

MRC Testimony on LD 2135 - Resolve to Investigate and Address Municipal Solid Waste Disposal Services Issues

MRC Executive Director Michael Carroll
January 24, 2024

Senator Brenner, Representative Gramlich, and members of the Joint Standing Committee of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), my name is Michael Carroll, and I am the Executive Director of the Municipal Review Committee (MRC), a non-profit organization managing waste disposal for 115 towns and cities across Maine. I am submitting written testimony to express our **position of neither for nor against LD 2135**. Our Board of Directors Meeting is today and we could not attend today's ENR meeting. Our stance is rooted in the fact that the MRC has been diligently addressing municipal solid waste (MSW) disposal service issues for over 30 years with a forward facing perspective with the environment in mind.

Without the MRC stepping in during the PERC financial crisis in the early 1990s, PERC would not have run successfully for over two decades. Through that assistance early on and being a minority owner, the MRC played a crucial role in maintaining PERC as a viable waste disposal solution for Maine. However, changes in waste management dynamics, including Maine's 50% diversion recycle requirement and shifts in power contracts with PERC, prompted MRC to seek modern technology and construct a new facility in Hampden.

The Hampden facility, an \$82 million state-of-the-art plant on 100 acres near Interstate 95, was acquired by MRC in 2022 from bondholders. Within eight months of owning the facility, we stepped up and found a viable partner to reopen. MRC subsequently sold the majority ownership to Innovative Resource Recovery (Innovative), a partner focused on environmentally sustainable waste solutions. This strategic move aligns with MRC's commitment to addressing MSW disposal service issues in the region.

Innovative is actively working on the site to retrofit the plant for renewable natural gas production and other products. The plant, expected to achieve commercial operations in 2025, has the capacity to process approximately 180,000 tons/year of mixed waste, diverting over 50% from landfills.

Despite the current necessity to bypass waste to a landfill, MRC has always had in place a waste swap agreement with Casella, mitigating the impact on Juniper Ridge Landfill (JRL) in Old Town. **This arrangement ensures that MRC's waste does not contribute to JRL's capacity issues.** The waste swap is an agreement with Casella, which operates JRL, to divert from the Old Town facility one ton of municipal solid waste (MSW) from southern Maine for every ton of MRC member MSW it receives. Instead of traveling all the way to Old Town, the southern Maine waste that Casella would have otherwise disposed of at JRL is delivered to Crossroads Landfill in Norridgewock. MRC member waste is not using up additional capacity at JRL, this arrangement helps lower the environmental impact by reducing miles traveled both for the southern Maine waste and for MRC member waste for whom JRL is closer than Norridgewock.

There has been a misperception that the Hampden facility's closure has increased the amount of MSW disposed at JRL. In reality, due to the waste swap, the volume going into JRL would be the same whether MRC was sending waste there or not.

On the matter of LD 2135, MRC supports the investigation for several reasons. It is crucial to scrutinize the following aspects at the ground zero of waste disposal operations:

1. Regulatory focus: Should regulatory departments and the legislature prioritize new facilities or a 30 year old facility?
2. Process hierarchy: We already know that the MWS process is higher on the solid waste hierarchy. Which do the people of Maine want to support?
3. Timeline: Estimating the time required for a facility to be operational.
4. Funding: Identifying the necessary funds for facility operation and securing them.
5. Insurance and permits: Ensuring the facility is properly insured and permitted.
6. Technical capability: Verifying the technical capability to operate the facility.

MRC's primary objective is the swift reopening of the Municipal Waste Solutions plant in Hampden. Collaborating with Innovative, we are committed to engineering the plant to meet the unique needs of our members and align with environmental considerations. We acknowledge the importance of getting it right from the outset to avoid delays and ensure a sustainable waste management solution.

We welcome open communication and are willing to assist in any way necessary. Having worked closely with DEP on EPR and joining the Waste task force, MRC is ready to collaborate with you for the benefit of our state. Feel free to contact me for further discussions or clarifications.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Michael Carroll". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.