

98810 WJ WNDJLSRM

Thursday, May 30, 1986

News 256-7198
Classified 263-3317

Thirty Five Cents

Strong vote favors curbside pickup

By Debrah Orpin DeLargy

Voters at last Wednesday's Special Town Meeting overwhelmingly embraced curbside pickup of trash by a vote of 411 to 184. In doing so, they rejected the concept of placing a transfer station at the landfill site, an idea that had been endorsed by the town's Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC), Board of Selectmen, Planning Board and Finance Committee.

While this commits the town to begin a curbside pickup contract, it is unclear where the money to accomplish this will be coming from. Unlike a transfer station, which would have been financed by a bond, the roughly \$300,000 for curbside will have to come out of the town's operating budget.

According to Finance Committee chairman Karl Fagans, his committee was not consulted about provisions for a curbside contract. Fagans said there is no money in the budget appropriated for this purpose.

"We'll just have to find it somewhere," Fagans said. He noted that this expenditure will affect the tax rate, due to be set this fall.

Last Wednesday's vote marked a successful end to six months of work by a residents' group, Westford Concerned Citizens (WCC), to defeat the placement of a transfer station in their neighborhood. Chris Pude, a member of the group, said this week, "We think it's im-

portant for people to realize that over 400 people rejected the rezoning of our neighborhood and the placement of the transfer station here. Obviously it wasn't just the artists. It was the voice of the townspeople and I hope town government listens to that."

The vote to begin curbside pickup was the third in a three-article package decided by paper ballot last Wednesday night. Article 1, requesting funds to build a transfer station, failed 328 to 268. Article 2 seeking to rezone the currently Residential landfill site to Industrial A, also failed 412 to 184.

The version of Article 3 accepted by voters, funding curbside pickup, was amended on a motion made by Ellen Harde. The amendment restricts the length of the curbside pickup contract to three years (with a two-year extension) and directs the Board of Selectmen to appoint a seven-member committee to search for another transfer station site and make their report by the spring of 1986.

The sizeable vote for the amended article indicated that Harde's amendment expressed the view of many voters, that a transfer station may still be the best alternative for the town if a more suitable site can be found.

Although Harde's amendment to Article 3 was made at the outset of the meeting, the actual vote came after two hours of debate on both the suggested landfill site and the eco-

nomics and desirability of curbside versus transfer.

Bert Russo, chairman of SWAC, first showed slides depicting a variety of architectural styles for municipal transfer stations. Those slides were followed by a detailed rendition of the method used by Russo's committee to determine that the levels of service from a transfer station and curbside service were relatively equal.

Citing figures based on a six percent inflation rate over the next 20 years, Russo said the town could save \$6 million over the same 20-year span by choosing to build a transfer station.

Russo also challenged statements from transfer station opponents, point by point, that a transfer station at the landfill site would be a health hazard, would cause traffic problems and noise pollution, and would be risky to construct on filled land.

Speaking for WCC, Bill Pude focused his arguments against the transfer station on the unsuitability of siting a waste handling facility and the traffic it would generate so close to people's homes, the Catholic cemetery, the town wells, Town Forest and bird sanctuary.

"There are 100 homes within a half mile of the proposed site. This is not an industrial site." — TRASH, Page 10

Town Meeting adopts curbside trash collection

TRASH, From Page 1
area. Are we so desperate for a transfer station this year that we would put a facility like this within 350 feet of people's homes?" Pude asked voters.

Another WCC member, Mike Hanley, contested figures showing a \$1 million savings for the town from a transfer station. He said the economics are relatively equal when considering the cost to residents to travel to the transfer station and the money a third of the town now pays for private curbside pickup.

Hanley also said the town might be building itself an obsolete facility if trends continue to show that "putting trash in your car and driving it somewhere is getting less and less popular."

