Director, Real Estate, Alaska Railroad Corporation
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Mary Beth Michaels
Mile 280 Parks Highway
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Nenana, AK 99760

And Dear Kesslyn Tench, Please do whatever you can to stop this terrible plan.

4 May 2016

Dear Mr. Jaques:

It has come to my attention that there is a frightening plan for the Railroad gravel pit area at mile 388 on the Railroad. I live very close to this area (as do many other people), and I am very familiar with the pit and the area surrounding it, and with the people who live very close to it. I have not talked with a single person in my area who thinks this is anything but a terrible idea. Nobody wants the clean pit turned into a huge pile of harmful junk, junk which it is known will contain some toxic substances. We do not want to end up being added to the Superfund cleanup site list along with the other nine or ten sites in Alaska. This list names many US military bases in the state, including all of the largest bases. There is no need to add Clear to our national problem.

First, no one here has heard a word about this until just a few days ago. Your deadline of 25 May 2016 for comments from the public is coming too soon. People need more time to understand the plan, to research its history and its future, and to give it all some serious thought. We need more time. We need more time.

Second, we have not seen a meaningful map. This is very important to the local community. The fact that no one has tried to give us a truly useful map makes me think that you don't have one, and that your plan is still half-baked. It seems that you need more time too. (And your suggestion that we drive almost 300 miles to Anchorage to see a map that may or may not be accurate is not reasonable.)

The plan, as I understand it is to tear down the old radar site at Clear and move it all to the Railroad gravel pit site. I have visited the old radar site, and having lived here for a few decades I know a little bit about it. There are several dangerous things there that should not go into the gravel pit area. First, the buildings contain a large amount of asbestos, a dangerous cancer-causing substance. Second, I know that in the past there were polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) at the site, which have caused trouble in Anderson in the past. There are rumors of a large amount of lead paint, chemical solvents, and mercury. There are probably also some or all of these items: chlorinated solvents, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), pesticides, a variety of metals, trichloroethylene (TCE), and many others.

The idea of building a Class I landfill here is not helpful. We already have our own landfill, built and maintained by Denali Borough. We are content with that. We do not want to be a giant trash can for the whole state.

The recent news from Flint, Michigan makes me realize that we are lucky enough to have a very clean and healthy aquifer here. The water runs from the mountains straight under the gravel pit and then under many populated areas. There is no good reason to endanger the water, the population, the wild life and the local flora. All of us depend on it, and we would like that to continue into the future. (I do not believe it is truly possible to put a permanent liner into a landfill. I have seen one that was full of holes. It was not replaced or properly repaired or monitored, as had been promised. I expect most of them are like this one.) Class I

I have a couple of suggestions. First, The original "dump" at Clear could be remodeled and used for this one purpose, to take care of the base's problem. Second, Wainwright, Eilson, Fort Richardson and Elmendorf all probably have places that would be suitable for additional military discards. They are all on the railroad line (for ease of transport), and they all already have their own Superfund clean up sites. They would know what to do. Three (and I like this best of all), a lot of the old radar site at Clear is now a historic and interesting part of the Cold War. Much of the old site could be saved and used for historic purposes. Visitors and students would enjoy learning about the history of Alaska in World War II, and so on. Every other base I have ever visited has taken advantage of its own historic sites to enhance its important place in history.

There are many other ideas that are worth looking into. To rush into something that everyone will later regret is not a good idea. I have a lot of other ideas myself, but this is enough for now. Please give this more thought, a lot more thought. Your current plan is full of flaws, and there are so many other good and logical options to consider.

Sincerely,

Mary Beth Michaels

CC

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Congress: Lisa Murkowski, Dan Sullivan, Don Young

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Alaska Dispatch News

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Zaz Hollander [1]
March 31, 2015
Main Image:
Monofill HearingJPGA.JPG-1427855682 [2]
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Matanuska-Susitna Borough deputy attorney John Aschenbrenner speaks Tuesday at an appeal hearing, while Central Monofill Services Inc. representives (from left) majority owner Stuart Jacques, attorney Bill Ingaldson, and co-owner Shane Durand take notes.

PALMER -- The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has for the third time rejected a contentious construction and demolition landfill on 35 acres along the Glenn Highway near Palmer.

The borough's Board of Adjustment and Appeals on Tuesday upheld the borough planning commission's December denial of a permit sought by Anchorage-based Central Monofill Services. The planning commission denied an earlier conditional-use permit application for the same facility in 2013.

