

# Vision 2025-2028

## Citizens and Governmental Vision for the Closure of Mega Landfills and Post-Closure Solid Waste Disposal Plan(s) for the Future of the Finger Lakes

February 2019

### Purpose Statement

The Northern Finger Lakes and Eastern Monroe County have hosted the three largest landfills in New York State for over 20 years - Seneca Meadows (SMI), High Acres (HA) and the Ontario County Landfill (OCL).<sup>1</sup> According to the DEC, the permitted capacities of these landfills are approximately 6,000, 4,500, and 3,000 tons per day. These mega-landfills represent both an environmental and social injustice scourge on our region.



The focus of this document is to consolidate governmental and citizen support for the current closure plans and for development of a rational, just, and feasible post-closure strategy for the two northern Finger Lakes landfills - SMI and OCL. Each operation has defined closure dates on record:

- SMI is scheduled to close via the Town of Seneca Falls Local Law #3 in 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> SMI, OCL, and HA are all located in the 54<sup>th</sup> NY State Senate district. Annual permit capacities are respectively 2,190,000, 1,200,000, and 1,074,500. NYS DEC, **2015 Municipal Solid Waste Landfill Capacity Chart**, Albany, NY.

- OCL is scheduled to close under the current Ontario County solid waste plan in 2028.

There is already pressure by some entities to have Seneca Falls rescind its local Law #3 and extend the life of the SMI operation. As a County-owned entity, OCL may be more securely under community control. Regardless of the ownership model, the millions of dollars paid annually to the host communities and politicians provide an incentive to extend the life of these enterprises. Doing so, however, compromises the health and enjoyment of our citizens, environmental integrity, and local landscapes. Our communities have to not only solve local waste issues, but must become a model for how all NY State communities are going to solve their solid waste problems.

## The Environmental Imperative

It is crucial that State and local governments take immediate action to secure a more sustainable future for all our citizens. This argues for a distributed and localized approach to solid waste managements across the State. Local governments in the Finger Lakes have an incentive to demonstrate the feasibility of complete solid waste solutions. Once available, it is the State's responsibility to assure that the successful technologies and processes are transferred across all 62 NY counties. To that end our local leaders should focus on:

1. Local solutions will include a more sustainable system for dealing with organic wastes that converts what might have been landfilled or problematic for recycling (such as certain types of paper) into a composted product with a real market value. Diversion from a landfill to a composting facility significantly reduces the amount of material that would have been anaerobically digested, (which produces the powerful greenhouse gas methane<sup>2</sup>), into an aerobic process that produces only CO<sub>2</sub> and contributes significantly less to greenhouse gas warming.

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<sup>2</sup> Landfill gas is comprised of roughly 50% CO<sub>2</sub> and 50% CH<sub>4</sub>. The methane is developed due to the anaerobic decomposition – lack of oxygen – that takes place in a landfill. Whereas a compost pile decomposes aerobically – with oxygen – producing mainly CO<sub>2</sub>. This depends upon the types and ratio of material included in the compost (i.e., food, manure, yard waste), and how often the pile is turned or use of another method of oxygen introduction. **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change**, Geneva, Switzerland.

2. Development of regional resource/recycling/diversion facilities and solutions that will dramatically reduce the unsorted waste fraction shipped around the State and share the solid waste burden more equitably.
3. Solutions that reduce wear and tear on roads and the millions of gallons of fuel expended and the accompanying diesel emissions.
4. Address the mindset which allows communities to ship their garbage elsewhere and to avoid the consequences of poor local waste-management practices. As long as we continue to make it easy and cheap for much of the northeast US to simply send its garbage "away" to the Finger Lakes region, we will fail to incentivize creative and innovative thinking in all communities to reduce waste and become better stewards of our environment and our people.

## **Why this Document?**

Once finalized, this document should be circulated to all Finger Lakes governmental entities for passage of resolutions of support which will accomplish three important objectives:

1. Signal local governmental staff of the future, sustainable plans and measures that are to be pursued
2. Provide a framework for future legislative actions to support this vision
3. Signal to the State government that the Finger Lakes region, while actively addressing its own needs, will no longer serve as a repository for other peoples' waste.