Roger Parent, owner of Parent's Market, attempted to make a second amendment to Ar-

ticle 3, which failed after it became clear that it would not be possible to implement it, even with voter approval. Predicting that he and other local small businessmen would have a serious problem disposing of their daily trash if excluded from town curbside pickup, Parent moved that small businesses, such as his, be included in the curbside plan.

The motion was defeated after selectman Dave Earl questioned the cost of adding more businesses to the curbside contract. And Earl said it would be difficult to accomplish the intent of Parent's amendment, which calls for daily residential pickup that already been solicited, with one conditionally accepted.

Earl did say that the selectmen would be willing to meet with local businessmen to determine a solution for their commercial trash problems.

Although the move to curbside has been facilitated, it is unclear when actual pickup of household trash will begin in Westford. The town is under contract with the Northeast Solid Waste Committee (NESWC) to begin delivering rubbish to a North Andover resource recovery plant sometime between July and November of this year.

A Medford company Vining Disposal, was chosen by SWAC as offering the best package to the town. Town officials have said the company will accept unladen rubbish from such as Westford weekly and will collect large items, except automobile transmissions and engine blocks.

Town Meeting voters were told by town officials that Vining also has agreed to pick up at the doorstep of elderly and disabled customers.

Chemicals in Westford's wetlands believed to be coming from landfill

By VIRGINIA KIMBALL
Sun Correspondent

WESTFORD - Several "volatile organic compounds" have been detected in a sample of wetlands surface water near the town landfill, according to a letter from an environmental engineering firm.

The letter, submitted to selectmen earlier this month by Newton-based Goldberg, Zoino & Associates (GZA), also reported the presence of road salt and concentrations of dissolved solids from the landfill in the wetlands area off Forge Village Road.

Selectmen last night, however, requested a more detailed study of the wetlands area. The GZA tests are a followup to 1983 wetland tests that offered inconclusive results.

"I would like a fuller report

explaining what those chemicals are they found and what kind of impact they will have on the well field," said Selectman Ronald Johnson.

In order to fully test the extent of the contamination in the wetlands, GZA officials Gary Williams and Lawrence Feldman have recommended a 30-day pumping test to reach water at lower levels in the Forge Village Wells, according to Executive Secretary Robert Halpin. However, Halpin reports the pumping test has been opposed by Water Commissioner Harold Fletcher, who feels the firm could test water in the storage tanks to gain the same information.

"They want me to run the wells for 24 hours a day for 30 days," said Fletcher, "I don't think GZA understands... this is not done under normal condi-

tions."

The recent GZA tests were, in part, prompted by a group of Westford residents concerned over wetlands contamination. The group was formed following the announcement of a proposal last fall to locate a waste transfer station on landfill site.

According to the GZA letter, the following "volatile organic compounds" were detected in the sample from a wetlands area adjacent to the landfill: acetone, 2-butanone, 1,1,1-trichloroethane and toluene.

Acetone and 2-butanone are possible byproducts of either landfill refuse or naturally occurring organic matter in the wetlands, while the presence of 1,1,1-trichloroethane and toluene most commonly originates from solvents disposed in the landfill.

KIMBALL Sun
7/29/85

Town wells okay, but monitor closely: report

By VIRGINIA KIMBALL
Sub Correspondent

WESTFORD — Selectmen learned last night that town wells near the sanitary landfill are still safe for use. Continued pumping at the wellfield would cause contaminants to reach the wells, however, and frequent monitoring was recommended in a report from Goldberg, Zoino and Associates (GZA).

In its study, the Newton-based

Westford

GZA demonstrated that continued pumping of the wellfield causes leachates — contaminants in the ground water — to move toward the water source.

Samples taken from locations around the landfill, in the surface area of the wellfield, showed low concentrations of at least 35 volatile organic matter, including acetone, 1,1,1-trichloroethane, 2-Butanone and toluene.

Most of these compounds are waste products from commercial or industrial developments and in higher concentrations have been linked to cancer.

The GZA report suggested that with proper management and pumping techniques, the levels of these compounds would not reach dangerous

levels.

