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Sustainability Campus and Landfill No. 3

Frequently Asked Questions – General Project Updates

1. What is the status of the Sustainability Campus and landfill project and when will the landfill be built?

Madison-based Strang, Inc. and sub-contractor Foth Engineering continue their work designing the first phase of Campus buildings and infrastructure, including: a waste education center, scale house, maintenance facility, material drop-off areas, and associated roadways and other related infrastructure. The design team will be presenting the concepts to the City of Madison's various planning committees in the coming months. We expect to be able to start construction on the infrastructure (roadways, buildings, etc.) by **spring of 2026**.



Figure above: Conceptual rendering of the Sustainability Campus' Waste Education Center, looking southwest.

The Department has also been undertaking efforts to permit a new Dane County landfill on the Eastern portion of what is now the Yahara Hills Golf Course. Under Wisconsin State law a landfill owner proposing a new landfill or an expansion of an existing landfill must submit a detailed feasibility report to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). W+R submitted this required documents in early 2025. In May 2025, W+R was given notice by WDNR that the **feasibility report is complete**.

Though a feasibility report completeness determination is a major step, this is not an approval of the proposed landfill. It does confirm that the minimum

information required by chapter NR 512, Wis. Adm. Code, and s. 289.24(3), Wis. Stats., has been provided. The information provided includes:

- a comprehensive and detailed site-specific geologic and hydrogeologic investigation
- a preliminary engineering design;
- an environmental analysis;
- documentation of the need for the proposed landfill; and
- an analysis of the alternatives to landfilling, such as waste reduction, reuse, recycling, composting and energy recovery initiatives and services.

Now that the feasibility report is determined to be complete, the report and its associated documents will be posted on the WDNR's website for public review and comment. W+R expects the report was [posted online](#) by WDNR on Wednesday, May 21st, beginning the 30-day public comment period.

After the public comment period has ended, the WDNR will issue a feasibility determination which, if positive, allows W+R to proceed with development of a detailed plan of operation for the proposed landfill, which is the final step in the landfill permitting process. Construction on the landfill is anticipated to begin by late 2026 or early 2027 with operation beginning in late 2027 or early 2028.

2. Why is this project needed?

We all generate and take out our trash each week. For Dane County's half a million residents, this adds up to over 450,000 tons of waste each year. All of that stuff has to go somewhere and responsible waste management is necessary to protect human health and the environment.

We could in theory haul all of our waste to a landfill outside of Dane County, but that would come with significant negative social, environmental, and economic impacts. It would shift the burden of our waste to another community and cost money and emit greenhouse gases to transport the waste. The responsible thing to do is to find a way to manage our own waste locally.

3. Why can't we recycle all of our waste or turn it all into renewable energy?

Our community's ultimate goal should be "zero waste" production. Waste is actually a collection of resources that should be diverted for reuse, recycling, or conversion to renewable energy.

Dane County already strives for landfilling as a last resort and is a national leader on waste diversion and waste-to-energy. At our current site, we have a year-round [Clean Sweep](#) program and [recycling programs](#) for shingles, tires, metals, bikes, wood, and [construction & demolition waste](#). We have also invested \$29 million in a [Renewable Natural Gas Facility](#) that converts landfill gas to renewable vehicle fuel and generates revenue.

Currently, there are significant challenges preventing us from diverting all waste for recycling or energy production and the most economic and technologically feasible way to manage materials that cannot be recycled is by landfilling. The intent of the Sustainability Campus is to allow us to adapt to, and even create, new technologies as they become technologically and economically feasible.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the importance of waste reduction measures and preventing waste in the first place. Waste education is a major part in achieving "zero waste" and is central to the goal and vision of this project. Learn about some of our current educational programs [here](#).

4. What type of recycling activities would occur in the Sustainability Campus?

In Spring of 2025, through a Request for Information (RFI) process, the County sought partners whose ideas, technologies, and operations can advance sustainability, educate the public, create jobs, and reduce waste, while generating marketable products such as raw materials, recycled products, and energy. RFIs were designed to evaluate interest, gather ideas, and assess feasibility while minimizing the burden on both respondents and the County. Responses to RFIs will be used to identify the most promising approaches, and inform future Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for operation on the Campus.

The application period closed on March 21, 2025, and yielded a tremendous response. In total, we received 45 submissions from across Wisconsin and

throughout the country! Responses included advanced recycling, community education, bicycle repair, building material reuse, mattress recycling, and much more. We are currently working with consultants and project partners to assess viability and alignment with the Department's priorities, which include waste diversion, advancement of the circular economy, renewable energy generation, and job creation. We've already begun planning with potential partners on projects that require no land or investment, and are conducting follow-up discussions with partners that may physically set up shop on the new site. We anticipate releasing at least one formal RFP for development by Spring 2026.

