

Waiting Game

\$50 million expansion will add life to landfill

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McELHATTAN - The next two years are going to be a waiting game for Wayne Township Landfill General Manager Jay Alexander. After about a year and a half of preparation, landfill officials submitted an extensive application on Nov. 30 for an expansion project that would keep the landfill open for another 35 to 40 years. The \$50 million proposal calls for reopening and lining the north side of the landfill, which has been closed since 1991. The approximately 75-acre north side saw trash dumped there from 1973 until 1991. It was never lined to protect the groundwater table from being contaminated by the garbage and was closed to transfer operations to the 33.6-acre south side, which was double-lined, Alexander explained. "To date, we haven't had any contamination issues (on the north side). But instead of waiting until we do, we'd like to be as proactive as possible," he said. Alexander expects the state Department of Environmental Protection will take up to two years to review the application and then hopefully issue a permit. If approved, Alexander said landfill employees could start excavating and moving the trash from the north side to the south side in 2010. He estimates the transferred trash will fill up approximately two years' worth of space on the south side, reducing the life expectancy of that portion of the landfill from 10 years to roughly eight. Construction of the first lined field on the north side would begin in 2011, according to the proposal. A second field would be build and lined in 2012 or 2013. Daily trash flow to the south side would continue through construction, he said. "At that point, there will be a one- or two-year window (of space on the south side) to make everything balance out properly," Alexander said.

The project should cost just under \$50 million and Alexander said the landfill has been putting money aside for the expansion for some time. "We have reserves of a little over \$10 million for this project. If we have a couple good years in the next three or four years, we'd be even more fortunate," he said. "We hope to get started deep into this before we have to borrow money." He said the landfill would probably have to start borrowing money for the project around 2011 or 2012, and should see income exceeding expenses from the new landfill around 2018. The landfill has already spent \$1.6 million, mostly on permit application and engineering fees, Alexander said. There has also been some money spent on utility relocations. Before submitting the permit application, engineers had to study groundwater conditions below the north site for at least 12 months, gather hydro-geological data, design the new facility and work out a plan for how the facility would run, he said.

Alexander said the landfill hopes to maximize the expansion project by focusing on leachate recycling and by considering the installation of rail service in the new system. Leachate - the juices that drain from garbage - are collected as they seep out of the landfill and are sent back in to the pile of garbage to create methane gas. The gas is then sold to nearby Jersey Shore Steel Co. who uses it to power its plant In South Avis. Alexander said the new site's design will enhance that process. The landfill would improve the leachate process by treating it at the Pine Creek Municipal Authority treatment facility instead of treating it on site at the landfill, Alexander said. The landfill would help PCMA pay for costs to upgrade its plant, possibly as much as \$1 million, so it would be better able to accommodate this work, he said. "It would save us money in upgrading our plant and it would save (PCMA) some capital on that project," said Alexander.

The landfill sells about half of the methane gas it produces annually to Jersey Shore Steel. Remaining gas is flared, or burned underground by a large flare burner. Alexander said he is talking to other businesses in the valley about purchasing this excess gas, increasing the revenue the landfill sees from this process while cutting costs on flare burning. An existing rail system could also be improved and reinstated as part of the expansion project, allowing trash to be sent into the landfill via train. Alexander said this part of the project would be considered if and when gas prices reach \$5 a gallon, which would affect costs to haul garbage by truck. Increased costs would likely be

passed on to consumers, he said. "Nothing would make us happier than if people's trash bills are still under \$25 a month in 10 years. That'll be our little part of helping every resident in the county," Alexander said. He said the rail line would also help the landfill compete with other area landfills, such as Greentree Landfill in Elk County and Lycoming County Landfill.