These compounds were not detected in samples taken from observation wells after 34 days of pumping.

GZA engineer Gary Williams told the board that continued pumping of the wells would cause the contaminants from the landfill to move toward the wells.

Williams said his firm recommended monitoring the water quality at the well sites near the landfill with a "frequency of testing." A GZA report delivered to selectmen also suggested new monitoring wells be installed between the landfill and the wellfield, to be frequently sampled for "volatile organic priority pollutants."

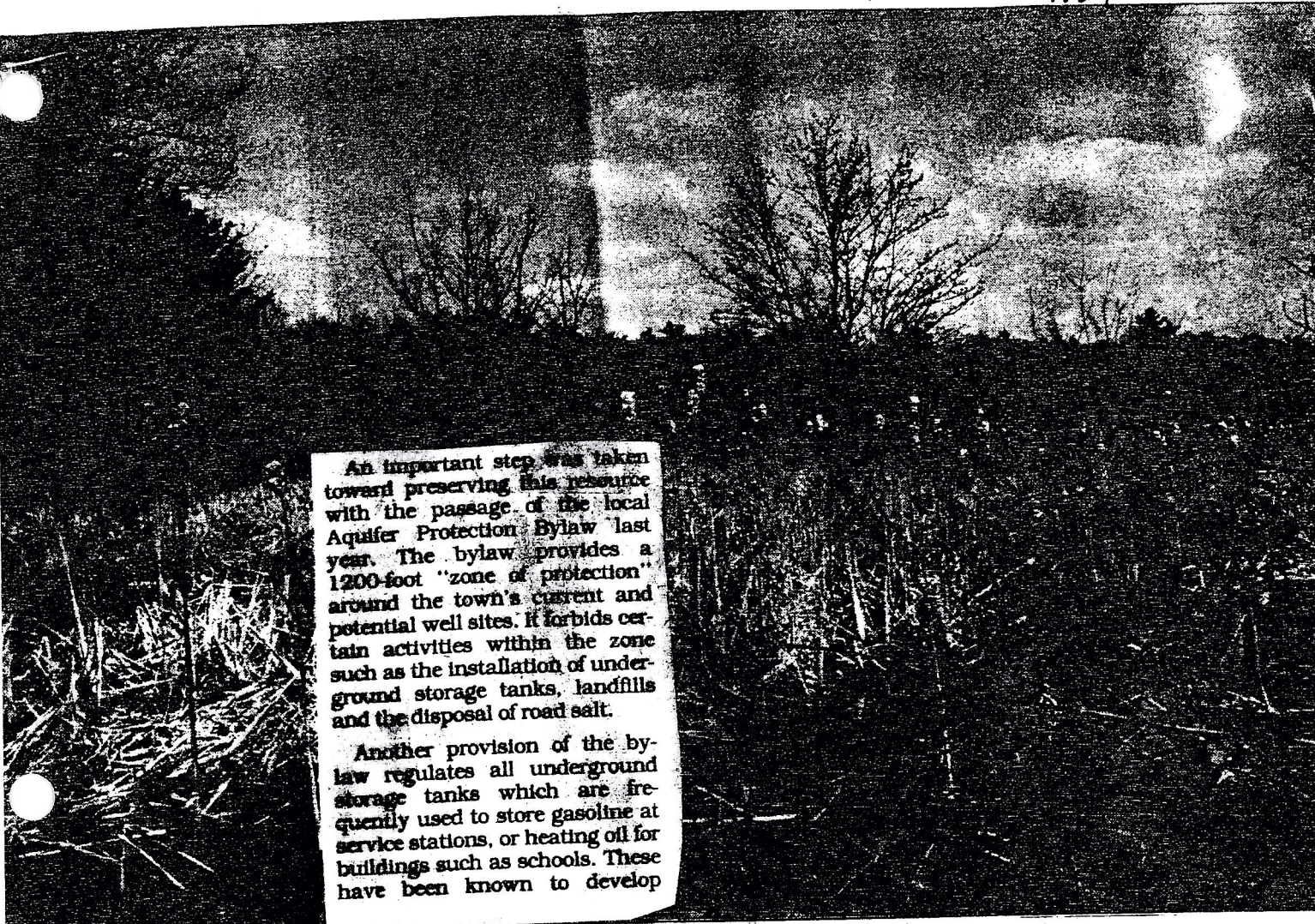
According to Williams the capping of the landfill, a project to begin soon, will help contain contaminated ground water.

