

Geneva Green Committee Meeting Minutes – October 2020

Present: Darrin Magee (guest), Richard Cox, Sara Britting, Marilla Gonzales, Joe Gonzales, Larry Campbell, Jan Regan (council liaison), Anne Hoyt, Dan Belliveau

As a follow-up to our tour October 8, of the Ontario County Resource Recovery Facility and meeting with landfill personnel, we invited Darrin Magee, Professor of Environmental Studies at Hobart & William Smith Colleges, to attend our regularly-scheduled October meeting to discuss these issues further. Darrin has a Master's degree in China studies and a PhD in Environmental Studies. The following is your meeting minutes taker's attempt to capture some of what transpired in our conversation with Darrin. Items that are potentially actionable have been highlighted.

- Since 2008, he has taught a “Garbage” class at the colleges that typically has each student trace where different types of “garbage” in her or his hometown is taken, including recycling. **We asked if next semester, a class could do a similar project, tracking “garbage” (including recycling) emanating from the city of Geneva.**
- Asked about gas emissions from the landfill, Darrin said they include CO2 or Methane. The Resource Recovery Landfill Act requires landfills to capture these emissions. The methane is being captured onsite at an electric generating station. The amount being emitted by the landfill varies by season and over the life of the facility and at times exceeds the generator's capacity. The unpleasant odors that come from the site are the result of sulfurous compounds and only comprise a small percent of the emissions (5%). These emissions arise from the fact that the interior of most landfills is anaerobic. Oxygen is not present which means most things do not decompose except with the help of sulfurous compounds. Last year's spike in odor problems was largely due to the landfill tripling the amount of sewage sludge it accepted. **He suggested the county take steps to force the landfill to not accept sewage sludge.**
- Asked about the effect of particulate matter on health, Darrin said most studies on the long-term effects of particulate matter from landfills are inconclusive.
- The OCLF takes approximately 3,000 tons/day, with 500-600 trucks a day tipping at the landfill.
- NYS is one of four states that requires its landfills to have a double-liner. OCLF has a 60-millimeter high-density polyethylene liner, stress-tested to withstand 30-50 years of use, placed over a two-foot deep base of clay with pipes embedded to collect “juices” (leachate) that filter down through the material. Once closed, the landfill will be sealed entirely with a 30-millimeter plastic top. Darrin likened it to a giant zip-lock bag. Once the landfill closes (its closing date is 2028) Casella has an obligation to monitor the site for thirty years. The county has also a bond that obliges Casella to correct any issues that arise in perpetuity.

Leachate is routinely sampled and tested, but Darrin said it is currently done not by an independent firm, but by a design firm that works for the landfill. **He suggested the county ask Casella to use an independent firm for monitoring and sampling leachate.**

- The city's wastewater treatment plant is processing approximately one truck-load of leachate per week, dosed in gradually to prevent its killing bacteria in the treatment plant. Darrin talked about a study the GGC did eight or nine years ago in conjunction with HWS students that analyzed the content of the OCLF's leachate. According to Darrin, they "found a number of substances that are being considered for regulation" and many chemicals for which there are currently no tests to ascertain their effects. Committee members expressed surprise at the news that the city has resumed taking leachate since several years ago, the city stopped accepting it. **The committee should clarify the city's current stance regarding accepting leachate.**
- **In a discussion of how to reduce the city's trash footprint,** Darrin said making it more expensive for residents and businesses to dump trash would be an effective deterrent. Reducing organics (food wastes, paper, yard debris, cardboard) should be a priority. One approach would be to increase the landfill's tipping fees for "mixed" loads that include compostable and/or recyclable materials. There are a number of options available, to encourage residents to reduce their trash. Geneva could do as some cities have done where haulers will only pick up trash in a city-issued or hauler-issued bag whose cost could be an incentive to throw away less and recycle more. The committee discussed making it a requirement for doing business in the city that all haulers charge a higher fee for trash than for recycling pickup.
- Regarding recycling, he said a bale of mixed paper is not at this time recyclable. The landfill has to pay to get rid of it although the Chinese have opened a mill in Maine that is beginning to process U.S. recycled paper. The only viable market for recycled plastic is for fabrics such as carpets or clothing, and for glass there is little market. The RRF is currently stockpiling recyclables that cannot be sold.

We asked Darrin for a list of things he would like to see happen:

1. Enlist the landfill in the county's effort to reduce the organic materials in trash, including food wastes, yard wastes, paper, and cardboard, so that the landfill's engineers, technical advisers and staff create a facility capable of handling these materials separate from the landfill.
2. Install on-site treatment at the landfill for leachate.
3. Pressure the county to produce a strategic plan that includes how to handle trash, organic materials, and recyclables after the landfill closes.