Environmental Health Task Force
Monday, May 4, 2026 - 11:00 am

Joe Pete Wilson - Chairman

Chairman Wilson called this task force to order at 11:08 am with the following in attendance: Ken Hughes, Mary Lamphear (11:15), Jim O'Bryan, Davina Thurston (11:15), Joe Pete Wilson, Meg Wood, Mike Mascarenas (11:15), Anna Reynolds, and Jim Dougan.

Deputy present: Dina Garvey

WILSON: So, thank you and Anna, thanks for joining us and bringing along materials, that's very helpful. This is the main follow-up we had after our last meeting was waiting for the DEC to give their official comments after reviewing the draft Local Solid Waste Management Plan that Essex County submitted.
So, there's a section of general comments and a section of substantive comments. Jim's already been at work on this and coordinating with the consultant that we've hired to do the Solid Waste Management Plan. But, just before we get into the details here, I just got an email from the Adirondack Council and they've been incredibly good partners in trying to get some legislative support for this ongoing funding for Essex and Hamilton County for solid waste and their legislative manager, their legislative government relations person said that the budget talks just got seriously down to money this morning. So, that means stuff is going to start happening and they're pushing the solid waste for Essex and Hamilton County, this funding and reminding us that if any of us have connections with any legislatures in Albany, not just our local electives but any connections where we could put this on their mind and remind them that now is the time to do it. So, this afternoon I'll be emailing and calling some of the contacts that I made, last week, at AATV Legislative Day down in Albany and if you have any contacts, any way to reinforce our ask now is the time to engage them.
And Jim, I am going to let you bring us up to date on your review of the feedback from DEC.

DOUGAN: Yup, let me first start with, so prior to receiving these comments from DEC, I did have a phone conversation with Richard Clarkson at DEC who is like, he's pretty high up in the solid waste side of DEC and somebody who Mike had been talking to before, Mr. Mascarenas talking to before to try and get the money they owe us and so Mr. Clarkson is who alerted me that they were sending some of the back money that they owed us and they did send us $600,000. The only thing they currently owe us from that system is 2025 money which we didn't submit until the first part of 2026. So, we're semi up to date.

HUGHES: Is that $300,000 left?

DOUGAN: Roughly $300,000 and he told me that these were coming, these comments and he also offered at that time to set up a meeting with us to talk about our responses. So, what I would like to focus on with this group is not each individual comment, I would like to talk about the first

two general comments. I have prepared some thoughts and if you guys agree, I think we should request that yes, we have a face to face meeting with DEC regarding these comments and I will tell you the basis of things, especially with the general comments at the beginning.
The very first one that they say is that Essex County is that only 22 other counties have landfills within their boundaries. What they fail to recognize is there's only two of us in the State who are told that we can't have one in our boundary. As a general comment, as my general comment of the name of this plan from DEC is called a Local Solid Waste Management Plan and I believe they gave us all one sized fits all answers to every single item. Every comment that they gave us was just about the regulation. They have forgotten that it's about local solid waste management. The first one says it right off the bat, you know, only us and Hamilton County aren't allowed to have a landfill in our county. Those other ones, even though they chose not to, they're allowed to have a landfill. They forgot the local part and if you get a chance to read through the rest of these comments, I'll bet you'll see throughout this that they're just following a standard. They're referencing New York State 66R, whatever, NYCR Part 366. They just keep referencing that and I am sure this was done by a tech, but that's why I what to have the face to face discussion.
Joe Pete, that's kind of what, when you and I met we said, yes, we want a letter and we want to focus on the fact that it needs to be a local solid waste management plan. Second largest county by area in the State, second lowest population density of any county in the State and as they're asking us to do more recycling, which I don't disagree with, they fail to recognize that there have been many, many studies that recycling is more effected, it's more used by people with slightly more means. Meaning more affluent communities. People disadvantaged, economically, socioeconomically disadvantaged people are less likely to do it. You start to put in all the other factors that we face here with how large our county is and the aging population and all those things, they're, again it's a one sized fits all that they're asking for.
How does your transfer station work? You probably barely scrape by. You're barely in the black if you are in the black and the rest you're in the black depends, you pay an attendant to be there all day long. Whether you get 100 tons of garbage that day or just 1 ton of garbage that day you still pay that guy the same amount of money. They don't realize how tight our margins are here in the North Country as they're saying pull more out of it that you don't get any money for. So, I really want to have an inface discussion.
I have asked our consultant to put some questions together. I'll be honest, the first answer that they gave us was all about just satisfying DEC and they seem to forget that Essex County is the client and just giving us more administrative burden of all the recording requirements wasn't fair.

