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Developer of proposed Wheatfield subdivision rejects complaints about possible environmental damage

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WHEATFIELD – Bob Weaver, who wants to build a 23-home subdivision behind his store, says the site is not close enough to a landfill to cause any environmental damage.

The subdivision, which would be accessible from Nash Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard, currently is under consideration by the Wheatfield Planning Board.

At recent Town Board meetings, some residents have said the site is too close to the former Niagara Sanitation Co. landfill, which has been owned by the town since 1968.

Weaver said he has heard about the objections at meetings, as well as allegations by an online poster that his property contains radioactivity.

“That guy doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” Weaver said. “Everybody has to be careful about running around saying there’s radioactive waste all over. Property values are going to plummet.”

He also said he is convinced that his land is safe, because it isn’t close enough to Niagara Sanitation for development to risk a release of waste from the landfill.

“My property is about 500 feet wide at the back,” Weaver said. “Next to me is a farm that’s probably 1,000 feet wide, and then there’s one that’s probably another 1,000 feet wide, and then there’s that contaminated area. So I don’t know how I’m part of that. My land has always been farmland.”

At last Monday’s meeting, a resident of Forbes Street in North Tonawanda, which is a short distance from the landfill, said she moved there after her family was evacuated from Love Canal in 1981.

“This Weaver subdivision cannot go through,” Sarah T. Kraus told the Town Board. “I’m constantly nauseous, continual headaches, pain that cannot be explained. ... There was a group of us that used to hang out there (at the Niagara Sanitation landfill). There was never a posted sign. We were never told there was anything that could harm us.”

In 2015, about 80 truckloads of Love Canal waste were excavated from the landfill and driven to Nebraska for incineration. The waste was moved from Love Canal by state Department of Transportation crews during the summer of 1968, when the LaSalle Expressway, which runs past Love Canal, was being built.

“That whole time they did remediation work, we didn’t hear it, we didn’t see it. It’s a long distance from us,” Weaver said.

In December, the state Department of Environmental Conservation changed the status of the landfill from Class 3, “no significant hazard to the public,” to Class 2, “a significant risk to public health or the environment.”

Supervisor Robert B. Cliffe objected that the risk shouldn’t increase after the worst pollution was removed. At last Monday’s Town Board meeting, he reported that a DEC official had told him that the classification change was made in order to make Niagara Sanitation eligible for Superfund cleanup money.

The DEC said in its announcement last month that there is no fence to keep people off the site and that the current cap over the 18.7-acre landfill doesn’t meet modern specifications.

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