

CARROLL COUNTY INDEPENDENT

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why would the Town of Ossipee support the construction of a gas station in Effingham?

To the Editor:

On March 29, the Ossipee selectmen held a meeting at which time a vote was made at the recommendation of Selectman Jonathan Smith to send a letter of support to the Town of Effingham for the construction of a gas station in Effingham. Mr. Smith's recommendation of support was based on assurances that State and Federal regulations to mitigate the potential for a release to the environment would be in place at the station and that Ossipee should not interfere with the development of a gas station in Effingham despite its potential for regional impact to drinking and surface water resources shared by nearby towns.

The gas station is being proposed within a drinking water protection district, the installation of which is prohibited by Article 22, Section 2207-A (8) of the Town of Effingham zoning ordinance. The ordinance was put in place in 2011 to protect the Ossipee Aquifer which is the source of drinking water for residents in Ossipee, Freedom and Effingham. Installation of the underground storage tanks was started illegally before approval from the Town of Effingham. Now after significant investment, the property owner is seeking site plan approval from the Effingham Planning Board to move forward with finalizing construction while a court case is still pending regarding the town's Zoning Board of Adjustment's granting of a variance for the project.

In considering the proposal, the Effingham Planning Board concluded that the station could have regional impacts to abutting towns and in accordance with a proposal deemed to have a Development of Regional Impact, was required to solicit input from the Lakes Region Planning Commission as well as abutting towns, including Ossipee and Freedom. The regional impact was based on concerns that any petroleum spill, leak, or release on the site could impact the drinking water resource shared by the Town of Ossipee, among others, and surface waters feeding into Lake Ossipee.

The gas station is located directly up gradient of private drinking water wells for more than 20 Ossipee residences and within 200 feet of Phillips Brook that flow into Ossipee Lake. Potential impacts to these sensitive receptors are exacerbated by an infiltration basin that is designed to collect untreated stormwater runoff from the site. The station is in a former gravel pit where most of the protective overburden has been removed, leaving only

a thin layer of gravel which can easily be penetrated by contaminated runoff. Obviously, the location of a gas station in a gravel pit above a drinking water aquifer is a bad idea.

It was surprising that the Ossipee Selectmen followed Mr. Smith's recommendation to support the construction of the Effingham gas station given the likelihood of impacts that could put the health of Ossipee residents and taxpayers at risk. Support of the station was based on State and Federal regulations intended to mitigate a release but ignores a local ordinance that was put in place to protect human health and the environment. Local ordinances look after local interests. Even state officials at the NH Department of Environmental Services are clear that it is the town's responsibility to make sure a development is appropriate for any given site.

Having over 30 years of experience as an environmental consultant and overseeing and documenting countless releases of petroleum ranging from system failures to human errors. I have come to learn that despite having all types of precautions in place, when tens of thousands of gallons of petroleum are being stored and dispensed, a release to the environment is inevitable. Even with the most advanced systems in place, there were releases at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima. At gas stations,

my most disturbing releases were when the delivery driver steps away from his truck for a few seconds while making a delivery only to turn around to find the tanks being overfilled resulting in an uncontrolled release onto the ground.

So, what does Ossipee gain by supporting the construction of this station in Effingham? Does a letter of support from our Town representatives expose the Town of Ossipee to a lawsuit if a release does occur impacting neighboring drinking water wells? Who is going to monitor the quality of the groundwater to ensure that there are no impacts to the groundwater and nearby sensitive receptors? Are the interests of Ossipee's residents really being considered by this vote? As an after note, the Selectmen made their decision and voted on this issue before hearing public concerns at the town meeting. Is this standard practice?

*Sincerely,
Dana Simpson
Ossipee*