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Compost facility pitched for Freetown

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FREETOWN — A company proposing to build an organic recycling center in a gravel pit off Copicut Road made an informational presentation before selectmen Monday night.

The Peninsula Compost Group of North Easton is a commercial composting company that has been turning food and yard waste into garden compost at an existing facility in Wilmington, Del., since November.

The company met with Dartmouth officials in March to talk about siting a similar center at that town's Energy Park.

"We have a hot line to deal with complaints and we haven't had a single call yet," Charles Gifford, the company's managing director, told a group of neighbors who expressed concerns about problems with odor, traffic, vermin, airborne bacteria and leakage.

"The EPA has cited us as a facility that they want to see in every town in the country. Everyone wants this stuff. We can't keep it in," Gifford said. "Every state wants their topsoils to absorb more water and this material does that. This is going to be a requirement in the future."

If approved, the proposed facility will occupy 9 acres currently owned by K.R. Rezendes and will be capable of processing 80,000 tons of waste annually — predominantly food waste from large producers such as supermarkets, hospitals, restaurants and schools.

According to the presentation delivered by company chief operating officer Whitney Hall, the waste in Wilmington is delivered to the plant in sealed trucks, then shredded inside a building equipped with an air filtration system. It is then mixed with wood and stored outside in large piles, sealed beneath a fabric made by the Gore company, makers of Gore-Tex.

This prevents any odor from escaping and, by controlling the moisture and oxygen content in the piles, finished compost can be produced in as little as eight weeks. The temperature inside the pile reaches 180 degrees, Hall said.

The benefits to the town of allowing the company to operate "might be tied to a per-ton basis," Hall said. But he said there were other benefits, as well, including job creation, increased property tax revenue, free compost to residents and a measurable reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

In response to fears about odor control, Gifford sought to reassure neighbors.

"Massachusetts law says you cannot have odor at the property line and, if we create a problem, they will shut us down," he said.

The company has been operating a similar facility on Nantucket for the past 15 years using a different technology, he added.

Company officials concluded by inviting selectmen and interested parties to tour the facility in Delaware at the company's expense.

The next step in the process would require the company to go before the Planning Board to seek a permit and

public hearings would be a part of that, Selectman Jean C. Fox said.

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