5. Why is this location being proposed and not another?

There are a number of factors that go into considering a potential site, including setbacks from private wells and wetlands, land topography, hydrology, surrounding land uses, and access to utilities.

The Yahara Hills site has a number of advantages for this project including its proximity to the urban center of our County, which minimizes waste disposal costs and allows for easy access to the site. These cost savings are passed to our customers. Since many of our customers serve municipalities, ultimately, these savings are reflected on our property tax bills.

Additionally, this project centers on the Sustainability Campus which will attract and encourage recycling businesses right here in Dane County and provide our area a unique economic development opportunity. This site is close to City utilities, transportation routes, and other businesses, making it ideal for the Sustainability Campus. Due to these reasons, we are not currently pursuing any other sites.

6. How will this project impact the surrounding neighbors?

With the proposed Campus's proximity to our existing facility, we will continue to share many of the same neighbors. We also realize this plan will bring the future landfill approximately ½ mile closer to some residents. For over 35 years, we have worked hard to be the best neighbors possible, listening to concerns and making adjustments to our operations when possible. This is a responsibility that we take seriously, and we will continue to do everything possible to limit our impacts.

There are also regulatory and contractual requirements that will be or have been developed for this site to help reduce and mitigate the potential impacts. Site design and operations are regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the [local negotiated agreement](#) with the surrounding communities determines key elements of the project.

Additional details about other potential concerns are included in later responses.

7. What are the opportunities for public input and what approvals are needed?

Public input is key to the success of this project and we look forward to engaging with the community about what the future of waste management looks like for Dane County. There will be many opportunities for public input during the planning process, and Dane County will consider all of that feedback as we work to design and develop this site.

The County will host or attend informational sessions as needed through the course of planning for the project. A project timeline with opportunities for community input can be found on our [project webpage](#) under the “engage”, and “timeline” sections. This project will continue to go before several County and City committee meetings during the approval process and the WDNR will hold a public comment period for the feasibility report.

In addition, we have heard recent requests for additional ways to provide comments and concerns and have created a feedback section on our webpage [here, under our Contact Us webpage](#)

8. How and when will access to the site be determined and how will this project impact traffic?

Vehicle access to the site will be determined after a traffic study and review of setbacks and requirements. The primary objectives will be to maintain safety and minimize impacts to neighboring communities. Preliminary access points are currently established on Cty Hwy AB and on Millpond Road. Access points and traffic plans will need to be approved through the City of Madison’s land use process and by the Dane County Public Works & Transportation Committee.

Traffic routes and vehicle restrictions are part of the [local negotiated agreement](#) with nearby municipalities and we the primary truck route will be from US Hwy 12/18. This will minimize impacts to traffic on town and county roadways such as Siggelkow Road and Cty Hwy and AB.

9. When will construction start?

Construction of some elements of the Sustainability Campus, including a Waste Education Center (and Administrative Building) and composting area, are proposed to start by spring of 2026. These early elements of the project will impact a relatively small footprint of the site. Operation of the landfill is not anticipated to be needed until approximately late 2027 or early 2028, or after the completion of the plan of operation.

10. What will happen to golf?

It is at the discretion of the City of Madison to determine the future for golf at the Yahara site. The City formed the Task Force on Municipal Golf in 2019 to address ten years of negative net income and offer recommendations on how to make golf more financially and environmentally sustainable. The [recommendations from the Task Force](#) included a recommendation to reduce the number of holes to 18 (from 36) at the Yahara site. This proposed project accommodates for 18 holes of golf at the site until at least 2045 and possibly beyond. Dane County is committed to maintaining the level of play and positive golf experience at the site through natural buffers, protection of trees and screening, and both attentiveness and responsiveness to any concerns from golfers and City Parks staff.

11. How will recreation be incorporated into the landfill site?

Utilization of surrounding greenspace for recreation and education will be a focus of our master planning efforts, and Dane County intends to maintain recreation before, during, and after operating at the Yahara site. Dane County Parks Division will also be incorporating the current Rodefild landfill and surrounding lands into their next Parks and Open Space Plan. Upon the closure of the Rodefild site, up to 100 acres of land will be available for recreation which will serve our community until the Yahara site is ultimately returned to open space.

Additional recreational opportunities at the Yahara or Rodefild site could include trails for hiking, biking, cross country skiing and space for activities such as disc golf. Our vision for a multi-use recreational site would allow more people than ever before to enjoy the space in a variety of ways.

12. How high will the landfill go?

There are physical limits to how high a landfill can be built based on stability of the slopes and geotechnical investigations. The height of the landfill also determines the capacity and the length of time the landfill site could serve the community.

