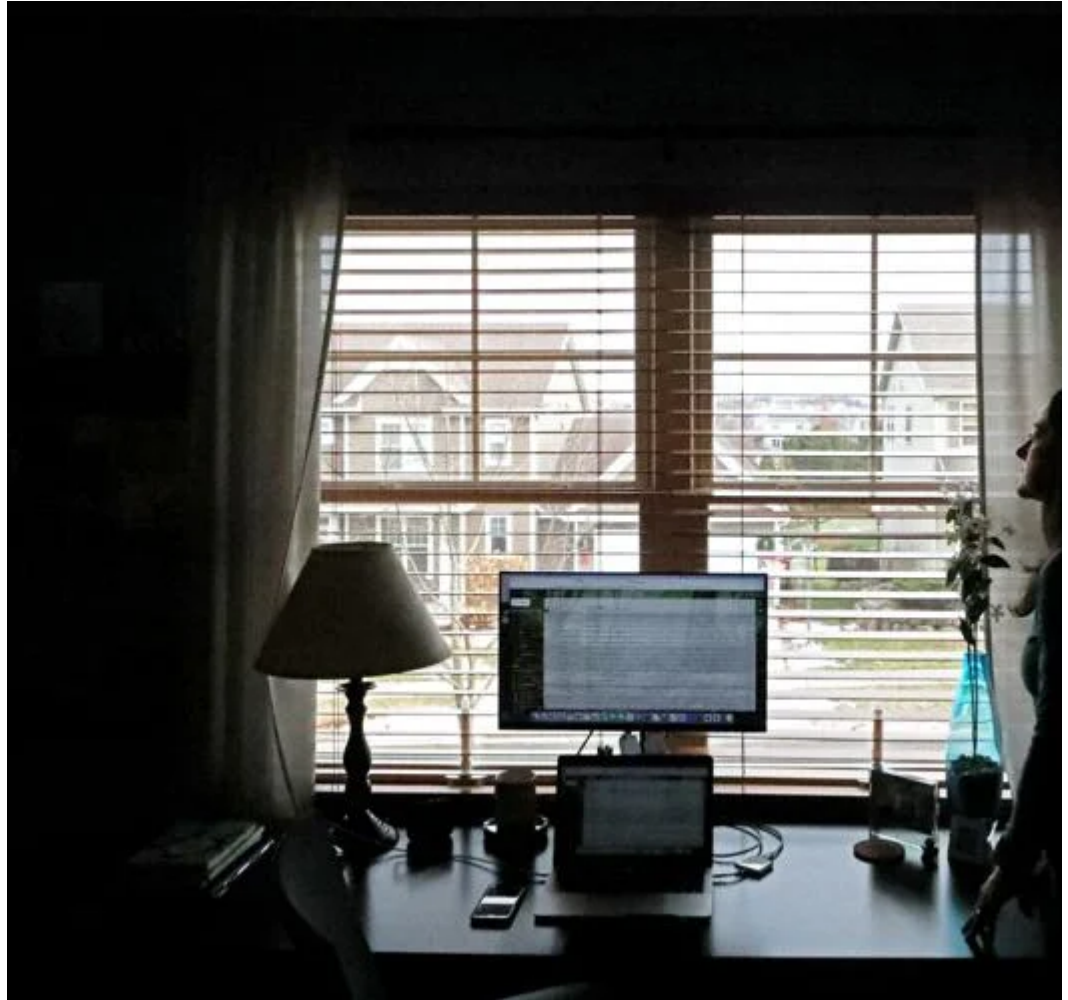


Proposed Dane County landfill expansion has neighbors pinching their noses

Chris Hubbuch | Wisconsin State Journal

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Melissa Carr looks out the window of her McFarland home office in the direction of land proposed for a Dane County Secret Places neighborhood, Carr and others say it's irresponsible to put a landfill so close to hundreds of homes on limited potential.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL

Melissa Carr's family is serious about reducing waste.

She packs her kids' snacks in reusable containers, tries to use cloth napkins instead of paper and buys soap in bars to avoid plastic containers. Her husband, Rob, took a master recycler class.

They recycle whatever they can, even if it means a trip to a city drop-off site, all to reduce strain on the county landfill, a seven-story pile of garbage lurking about a mile to the northeast — just out of sight but close enough to smell.



Dane County and the city of Madison are proposing a \$32 million "sustainability campus" on part of the city's Yahara Hills golf course as part of a planned expansion of the county landfill.