Central hopes to defray rising landfill disposal costs with monofills in Palmer and Chugiak. Company officials continue to say the facility will be well-regulated and safe. But starting in 2013 when the monofill was proposed, hundreds of nearby residents rose up against the prospect of a 160-foot pile of building waste sitting atop a notoriously unpredictable water table in the lake-studded gateway to Palmer.

The unanimous board decision by four of the board's five members -- one was absent -- came late Tuesday afternoon after three hours of testimony followed by three hours of closed-door deliberations.

Just a handful of the original 75 audience members scrambled back to the borough assembly chambers in time for the decision.

"We're thrilled," said Robin Bumgardner, who lives near the proposed monofill site.

Saying it lacked jurisdiction to do so, the board declined to take up Central's complaints regarding the recusal of planning commissioner Bill Kendig before December's vote. Kendig had to recuse himself because of recent business dealings with Central.The board also didn't address Central's appeal regarding another commissioner, Tom Healy, an employee of the City of Palmer, which publicly opposed the monofill. Healy voted against the permit.

Central has 30 days to decide whether to appeal the decision to Palmer Superior Court.

Bill Ingaldson, the Palmer attorney representing the company, said after the decision that Central hadn't decided about an appeal.

Ingaldson wondered if the board had time to digest all the materials -- 3,300 pages in the record, 30- or 40-page briefs from the borough and Central -- before coming to a decision.

He said Central, lacking an affordable waste disposal site, could start losing recycling bids.

"It may be a happy day for the people that live there but in a way it's sort of a sad day for recycling in Alaska," Ingaldson said.

The "Central companies" -- the same owners also operate Central Environmental Services and Central Recycling Services -- sell steel, crushed asphalt, concrete and glass to Seattle and Alaska markets from a bustling industrial site at Ship Creek. The Anchorage landfill gets what they can't sell -- carpet, sheetrock, drywall and the like -- but company officials say unfair prices triggered their monofill site search.

Monofills, unlike traditional landfills, are considered low risk to air and water and are not required to include liners or monitoring wells in Alaska. They tend to contain one type of waste -- in this case, construction and demolition. But studies in other states -- monofill critics here point to one from Ohio -- indicate the fills bring potential contamination from chemicals including lead, arsenic and benzene. Central says the Palmer facility would be too different to compare.

At Palmer, Central sought a borough permit to dump up to 25,000 tons a year of "inert" shredded waste as well as 10,000 tons of regulated asbestos-containing material, 5,000 of it requiring special protections. Materials would come from Valley building demolitions, as well as the Ship Creek recycling site.

The planning commission in 2013 voted 4-3 against the monofill, citing concerns about windblown garbage and groundwater contamination. Central submitted a new application last year. Based partly on new hydrology reports, borough planning staff recommended permit approval but with 40 conditions including monitoring wells, debris-catching fences and a 162-foot height limit.

The permit failed with that 3-3 vote. Central, immediately protesting Kendig's recusal, appealed the commission's decision to the five-member Board of Appeals.

Two dozen people, most nearby residents, testified during Tuesday's hearing. All but one urged the board to uphold the planning commission's permit denial.

A borough-contracted hydrologist found the monofill could foul wells up to a mile away, Stephanie Figon testified, saying she lives within about 1,000 feet of the site. Others testified about the possibility of rotting drywall creating hydrogen sulfide gas releases.

"If you overturn this decision, you're saying I just shouldn't be worried about that, that my property values aren't going to go down," Figon said. "That's ridiculous. I'll move out of my house if this project goes through."

Even the borough planning staffer who last year recommended permit approval on Tuesday urged the appeals board not to overturn the commission's decision. Borough development services manager Alex Strawn said a Federal Emergency Management Agency report lists monofills among the disposal sites subject to fires and described the "wild fluctuations" of the local water table resulting from a former gravel operator's puncturing the aquifer on the site.

Central officials say they don't plan to install a liner because that would block the flow of water through the fill. But the company contends that other protections such as compaction, sloping, a cap of shredded material and the area's relatively low rainfall will protect local groundwater. The last claim drew some grumbling and head-shaking from the crowd.

The company is required to keep the edge of the monofill at least 10 feet from the closest groundwater, Ingaldson said.

Before deliberations began, he told the board that the planning commission's December tie vote meant board members "don't have to defer to anyone" and could make their own decision about the monofill permit.

The only issue the decision boiled down to is whether the monofill will harm the water, Ingaldson said.

Four engineering firms concluded "there's not a realistic danger to the well water and that substantial evidence does not support any denial," he said.