WILSON: So, in one of the ways that this plays out in real life that it needs to be a local management plan and that they're just pasteing over by the one size fits all regulations is that we're a rural county and I think that they're ignoring this in other cases, too. Jim and I just did quick back of the piece of paper and the tradeoff that we're making here with what the State has required Essex County and Hamilton County to do is we're trading no landfill in our county at the expense of, we've calculated that this has burned like 8 million pounds of coal, the equivalent of the release of greenhouse gas of 8 million pounds of coal just in our trucking. So, is this really, we've got to look at the whole, you know what the tradeoff is with these long trips, which is better? Burying trash or burning diesel fuel?

DOUGAN: Yeah, part of our thought process is and from an engineering standpoint, there are ways to build a liner for a landfill. There are ways to protect water quality. I think it becomes a lot harder to deal with those emissions that you're getting from vehicles, and so did they choose water quality which is easier to engineer and protect over the other? And I'll throw some quick numbers, last year Serkil burned 43,626 gallons of diesel fuel. We have to haul all of our trash out of Essex County to Franklin County's landfill near Chateaugay. That's 176 miles round-trip. So, on average everyone of those walking floor trailers that we send handles 24 tons of garbage. So, that 24 tons of garbage is 694 trips a year. Everyday Serkil starts in Lewis, so even if they're picking up a full trailer in Ticonderoga, they then go from Ticonderoga and out to Franklin County and then come back to Lewis. So, they drive to Ticonderoga and back, I'm taking that 176 miles on every single trip as being additional to us operating the system. When I do that across those 694 trips, they put on 122,000 miles extra just going to Franklin County to get rid of it and operating the rest of the system the same.

HUGHES: I don't think New York State cares about anything you just said. I've got to be honest with you and that's not a knock against you or a knock against us. I believe because I am kind of driving into this here, I believe you mentioned the NYCRR, codes, rules and regulations.

DOUGAN: Yup

HUGHES: Those codes, rules and regulations are good in New York State's eyes, the bureaucrats' eyes, and the tech's eyes, everybody that works for New York State for all 62 counties. If we can't find a closer place to go that's our problem, not theirs. I am trying, if we're playing chess here, I'm trying to think about my opponent, New York State is playing chess and I don't think they care that we're hauling it to Franklin County and all of the numbers, you're right Jim, you're 100% right, but that is not important in this conversation. I actually am encouraged by what they said that the County should consider additional alternatives. They're probably thinking, Jim, you haven't thought about this enough. Essex County has not put enough brain power or energy to figure out a better opportunity so you can stop complaining about hauling all the way up to the Canadian border.

WILSON: Well, Ken, you're exactly right. The Commissioner of the DEC did say that in a news story that we're not doing enough.

HUGHES: So, I am encouraged. I would love to have that face to face conversation. They said DEC would like to meet with the County to discuss alternates. Great, let's do it. I want to hear what you think our alternatives are and not to refute every single one of them and look like we can't play well with them in the sandbox. But let's hear what they are, let's hear what they think they should be and then we get together and discuss what the pros and cons of everything. Because they don't know what's going on up here, they don't know.

DOUGAN: I think we're on the same page and…

HUGHES: We are absolutely.

DOUGAN: Again, the name of their program is a Local Solid Waste Management Plan.

HUGHES: Right

DOUGAN: They aren't paying attention, even though I am getting into a lot of math here. I am giving you the long winded engineering answer.

