



Amherst Massachusetts

OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

Town Hall Mezzanine
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002-2351

Phone: (413) 259-3002
Fax: (413) 259-2405
townmanager@amherstma.gov

Town Response to the “Misconceptions vs. Facts” Document Distributed by the ACRES Group May 13, 2011 (REV. October 28, 2015)

Assertion #1: The cap is compromised and no longer functions adequately to protect humans, wildlife or the environment.

FACT: If this were so, the Town would have been ordered to take immediate remedial action. In fact, samples have been analyzed from numerous groundwater test wells and surface water test locations in or near the landfill for many years. Fifteen groundwater wells and 6 surface water locations are tested for contaminants annually. The groundwater data are compared to drinking water standards in accordance with the Department of Environmental Protection requirements, and the surface water data are compared to surface water standards.

The Department of Environmental Protection noted in a letter that lead and cadmium levels were elevated near Hop Brook (2007). The Department of Environmental Protection letter stated that because the samples were analyzed for total metals (not dissolved), the results might be artificially high due to possible presence of sediment in the samples. In 2008 and 2010 sampling events, metals samples were filtered and analyzed for dissolved metals, and detected concentrations were significantly lower. In fact, most detected concentrations were below primary drinking water standards. Only two wells exceeded drinking water standards in 2010 (for lead and cadmium), but these wells are located west and northwest of the landfill. Neither well is anywhere near nor hydraulically connected to Amherst’s public water supply wells. In addition, there has been no evidence of lead and cadmium impacts in sediment and surface water samples located near these wells.

Amherst’s drinking water supply wells located nearest to the landfill are located 1.5 miles to the southeast of the landfill. They are not contaminated, and since the groundwater under the landfill runs east to west from the landfill, they are safe. An older public water supply source, the Brickyard Well Field, was located 0.5 miles west of the landfill and was closed in 1980, BEFORE the landfill was capped. The Brickyard Well Field was located directly downgradient of the landfill, and was closed because:

- Their shallow depths made them more susceptible to contamination;
- The design of the well field made it difficult to run; and
- Low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) were detected.

Elevated metals were detected in sediment from the KC Trail wetland (arsenic and cadmium) and from the inlet of Gull Pond (arsenic). A focused risk characterization was performed to determine whether these levels posed a risk to human health. The risk characterization found a condition of No Significant Risk, and the Massachusetts Office of Research and Standards agreed with this finding in a review letter dated May 18, 2009.

In addition, elevated mercury levels were detected in an unnamed wetland off Hop Brook Drive. For the purposes of a risk evaluation, this wetland is considered a forested wetland that is not readily accessible to the general public and was not considered a significant human health or public safety exposure risk.

Amherst has an extensive network of groundwater monitoring wells and surface water sample locations. They have been tested for decades for numerous parameters, and detected impacts are minimal. These results clearly demonstrate the cap is protecting the environment. As stated by the Department of Environmental Protection in their 2010 letter, the data and analysis indicated there were no significant risks to human health or public safety posed by the landfill.

Assertion #2: Installation of a solar farm is larger and heavier than recreational uses rejected in the past and would prevent maintenance of the cap; the risks are greater than those posed by previous potential uses, which were rejected for reasons of susceptibility to damage from foot traffic and potential cap penetration by the creation of a bathroom or storage facility.

FACT: The solar array will not be as heavy as creating soccer fields would have been. Soccer fields would have entailed 12-18 inches of sand over the landfill area used, a layer of top soil, pipes for irrigation, permanent parking spaces, moving vehicles, and 100 or more persons per day of play. Many vehicles moving on and off the site every play day would have been damaging. The best judge of whether our landfill can take the weight of the solar array is the Department of Environmental Protection. They have to give a permit for us to proceed with this project; they will determine if there is a risk to the safety of the cap. If the permit is granted, and the developer subsequently causes a problem to our cap, the contract will hold the developer responsible for any damage.

Maintenance and mowing does occur on the landfill now, and would continue if there are solar panels there. Landfills have solar panels in other communities – the cap will not be penetrated by their addition. Any alteration to placing the panels and inverters would be as permitted by the Department of Environmental Protection. Even after the contract is signed, the project is contingent on receiving all necessary permits; if the project can't meet the permitting requirements, it will not proceed.

Assertion #3: The electricity will not be free and savings would not be realized for 15-20 years.

FACT: The fixed price that the Town would pay would be less than the current cost, thus generating savings from the start of power generation. While utility prices can be volatile in the short term, most industry analysts believe electricity prices will rise in the long-term because of expensive distribution system investments needed by the utilities, and thus we can expect significant savings over the course of the contract – estimated to be as much as \$2.5 million over 20 years. Many of us sign a similar contract for home heating oil – agreeing to pay a fixed price over the year – on the assumption that we would rather pay that than probable increases in rates. In addition, the property taxes on the equipment will be a new source of Town revenue.

Assertion #4: The old landfill is too fragile for a solar project and could endanger the drinking water supply and the surrounding neighborhood – the project should go someplace else.

FACT: The landfill is the largest expanse of Town-owned, open land suitable for solar power. It has always been the Town's option to find a safe and appropriate re-use of the capped landfill property. Please refer to section 1 for information about the safety of our drinking water supply.

Assertion #5: The old landfill site is an environmental problem; adding a solar array would increase the problem and hamper monitoring and remediation.

FACT: The old landfill site is safe, and poses no threat to humans or the environment. The Department of Environmental Protection has strict standards for capped landfills and requires compliance. Monitoring and maintenance of the site will continue before, during and after the project in order to ensure continued safety. If the Department of Environmental Protection concludes that the solar project would endanger the safety of the cap or impede its monitoring and maintenance, they will not grant the permit to allow the project to proceed.

Assertion #6: Some old landfill sites, including ours, are unsuitable for solar projects; Longmeadow recently rejected a solar project on their old landfill

FACT: Many other communities have decided on solar panels for their landfills. At the time the landfill was created, lining was not part of the process. Later the landfill was closed, subsequently capped, and the data cited above show that our drinking water is not endangered. Brickyard Well Field, a former water supply, was closed before the cap was put on and lies in the direction that water moves from the landfill; the Lawrence swamp is a mile away and not in that direction. The Department of Environmental Protection has consistently found the old landfill site to be safe; they have required monitoring and maintenance to ensure that safety, and they will continue to do so, with or without a solar array there. If they determine that a solar array risks compromising that safety, they will not allow the project to proceed.

Assertion #7: The landfill doesn't meet DEP standards.

FACT: The Department of Environmental Protection has consistently determined that the landfill is safe and is not a risk to humans, to the Town's drinking water supply or to the environment.