But in spite of their efforts, that landfill is nearly full, and now Dane County **plans to build a new one on a portion of the Yahara Hills Golf Course**, directly across Interstate 90 from their home in Madison's Secret Places neighborhood. The site would include a "sustainability campus" that could eventually support recycling and resale businesses.

Carr said she strongly supports the idea of a sustainability campus but worries about the environmental, health and quality-of-life impacts of putting another landfill on the golf course.

“We already have problems with the current landfill,” Carr said. “This will be the same thing but even closer.”

With the current Rodefeld landfill expected to be filled by the end of this decade, the county needs more space and says the underused golf course is the ideal location, close to the current landfill and its largest customer, the city of Madison, with space and infrastructure to support the \$32 million sustainability campus.

Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway and County Executive Joe Parisi say the plan is environmentally and fiscally responsible, and will boost the local economy while reducing waste.

“If we don’t develop a site like this, the environmental and economic consequences are quite severe,” Parisi said. “It would require exporting our waste to somebody else’s backyard in a way that’s not environmentally friendly.”

But residents like Carr say it’s irresponsible to put a landfill so close to hundreds of homes on a site that environmental regulators say has limited potential.

Land buy set

Earlier this year, the **County Board approved an agreement with the city of Madison** to buy a 232-acre chunk of the 36-hole golf course as part of a deal that includes reduced tipping fees.

In addition to the landfill, the county **plans to develop a business park** to host administrative offices and an education center along with private waste processors and recyclers and other related businesses.

The county has begun the permitting process to use about 83 acres for a new landfill that would be expected to hold about 10.3 million cubic yards of trash and would likely be filled within 15 years. Plans include an additional 80 acres for future expansions that county solid waste director John Welch has said could provide at least 75 years of space.

Based on a review of the initial site report, the state Department of Natural Resources concluded the site has “limited potential” as a landfill, due to shallow bedrock and groundwater and the proximity to wetlands, surface water and private wells.

According to the documents, the county will likely need exemptions from rules requiring at least a 10-foot separation from bedrock and the water table.

In addition, the site is less than 1,200 feet from three private wells and could require filling some wetlands and a pond that the county believes was constructed as part of the golf course.

More study ahead

Solid waste director John Welch said the limited potential determination is “fairly common” and “should not be viewed as a critical hurdle in the permitting process.” Welch notes the DNR issued a similar opinion, based on some of the same concerns, for a 2014 expansion of the Rodefild landfill that was ultimately approved.

The county plans to begin geological drilling early next year as part of a more detailed feasibility study, which is the next step in the permitting process. Once the feasibility report is complete — likely by 2025 — members of the public will have a chance to comment and contest the proposal.

Meanwhile, the county has signed a \$643,750 contract with SCS Engineers and Vandewalle and Associates to help plan the sustainability campus. According to the county, the consultants will look for potential business partners, develop metrics to gauge waste diversion efforts and provide public engagement on the campus design.

But the project has generated strong opposition from nearby residents, particularly those in the Secret Places neighborhood.

In **dozens of public comments**, people say they have had to live for years with an at-times-unbearable stench from the existing landfill and don't think they should have to endure it for decades to come.

"The residents in that area have already borne the burden for almost 40 years," said Sheryl Otto. "You now have more residents and you're asking that same group to carry the burden for the next 40 years."

Welch said the solid waste department has made significant efforts to deal with the smell, including a real-time nuisance reporting system and hiring a person whose sole job is managing gas collection and reducing odors.

No other sites?

Residents also complain that the county has not presented any alternative sites.

Welch said there are no alternative sites with the access to water, sewer, broadband and transportation routes that are needed to support the sustainability campus, and it would not be economically viable to separate it from the landfill.

Putting the landfill further from the city would also entail longer haul routes, which would increase costs and greenhouse gas emissions, and require the county to either build an on-site wastewater treatment plant or truck the leachate back to the Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District.

"In theory, the landfill could be located in a more rural area, but there would be significant trade-offs in doing so," Welch said. "The (sustainability) campus cannot exist on its own in another location, and it would not be possible in a rural area."

Carr said she was hesitant to speak out about the proposal for fear of creating an environmental injustice, but she's convinced there is a more creative solution that would reduce waste without putting a landfill near homes.

"I was worried about a bunch of people with privilege complaining and getting this moved to an area with underserved populations," Carr said. "We don't want the site to be moved to another residential area ... just because we have raised our voices."