HUGHES: Sure

DOUGAN: They aren't paying attention to that, okay. They aren't paying attention to the socioeconomic factors that come alongside recycling. They want us to think of other alternatives and it's not just in their book that fits the City of Buffalo. They've written a regulation that says it's good for everybody. I don't disagree with you that it is. It's not cost effective over this group.

HUGHES: Right

DOUGAN: So, all about meeting with alternatives but what meets for them with alternatives, they don't care what it costs us. They need to care what it costs us.

HUGHES: I agree with you, absolutely.

DOUGAN: They need to care what it costs us. Joe Pete heard me say this at that Research Consortium, I am not against a lot of DEC programs, I'm not, what I am against is the fact that they keep pushing regulations that make down there and telling me, you that we have to pay for it.

HUGHES: I agree

DOUGAN: I'm not saying that when they, and I am going to go off subject here, but when they tell me, you put a new bridge, Jim, we want you to work upstream and downstream during steam morphology and changing the way the thalweg runs through that. It's not a bad concept, but my right of way only gets me this far. You tell me I got to work with four different property owners, and I got to own the property to get access to it to something that you have jurisdiction on. I'm not saying it's a bad idea. It's an unfunded mandate, okay. You're telling me I have to do this, no, you want it done on a stream that you have jurisdiction on that I do not then pay for it. You want solid waste, you want all this additional recycling, I am not against it, you pay for it. Household hazardous waste, this is a real nice benefit that Essex County does for its residents. We get to do all the heavy lifting, we do all the work. I've got to put together permits, I got to get people there, I've got to haul it all away, I got to put out a bid every so often and then I have to give them an annual report and then I have to go through a whole other process to get up to 50% of it back and usually it's not 50% it's less than that for a program that they mandate. And I am not saying that I want all that waste dumped in the landfill, pesticides and all those other things. I think that's a good program, but it comes back to us to pay for it.

HUGHES: I agree with you and the problem is the word local. Because when you're in Albany or Westchester or Long Island, the North County is local and they don't understand the breadth or depth.

WILSON: Well, that was my point about the trucking and CO2.

HUGHES: Going to Franklin County from Essex is local. It's not, but it is to them.

WILSON: And one of the things that Jim is alluding to but hasn't said, with the glass crusher we took on a really effective local solution to recycling glass that was a real loss of money and of a useable resource. That was something that we decided we could afford to do. But, when it comes to handling plastics or pesticides, to do that extra step is so far beyond the capacity of a county our size.

THURSTON: So, two things that come to mind and the first thing, when it comes to recycling, we cannot do this by ourselves. It is going to take the Federal Government changing the way these companies accept their products back for recycling. That's just the bottom line for every single county in the United States. The Feds need to decide, if they really want to be serious about recycling they need to come up a policy and a program that actually functions, step one. Step Two; and I know we have talked about this but the burn plant is 84 miles from Lewis. So, if we can, in the future, work with the burn plant to get our solid waste to them, it's only 6-8 miles more than where we're going.

HUGHES: Hudson Falls?

THURSTON: Yeah, it's only 6-8 miles further from Lewis to the landfill in Malone. So, it actually might be feasible that we could do this long-term. Obviously, not this year or next year but working forward.

WOOD: Well, the burn plant has its own problems.

DOUGAN: This is the State's Solid Waste Management Plan and the reason I brought it up is one of their priorities is getting rid of all burn plants, just so you know.

THURSTON: Well, but the burn plant down there actually provides electricity.

DOUGAN: I'm not arguing with you, I am just telling you.

THURSTON: Why would the State want to get rid of something that they have been pushing?

HUGHES: For the same reason that the State is banging on us for not having an alternative.

THURSTON: What in the world.

O'BRYAN: The waste that comes out of that burn plant is going out, I think it is going all that way to Monroe County and Rochester.

THURSTON: For the ash you mean? Because it's very little in comparison.

WOOD: You have local politics who are really trying to shut that burn plant down.

THURSTON: Why? It seems to be functioning perfectly.