## **What Should the Future Look Like?**

The future solid waste management system encompassing the northern Finger Lakes (Ontario, Yates, Seneca, and Wayne) will be supported and funded by State and County governments. The region will become a model of responsible waste diversion and disposal and no longer invest in facilities that choose to burn up or bury trash. Here are the major components of our future solid waste solution:

- Networks of full-service Reuse and Recycling Parks (RRP) /transfer stations strategically located throughout each County that are capable of accepting

the gamut of recycling and reusable materials, including organics and food waste, transported by commercial waste haulers.<sup>3</sup>

- As an incentive, the NYS legislature should enact legislation requiring the diversion of all commercially generated organic waste within 50 miles from a processing facility.<sup>4</sup>
- The RRP's should also provide for separate access by the public and commercial hauling operations to enhance safety and efficient operations.
- Extensive and on-going campaigns to educate the general public as well as educational, business, and institutional customers regarding the proper collection/sorting/handling of solid waste before pickup by commercial haulers and/or delivery to the RRP's.
- The RRP's will include processes and locations for the managing and packaging of all recyclable waste streams for sale and transport to entities that repurpose these materials.
- NO permitting of incineration projects or any more mega-landfills.
- The region will permit small, regional, publicly-owned landfills for deposition of benign, non-toxic material, for which no beneficial use can be found.
- The State of NY will actively support this future vision by assuming an active role in national efforts to reform the upstream issues that create waste in the first place and find innovative strategies for reduce/reuse when it can't be avoided.

## **Next Steps (from 1/31/2019)?**

- Formation of a citizens and organizations coalition
- Community Summit to promote the Resolution and identify issues and concerns
- Proposal of Resolutions to local government for discussion and support. See sample resolution in Attachments A.

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<sup>3</sup> The RRP's should include the ability to accept non-reusable, non-recyclable, non-compostable wastes that are benign. This material would be carried off-site by commercial hauling operations to the locally approved, owned and funded landfill of last resort.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.wastedive.com/news/new-york-may-be-the-next-state-to-pass-a-commercial-organics-law/434795/>

## **Signatories to this Action Plan**

- *City and County Gov'ts*
  - *Environmental Groups*
  - *Civic Organizations and Clubs*
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**Attachment A**  
**Vision 2025-2028**

**Resolution - Citizens and Governmental Vision for the Closure of Mega Landfills and Post-Closure Solid Waste Disposal Plan/s for the Future of the Finger Lakes**

**January 2019**

**Whereas**

The Northern Finger Lakes and Monroe County have hosted the three largest landfills in New York State for over 20 years - Seneca Meadows (SMI), High Acres (HA) and the Ontario County Landfill (OCL).<sup>5</sup> These “Mega” landfills represent both an environmental and social injustice scourge on our Region.<sup>i</sup>

**And Whereas**

SMI is scheduled to close via the Town of Seneca Falls Local Law #3 in 2025, and OCL is scheduled to close under the current Ontario County solid waste plan in 2028.

**And Whereas**

Given the circumstances of the situation, there is already pressure by some entities to have Seneca Falls rescind its local Law #3 and extend the life of the SMI operation. As a County-owned entity, OCL may be more securely under community control. Regardless of the ownership model, the millions of dollars paid annually to the host communities and politicians provide an incentive to extend the life of these enterprises in the heart of the Finger Lakes.

**And Whereas**

Local solutions will emphasize recycling and aerobic organic waste composting, vastly decreasing the volume of waste being transported to these mega-facilities on a daily basis, and thereby reducing wear and tear on roads, the greenhouse emissions of hundreds of trucks, and the greenhouse gas emissions of organic waste decaying in the anaerobic interior of landfills.

Local solutions will change the mindset which allows communities to ship their wastes elsewhere and ignore the consequences of poor waste-management practices.

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<sup>5</sup> SMI, OCL, and HA are all located in the 54<sup>th</sup> NY State Senate district. Annual permit capacities are respectively 2,190,000, 1,200,000, and 1,074,500. NYS DEC, **2015 Municipal Solid Waste Landfill Capacity Chart**, Albany, NY.

## **Be it Resolved**

That the local governments in the four county area, with citizen support, take whatever action is needed to insure that the current closure plans are adhered to, and develop sensible, post-closure strategies for the Finger Lakes landfills (SMI and OCL) and local waste management.

## **Post closure strategies**

Etc.

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<sup>i</sup> We in the Northern Finger Lakes and Monroe County play host to the three largest landfills in New York State. They are Seneca Meadows (SMI), the state's largest landfill, located in Seneca County a few miles north of both Seneca and Cayuga lakes; High Acres (HA), the second largest, which straddles the Monroe/Wayne County border and is sited on the banks of the Erie Canal; and Ontario County's Landfill (OCL), the third largest, sited five miles from the head of Seneca Lake. According to a recent analysis by Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle*, trash disposal has risen 37 percent at these three sites in the past six years. Six years ago none of these facilities accepted trash generated by New York City; they now accept nearly one third of New York City's wastes. Whereas other landfills in the state serve primarily residents in their own and adjoining counties, only nine percent of the 3.347 million tons of waste accepted last year at these three facilities was locally-generated. Both the Seneca Meadows and Ontario County facilities have closure dates of 2025 and 2028, respectively, yet they continue to accelerate their acceptance of more and more trash from downstate and out-of-state communities. Although this trend is incompatible with the region's major economic drivers and represents a form of environmental injustice, pressure is mounting on both facilities to extend their closures. Combined, SMI, OCL, and HA represent over 40% of statewide permitted capacity.