipated to be lower than cost to bring wood chips to Bridgewater Power Plant
- A.** Harry Gallien asked if resident is talking about financial risks?

Response: Resident; yes, after talking to revenue people.

A: Craig Moore asked what other risks are there?

Waldron went with newest technology with stack emissions data available to public and plant to be built above standards i.e. 99.9% water vapor out the stack

A: Charlie Bozzello said due diligence and risk assessment will be done by the bond holders

A: Alan Cilley looked at \$500,000 expenditure to check viability and felt Town would not support increase in taxes.

A: Craig Moore – plant is best shot we have to secure Ashland's future; solar on landfill has been mentioned but would not produce anywhere close to power this plant would.

A: Alan Cilley noted the cost of \$135M to make \$30M/year once facility established – Craig Moore said this was the estimate from Waldron.

Q. Resident – felt Waldron dropped the ball and did not deliver anything.

A. Charlie Bozzello – Proforma from Waldron an estimate based on model; % rate on the bond was increased to more conservative levels per request of WTE Committee. Waldron was asked if these were real #'s and were advised they were; a YES vote would have given us a chance to see if plant was feasible.

Q. Resident – What about feasibility of bond at 8% interest?

A. Craig Moore – plant would not be feasible at 8%; 5% more viable

Q. Resident – what about contracts?

A. Fred Welch stated the 19-town district is ready to come on board; there is a verbal commitment to bring tonnage. Note: reference to PemiBaker Solid Waste Management District (PBSWMD) of which Ashland is a member.

A. Craig Moore noted 25 trucks a day going in and out of plant; Ashland's compactor weighs 6-7 tons and many trailers coming in could weigh up to 16-18 tons. We could get written commitment from PBSWMD. Town could not handle Transfer Station budget doubling. Re-mention of 99.9% water vapor from stack compared to trucks on road, plant would put out 80 % less pollution

Q. Resident – are any other towns looking at incineration?

A. WTE Committee understands that Rumney is also looking at a Waste to Energy facility

Comment: Fred Welch – If do not burn waste to reduce it, there will be no place to take waste; landfill is generating methane now.

Comment: Alan Cilley – feasibility study to re-do Thompson St. is \$375K and project has been shot down last 3 years.

Comment: Resident – presentation by Waldron said plant could burn 'anything'; will Town require Town's bringing waste to recycle? There will be no sorting once waste is brought to facility.

Comment: Craig Moore – if build plant, could consider providing 'grant' \$ to towns to help with recycling programs.

Comment: Harry Gallien – Dioxins managed with scrubbers and 24/7 controls

Comment: Craig Moore – if emission levels exceed certain amounts, boiler shuts down; proposed plant has 1 boiler (Wheelabrator has 2); takes 1 week to clean boiler but 1 weeks capacity for waste on tipping floor.

Q. Resident - Article 15 was changed from \$135M to \$1 at deliberatve session – how does that

work? If vote YES to \$1 – does that give the WTE Committee or Town carte blanche to move forward?

A. Fred Welch – YES vote to \$1 means \$1 can only be spent; Town can apply for funding/grants; Town can ask for proposals that follow statute.

Q. Resident – if get funding from other sources, can Town build facility?

A. Fred Welch – Board of Selectmen can accept \$ but Town would have to vote to spend it.

Comment: Alan Cilley – this is not the 1st time Town has gotten a revenue bond – Water Commission has done so – produces \$600K/year

Q. Resident – how many registered voters are there? How many people know about the project?

A. Joe Mazzone said 1,300 (Pat Tucker, Town Clerk, confirmed count of 1,334)

A. Alan Cilley said at start of deliberative session there was 94 residents.

A. Charlie Bozzello says good point about how aware people are – and we need to get more info. to residents.

Response: Joe Mazzone said people mostly civil on social media; Town can do anything if we get together and thanked WTE Committee for patience and information.

Upcoming Meetings:

Next WTE Committee – Friday 2/23/24 at Utility Conference Room
6 Collins Street at 5:00 pm. (Town Vote prep)

V. ADJOURNMENT: Chairman Alan Cilley proposed to adjourn.

MOTION: Charlie Bozzello made motion to adjourn meeting.

SECOND: Craig Moore seconded.

VOTE: Motion Passed 5-0; meeting adjourned at 7:02 pm.

WTE Committee Meeting Minutes 3/07/24

Ashland's Auditors Reports

Summary of Opinions

2019

Governmental Activities	Adverse
Business-type Activities	Adverse
Major General Fund	Unmodified
Major Water Fund	Adverse
Major Sewer Fund	Adverse
Major Electric Fund	Unmodified
Aggregate Remaining Fund Information	Unmodified

2020

Governmental Activities	Adverse
Business-type Activities	Adverse
Major General Fund	Unmodified
Major Water Fund	Adverse
Major Sewer Fund	Adverse
Major Electrical Fund	Adverse
Aggregate Remaining Fund Information	Unmodified

2022

Governmental Activities	Adverse
Business-type Activities	Adverse
General Fund	Unmodified
Water Fund (Proprietary)	Adverse
Sewer Fund (Proprietary)	Adverse
Electric Fund (Proprietary)	Adverse
Aggregate Remaining Fund Information	Unmodified