WOOD: Because there's a lot of sickness in Hudson Falls.

THURSTON: Oh, is there? From that? Are the saying it's from that?

O'BRYAN: Well, they contested it since the day it opened its doors, they have been contesting it.

HUGHES: It's been open like 30 years; it's been a long time.

MASCARENAS: I just want to and kind of like what Ken said and I am on the same page which is why I want to bring here. To me the document in its entirely, I've been through it several times. I started writing comments under each section and the more I read, the more I found general political speak, and much like that news piece and what I mean by that is, I read that, I don't believe they have alternatives, Mr. Hughes. I believe it's general speak and they're going to come up here and if we think they're going to provide us with any, I don't believe that's going to be the case. I hope I'm wrong, but I believe they're going to come and say, you need to do this, you need to do that. One thing I would say is, anybody that is looking at alternatives, alternative one would be having your own landfill. But you can't. So, every other county that is doing a proper benefit cost analysis on what are our options? What's our long term cost benefit here? Number one would be a landfill.

THURSTON: Right

MASCARENAS: That wouldn't work for us has been set aside due to a lawsuit. So, now our alternatives are one less than the other 16 counties, us and Hamilton have one less alterative. So, I am all about, again, what they need, and the end game for me is to increase what they're paying us in terms of that landfill, not being able to have that landfill has our current rate is 13 years old. So, I am not against doing all these other things, what I am saying is we can't keep putting the cost of 4 million visitors on the back of 30,000 people to do it. And giving us limited alternatives to live by because ours are less than everyone else's.

WILSON: And can one of the strategies, when you mentioned trying to be good partners, one of the strategies that I keep bringing up with legislatures is the Adirondack Park is a perfect place to experiment. It is the most sensitive environment in the State. If you want to do better bridge design, then fund it. If you want to do better solid waste handling/recycling, use as a lab, try stuff,

battery storage and pay for it and work with us and then we can bring non-profits into it, too, come with expertise and be a laboratory to really test these in the most sensitive environment because that's what it's going to take. It doesn't work, the same as we found out with broadband and cell service. Rules that are written for a suburban and urban geography don't work here.

HUGHES: I have a question; do you know definitely that this gentleman and/or the people that this gentleman works with knows that Essex and Hamilton Counties cannot have a landfill? Do we know that they know that? Because I think it's an assumption on our part that they know.

MASCARENAS: We have been to several meetings in Ray Brook, myself, Joe Pete. We've had this discussion with everybody who's anybody that comes on. There's the Governor's Office, there's Joe Zaluski, Joe Zulski's higher up, Richard Clarkson, I can go on and on. The most recent document that I provided Steve and Matt to take to Albany, also has the history. So, I tried to teach them the history. We're trying to teach them the history. How many meetings have we had in Ray Brook, alone on this topic?

WILSON: But, to see on their willingness, after the Commissioner made those comments about, we're not, that's there's alternatives that we're ignoring. I talked to her, too, and she won't, now she won't talk to me at all.

THURSTON: Aww

WILSON: I said we would like to explore, if you've got ideas, we are very receptive to hearing them and now she won't even respond to me.

O'BRYAN: This whole argument hasn't changed in the last 30 years. We had this argument back when the Governor said no more garbage in the Adirondacks.

MASCARENAS: Yup

O'BRYAN: We had Lewis, that was the landfill running.

MASCARENAS: At that time, it was a good deal for our legislators to make with the amount of money that they got. It paid the difference. So, that account was originally set up as an enterprise fund. So, anybody that knows anything about public accounting would know that an enterprise account is supposed to be self-sustaining.

HUGHES: That's correct.

MASCARENAS: Well, over the years we started getting dinged by the Comptroller who put us in this position because we had an enterprise fund that wasn't acting as such that we were subsidized

AS THERE WAS NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO COME BEFORE THIS ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH TASK FORCE, IT WAS ADJOURNED AT 12:13 PM

Respectively Submitted,

Dina Garvey, Deputy Clerk
Board of Supervisors