Water Commissioner Harold Fletcher told selectmen the wells currently are pumped only 4 to 6 hours per day, in order to "top off other town water sources."

Fletcher told selectmen he felt proper monitoring and pumping of the wells would allow their continued use. "Those wells are 75 years old and I see no reason why they can't go another 75," said Fletcher.

es toward mapping and protection of

4/5/85



An important step was taken toward preserving this resource with the passage of the local Aquifer Protection Bylaw last year. The bylaw provides a 1200-foot "zone of protection" around the town's current and potential well sites. It forbids certain activities within the zone such as the installation of underground storage tanks, landfills and the disposal of road salt.

Another provision of the bylaw regulates all underground storage tanks which are frequently used to store gasoline at service stations, or heating oil for buildings such as schools. These have been known to develop

This wetland, characterized by standing water and cattails, is typical of many water recharge areas in Westford.

(Photo by Garo Lachi)

Protecting Westford's precious commodity: its aquifer

by Deborah Orpin DeLargy

Unlike many towns which draw raw from reservoirs, Westford depends entirely upon wells for drinking water. This makes the groundwater supply one of the most important resources and its protection should be among the town's highest priorities, according to Board of Health member Charles Menzie.

"Groundwater protection really has to be pursued aggressively at a local level," says Menzie. "It would be a shame to see Westford lose the use of its wells, as some surrounding towns have." Parts of Acton, Hingsboro and Bedford have had to close their wells due to contamination.

leaks which can contaminate groundwater supplies. The bylaw requires that owners of these tanks notify the town of their location and run checks for leakage on all tanks over 15 years old.

Menzie says that there has been about 50 percent compliance on this regulation so far and the town is working on obtaining information and safety checks on the remaining 50 percent.

The bylaw also requires all industries in the town to register any hazardous materials they may be using with the Board of Health, according to Menzie, compliance with this section of the bylaw has been good.

Although the Aquifer Protec-

tion Act does not require that no one really knows where Westford's aquifers are located. An aquifer is an underground formation which contains sufficient water to be developed as a water source. They are usually located in low-lying areas where there is a thick layer of soil deposits.

Many towns have done formal mapping of their aquifers and the Board of Health is requesting \$21,000 at the upcoming town meeting for this purpose. Article 25 on the May 11 Town Meeting warrant seeks an appropriation "to obtain consultant services for hydrogeological study of portions of the Town to study and map the aquifers that support the Town's drinking water resources as a first step in protecting our ground water supply as

well as the recharge areas. "Once we know where aquifers are, we can start mapping them at their recharge areas. Recharge areas also need to be protected from contamination," he says.

"The current 1200-foot protection around wells is nothing to protect recharge areas. It ignores the hydrogeology and the dynamics of how and where water moves," according to Menzie.

Another inadequacy in the town's current water protection policy is the lack of an ongoing program of testing for contaminants. The last time such testing was done was two years ago, according to Menzie. "Regular water testing programs are long overdue," he says.

Menzie adds, "There is no money in the budget for this year."

Auditor's landfill ruling is based on local mandates law in Prop. 2½

By Andrew J. Dabills
Globe Staff

The ruling by Auditor John J. Finnegan that the state must foot the bill for improvements it orders to municipal landfills isn't the first time the state has been held fiscally liable under a statute known as the local mandates law.

