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Town may let EPA bury Centredale waste here

December 14, 2011

By BETH HURD
Insider Reporter

Johnston is one of the sites proposed to store toxic materials from the Centredale Manor Superfund site, but town officials want to make sure the town is getting something in return should the waste come here.

"The town has to be very careful. If we are going to bear the burden of burying toxic material, the town better get something good out of it," Johnston Town Planner Pam Sherrill told the Johnston Planning board.

At the EPA's public hearing, held on Dec. 7, Sherrill made more formal comments, and relayed the comments of Mayor Joseph Polisena.

"I would like to reiterate the mayor's two requests, as expressed in previous meetings. First, that the town must be assured that the town will not be liable for any maintenance or failure of any future Confined Disposal Facilities that are located in the town of Johnston. And, second, that state contractors and workers should be selected for remediation and construction," she said. "The mayor is very adamant that these jobs not go to out-of-state contractors."

Although the actual nine-acre "source site," once a chemical manufacturing and drum recycling company, is just over the line in North Providence, the cleanup will include waters as far south (about a mile and a half) as Allendale and Lymanville ponds. The clean up will include shore line of the Woonasquatucket River on both the Johnston and North Providence sides.

There have been four short-term cleanups of the site to date. The latest proposal to remove 184,200 cubic yards of material from the "source area, river bottom and flood plain," which wouldn't start for another five years, could cost as much as \$101 million.

Part of the proposal is to bury some of the less-toxic waste at a site in Johnston.

One of the sites that is being considered is the current property on which the Department of Public Works is located, at 100 Irons Ave. Another potential site is the former tire dump along Railroad Avenue

"The town of Johnston is an abutter of the Centredale Manor site; none of the pollution was generated in the town of Johnston, and yet we are being asked to bear the brunt of the disposal on side and in upland areas," Sherrill noted.

"The town of Johnston bears a disproportionate burden state-wide in the disposal of landfill material. This must not continue without a win for the town, and we realize that this is an opportunity for a win-win for the town of North Providence, the town of Johnston and the EPA. If this is cleaned up right, it is a net benefit to the town of Johnston. We are definitely supportive of the cleanup of the waters, but it can not be at a cost to the town of Johnston."

The town hopes the cleanup efforts will have the additional benefit of adding jobs to the local economy.

"For every employee who works at these sites, they use the local economy, they support the pizza parlors, so there's a multiplier effect for those jobs in the local economy," Sherrill said. "This is very important to us, that we need to be supportive of the existing jobs that we have in town - it's much easier to retain a job than to attract new jobs."

A "visioning workshop" will be held to discuss the town's options on Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2012, at 5 p.m., at S. D. Barnes Elementary School.

"We do have preliminary support for relocation of the DPW elsewhere in town, but this must be paid by the EPA or the potentially responsible party. We do have preliminary support at this time for recreational reuse, again to be paid by the EPA or the PRP. And we need the assistance of the EPA in public education regarding health risks for use for recreational facilities; we understand that this is a concern among residents in town and we really look to the EPA for support in this area," she said.

Representatives from the EPA had said previously that the money is earmarked specifically for cleanup, and would not be able to assist financially with proposed recreational reuse of the site.

"This is a huge burden to put on the Town of Johnston, to expect us to negotiate with the PRPs, to make sure the outcome is a win-win, and I feel this is a disproportionate burden put on the town, and any kind of assistance from the EPA is definitely appreciated," said Sherrill.

She also noted that there is a Narragansett Bay Commission sewer interceptor that bi-sects the site, for which the town would need to maintain access, in the event that it would ever need to be replaced or repaired.

"We are concerned that any deposition on top of it could adversely affect the integrity of the line itself," she said.

The public comment period, which had started on Nov. 14 and was to last 60 days, through Jan. 12, has now been

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extended another 30 days, to Feb. 13.

Last updated 14.12.2011

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