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Proposed facility would turn waste into fuel

By Sarah Eames Staff Writer
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Sarah Eames | The Daily Star The entrance to the former Green-Del Sanitation Transfer Station in Roxbury, the site of a proposed solid waste processing facility, is shown Tuesday, Aug. 17.



A pair of public meetings will be held this month to hear concerns about a proposed solid waste processing facility on the edge of Delaware and Greene counties.

Hughes Energy Group, a U.K.-based developer, is proposing a facility to convert household waste into biofuel at the site of Green-Del Sanitation, one of two privately owned transfer stations in Delaware County. The 15-acre property was formerly owned by Bob and Linda Compton, according to Delaware County real property tax records.

“We were very lucky to have the opportunity to buy the site when it came up for sale,” Hughes Energy CEO Dane McSpedon said in a Tuesday statement.

Hughes Energy representatives will host public hearings Thursday, Aug. 19, at 6 p.m. at the Prattville Hose Company and Friday, Aug. 27, at 7 p.m. at the Grand Gorge Civic Center. Both meetings will be streamed via Zoom.

The proposed facility in Roxbury will “steam-clean, sanitize and recycle all

organic and household waste,” according to Sheila Hughes McStravick, the company’s marketing director.

“Together, we are looking to create a green recycling hub in the area which will attract dozens of US and international delegations every year,” McStravick said.

Hughes Energy, the U.S.-based distributor for Wilson Bio-Chemical Ltd, is pitching “the Wilson System,” described as a “hyper speed composting facility which transforms organic material into a high energy fiber which is used to make recycled paper, organic plastics and other consumer and energy products.”

The system also steam-cleans and recycles plastics, metals and glass from the waste stream, using a “highly efficient closed process” that recycles water and steam within the system at a low temperature and pressure and without burning or melting any materials, McStravick said.

“Any emissions from the plant are well below New York State thresholds,” she said.

Emissions and runoff contaminants affecting nearby streams, rivers, reservoirs and even New York City’s supply of drinking water are among the primary concerns listed by a group identifying itself as the “Rural Information Collective” in a free pamphlet circulated among the Roxbury, Stamford, Prattsville and Gilboa communities.

“This proposal has the potential to change the quality of life for many people and communities in the Northern Catskills Region with little visible benefit to them in return,” the pamphlet reads.

The public hearings are a requisite part of the New York State Environmental Quality Review process, which considers any environmental impacts of a proposed development alongside social and economic factors during discretionary decision-making, according to the Department of Environmental Conservation, which serves as lead agency on the Roxbury project.

The Delaware County Planning Department is working with the Roxbury Town Planning Board to review the project’s potential environmental impacts, according to Delaware County chief planner Shelly Johnson-Bennett, but the review is still too deep in its infancy to yield a determination.

“Until there’s a complete SEQR application, it’s too early to say what the impact will be,” she said.

Delaware County Economic Development director Glenn Nealis said his department is not expected to become formally involved in the project until the completion of the environmental review.

“Job creation is something we are always interested in,” he said. “It’s our job to try to attract new jobs to the area for local residents.”

Roxbury Town Supervisor Allen Hinckley agreed that the promise of introducing about 50 new jobs to the area was enticing.

“As you can imagine, jobs are really important to a local community like ours,” he told The Daily Star. “If it’s good for getting people through the times of COVID, that’s great, but right now, we’re all kind of learning as we go.”

“I’m not terribly against it, but I’m not sure I’m for it, either,” Hinckley said. “There’s a lot of rumors out there back and forth.”

The Rural Information Collective, which describes itself as a “loose collective of concerned volunteer local citizens, friends and affiliates who are exercising our freedom of speech to protect the natural ecology and heritage of the Northern Catskills,” speculates that Hughes Energy plans to import solid waste from hundreds of miles away to meet the capacity of the proposed Catskills facility.

Citing a similar Hughes Energy waste-processing facility proposed in Rockland County in 2018 that was never built, as well as the company’s own estimates that New York City generates nearly half a million tons of food waste per year — “enough to fill up more than 100 subway cars per day” — the Rural Information Collective surmises that Roxbury’s proximity to the Greater New York Metropolitan Area could be “an indicator that (Hughes Energy has) big plans for waste from NYC in the Catskills.”

“At their current proposed volumes, the risk of industrialization is not just for Prattsville alone,” the pamphlet continues, speculating that solid waste “would likely need to be imported from as far as NYC, Albany, Hudson, Kingston, Rochester, Oneonta and perhaps even Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.”

“Any Catskill town with a major traffic artery could be adversely affected by this radical increase in truck traffic,” the pamphlet reads.

The site is expected to receive as much as 175,000 tons of garbage a year, which the Rural Information Collective extrapolated to 40 average garbage truckloads a day, assuming a standard truck capacity of about 12 tons.

While Hughes Energy predicts that just three trucks per hour will pass through the Roxbury-Prattsville area, the Rockland County project was proposed to be operational “22 hours a day, nearly all year long,” according to a November 2018 report by the Rockland County Business Journal.

Hughes Energy promotional materials boast that a waste processing facility similar to the one proposed in Roxbury is capable of processing 20 tons of garbage per hour into a “saleable fiber” made from food, paper and cardboard, which would be sold as a pelletized fuel.

“With Hughes technology, waste professionals turn a cost into profits,” according to a November 2018 promotional video. “By diverting all organic waste from a landfill, they increase the amount of waste they can accept.”

Saving room in a landfill is not a matter of great concern for Delaware County, which was among the first to implement a centralized waste facility and continues to lead the industry in innovative and diverse uses of solid waste, according to Public Works Commissioner Sue McIntyre.

While other municipalities have adopted profit-driven waste management strategies, importing solid waste from beyond their borders, Delaware County maintains an operation in Walton that is “very much self-sufficient,” McIntyre said.

In an age when many U.S. landfills are nearing capacity, the Walton site has maintained an efficient intake rate “only because we divert so much material away from the landfill by recycling and composting and only handling Delaware County waste,” McIntyre said.

Landfills throughout western New York, including the Allegheny Plateau and northern Finger Lakes regions, remain significant importers, according to McIntyre.

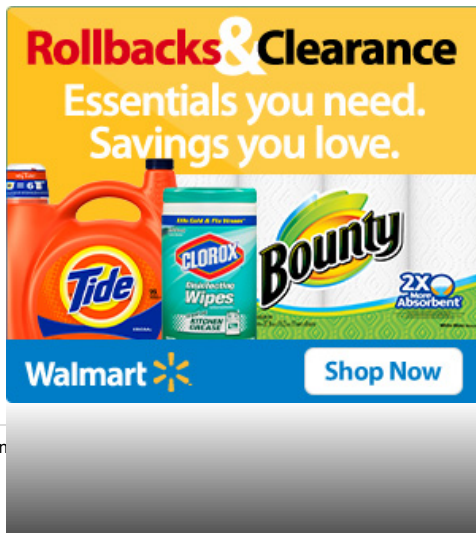
The Albany landfill, once a major importer of solid waste from throughout the greater Capital region, is expected to reach capacity in just five years and possibly as early as 2023, according to state data.

McIntyre said she met with Hughes Energy representatives several years ago after the developers sought a potential working agreement with Delaware County.

“They were looking into securing waste from Walton to take to Green-Del, which is not something we’re interested in,” she said. “Not only would we be providing a source of material, they would be charging a tipping fee, so we would be both a source and a revenue for them.”

“My team and I look forward to engaging with the local community to share our plans and to listen to their feedback at the upcoming events,” McStravick said.

Visit hughesenergygroup.com/projects for more information.



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