Under the tax-cutting Proposition 2½ that went into effect in 1981, the state is expressly prohibited from "imposing any direct service or cost obligation" on communities without also paying for them — unless the community agrees to assume the cost itself.

The law also permits any 10 citizens of a community to sue the state unless state funds are provided for programs required by new state laws, rules or regulations.

The idea of establishing a Division of Local Mandates — and putting it under the state auditor — came from Rep. Andrew Natsios

(R-Holliston), the state GOP chairman. His suggestion was adopted by Citizens for Limited Taxation, the sponsors of Proposition 2½, whose director, Barbara Anderson, yesterday described the 14-person Division of Local Mandates as "aggressive and independent."

Under the local mandates law, the auditor's decisions can be appealed to a state Superior Court, an avenue Gov. Michael S. Dukakis yesterday said was being considered after the landfill ruling.

Natsios said that if Dukakis attempts to have the landfill question or health issues exempted, "there will be a floor fight to end all floor fights" in the House where Proposition 2½ has been sacrosanct.

Finnegan's decisions on local mandates have cost the state more than \$7.1 million for programs that before Proposition 2½ would have been financed locally.

He has forced the state to pay

for new ambulance regulations, extension of voting hours, vocational educational programs and other state-mandated programs. In January, the state's Supreme Judicial Court upheld one of his decisions that said the state also could not force communities to provide busing for private school students unless it paid the cost.

Natsios said when he drafted his bill, he almost decided to put the Division of Local Mandates in the state Office of Administration and Finance, an agency under the governor's control. But he said Administration and Finance would not have been independent of the governor.

"The auditor is normally at odds with the executive branch because they audit what the executive branch does, so there is a little friction there," he said. "I thought that would protect the cities and towns more than anything else."

Landfills: A cure that brought new ills

By Jerry Ackerman
Globe Staff

The local dump used to be a favored place for politicians to campaign. But today politicians tend to avoid dumps — now called sanitary landfills — as they have become an expensive environmental headache.

Landfills, in fact, have joined industrial disposal sites and leaky underground tanks as a major long-term pollution concern. In Massachusetts, with 266 operating landfills, water pollution problems have been documented at 20 locations and 59 others are likely to cause pollution, according to environmental officials. All but nine of these are municipal landfills.

The problem can be dated to 1971, when landfills were designated by Massachusetts law as the way to end the problems that open burning and rats caused at town and city dumps.

But burying the trash didn't cure another problem — then unseen. It turns out that, without protection in the form of clay or

mulate in landfills — oils and chemicals from homes and businesses — leak out, their transit speeded up by rainfall soaking into the ground.

Called leachates, these liquids drain into underground water aquifers, rivers and reservoirs, often making water undrinkable.

Landfill leachate already has closed drinking-water wells in Amherst, Auburn, Berkley, Lowell, Middleborough, Pittsfield, Plymouth, Tewksbury and Tyngsborough, according to a tally by the Department of Environmental Quality Engineering (DEQE).

Near the Wachusett Reservoir, part of metropolitan Boston's water supply, the Holden municipal landfill caused contamination in the Quinapauket river.

Nationally, according to a recent congressional report, solid-waste landfills (one-third of them municipal) account for 20 percent of the sites on the "Superfund" list. As many as

federal cleanup help.

Liners for landfills typically cost up to \$250,000 for a 10-acre site. They have been required by Massachusetts since 1979.

Typically a liner is accompanied by a leachate collection system that pumps and treats the liquids for disposal in sewer systems or cycles them back through the landfill. Around the landfill, wells are drilled where water samples can be taken and tested for signs that contamination is escaping.

Liners and collection systems aren't specifically required by the 1971 rules that regulate landfills, according to DEQE general counsel Willard Pope, because until the 1970s "no one really understood leachates and the problems they could cause."

As a result, according to department statistics assembled by the private Conservation Law Foundation of New England, only three of the Bay State's 225 municipal landfills have leachate systems certified by authorities as being "state of