But the borough's deputy attorney, John Aschenbrenner, advised the board that borough code and court precedent direct the board to weigh only the planning commission's decision and whether the evidence backing it up was substantial. "It is difficult to try to surmise how you could reach a decision that it wasn't," Aschenbrenner told them.

The Chugiak site is on hold due to adjacent contamination from an old landfill. Both sites still need approval from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

Source URL: http://www.adn.com/article/20150331/mat-su-appeals-board-upholds-rejection-proposed-monofill-dump

Links:
[1] http://www.adn.com/author/zaz-hollander
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Alaska Dispatch News

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Home > Controversial monofill pulled from Eklutna plan for land near Chugiak park

Zaz Hollander [1]
March 26, 2015

Development on Eklutna Inc. land next to Chugiak's popular Loretta French park will proceed without a contentious construction and demolition debris landfill.

The Alaska Native corporation last week announced it had eliminated the so-called "monofill" from its planned community district master plan proposal for the 68-acre property. The decision reflects ongoing discussions between Eklutna and Anchorage municipal officials after tests last year revealed contamination from the old Peters Creek dump may be leaking onto the proposed monofill site.

Until the "potential trespass contamination matter" is resolved, Eklutna said in a statement, it isn't pursuing the monofill.

The Anchorage Assembly on Tuesday approved the Eklutna master plan that sets the stage for future development on the property. A number of audience members and several Assembly members thanked Eklutna for removing the monofill as a permitted use.

Eagle River Assembly representative Bill Starr said he appreciated Eklutna's land stewardship and flexibility.

"We worked it hard, some behind the scenes, some in front," Starr said.

Some 800 people signed a petition against the Chugiak fill, according to Chugiak Community Council secretary Jake Horazdobski. He cautioned the Assembly to make sure the monofill was "truly deleted" from the Eklutna plan.

The decision to mothball the monofill marks the second apparent setback for the company proposing it and another one near Palmer: Central Monofill Services is affiliated with Central Recycling Services, the company that runs a successful industrial recycling operation at Ship Creek.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission in December rejected the Palmer monofill [2] in a tie vote, after scores of area residents testified about the risk for underground fires, potentially fouled drinking water wells and wind-blown trash or asbestos dust.

Central is hoping for a reversal of the commission decision from the borough's five-member Board of Adjustment and Appeals. A hearing on the company's appeal is scheduled for 10 a.m. Tuesday at the borough building.

Central officials have called both sites necessary to take at least 8,000 tons a year of debris they can't recycle but that is becoming too costly to dispose of at the Anchorage landfill. Monofills can contain building materials including plywood, carpet, wiring and Sheetrock. Central also hopes to dispose of asbestos in special cells at the Palmer site, located above an unpredictable water table a few miles from the city along the Glenn Highway.

Monofills are lightly regulated by the state because officials say they pose a lower potential to pollute air and water than traditional garbage landfills. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation is reviewing a permit request from Central for the Palmer site, according to an email from Lori Aldrich, the department's regional solid waste program manager. DEC is currently researching information from 86 comments about the monofill permit application.

The Palmer permit decision will take at least another three months, Aldrich said.

Central put its DEC application for the Chugiak site on hold.

Central officials did not testify before the Assembly on Tuesday night. Contacted Wednesday morning, Central co-owner Shane Durand said the Eklutna property is the company's only potential monofill site in the Chugiak area.

Asked about the company's plans now, Durand referred questions to "our partner," Eklutna CEO Curtis McQueen.

McQueen was attending a day-long forum and couldn't be reached for comment Wednesday.

Eklutna is the largest private landowner in the Anchorage Bowl. The master plan for that Chugiak parcel includes a list of allowed uses that range from housing and industry to a golf course, a fitness center and animal boarding.

Numerous Chugiak residents and community council officials thanked Eklutna for pulling out the monofill but said they still had concerns about what they described as a lack of detail in the plan.

The plan includes only five uses that don't require additional review or a conditional-use permit, according to DOWL consultant Tim Potter: a community garden, a public or private park, a community or police substation, a "stealth design" transmission tower and a farmers market.

"Everything else has to go through the public review process," he said.

Source URL: http://www.adn.com/article/20150326/controversial-monofill-pulled-eklutna-plan-land-near-chugiak-park

Links:
[1] http://www.adn.com/author/zaz-hollander
[2] http://www.adn.com/article/20141216/palmer-monofill-rejected-mat-su-planning-commission