With the preliminary design submitted as part of the Feasibility Report, the final elevation is proposed to be 1,135 feet high or about 230-240 feet above current ground elevation. For comparison, the existing landfill is approved to go to 1,060 feet high, but the Rodefild site is narrower which limits the vertical height. The final elevation of the proposed landfill will be determined through the Local Negotiations and the Plan of Operations.

13. What are the requirements for building a landfill near private wells and what is the risk to groundwater?

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources requires that a landfill's limits of waste boundary must be at least 1,200 feet from any private or public water supply wells. The landfill owner may request a smaller distance if it can be demonstrated that there would be no impact to the water supply (adequate hydrology, well construction, depth, etc.). This type of request also requires notification to the landowner and allows for the landowner to have the opportunity to be involved in the landfill permitting and design process.

Modern landfills, like the Rodefild Landfill and any future landfill, are highly engineered and carefully constructed to ensure protection of the environment. There are also various requirements for landfills to monitor the groundwater and private wells surrounding the site to ensure that the water quality continues to remain consistent with conditions prior to the landfiling activities. Through our 35-year history of monitoring groundwater at and near the Rodefild site, our team of staff, consultants, and regulators have not observed any results that would indicate that the landfill is impacting groundwater.

14. What will be done to control landfill odors?

We are committed to doing everything possible to minimize odors. Landfill odors are caused by constituents in biogas that are produced during the breakdown of the waste we all generate from our households and businesses. The most effective way for us to control odors is to control the landfill gas with a robust and well-functioning landfill gas extraction system. To achieve this, we have and will continue to use the following management practices:

- Install permanent cap over closed areas of the landfill. This cap is engineered to include multiple layers, including a layer of HDPE plastic, and the cap is over 4-feet thick in depth. Covering the waste with a cap creates a physical barrier that prevents gas from leaving the waste.
- Install temporary cover soils over as much of the uncapped landfill area as possible.
- Cover the active area of the landfill at the end of each day.
- Install landfill gas wells sooner and closer together than required to collect landfill gas as it is generated. To learn more about our landfill gas collection and treatment system, check out [this video](#).
- Utilize advanced gas collection and monitoring systems that remotely monitor our gas extraction wells every 15 minutes and automatically make adjustments to maximize the gas collection effectiveness.
- Monitor the gas extraction system on a daily basis and inspect and monitor our entire wellfield at least monthly. We also perform a scan of the surface of the landfill each quarter to identify any areas where gas could be travelling through the cover.

Varying conditions such as barometric pressure, wind patterns, and humidity do temporarily impact gas collection abilities and odors. We have invested in a number of tools and practices to respond to these conditions including:

- Mobile odorant misting system
- Perimeter odor neutralizing vapor system
- Surface application of deodorant, as needed
- On-site weather stations to monitor these conditions

We have heard recent requests for additional ways to provide comments and concerns and have created a feedback section on our webpage [here](#).

15. Will the landfill attract pests?

We are required to minimize conditions that would attract pests and animals such as rodents, birds, and burrowing animals. These efforts include covering the waste daily, paid professional pest control, and regular visual checks for signs of animal intrusion on the landfill. We don't commonly receive comments or concerns from our existing neighbors about pests.

Of note, we have invested in native pollinator seed mixes on our landfill cover and are committed to habitat restoration so that the site attracts a diversity of species of wildlife.

16. How will this project impact storm water?

This project will meet or exceed stormwater management requirements of the City of Madison, Dane County and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. We also plan to implement sustainability goals for any development which will include targets for green infrastructure practices including rain gardens, permeable pavement, and green roofs to promote infiltration and further reduce any downstream flooding impacts.

Additionally, The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is in final design of roadway improvements for US Hwy 12/18 and Cty Hwy AB, located adjacent to this site. The roadway project includes the construction of a large stormwater pond on the north east corner of the Yahara Hills site. The pond includes capacity to handle surface water runoff from the property. The intent of this pond is to help with current storm water management issues at the site. This project is scheduled to begin in 2022.

17. What impacts will this project have on property values and are neighbors compensated for potential impacts?

Our ultimate goal is to be an asset and have positive impacts on our surrounding communities by being a source of economic growth, jobs, recreation, educational

opportunities, and renewable energy. Despite this, there is the potential for adverse effects on individual properties located near the landfill.

To provide our closest neighbors additional security, we have property value guarantees within our current local negotiated agreement which require us to compensate these homeowners if their home does not sell for appraised market value. Since this agreement started in 1994, the County has only had to compensate neighbors under this provision three times.

Additionally, as a part of our current [local negotiated agreement](#) we also provide annual compensation to our closest neighbors.

18. Whose waste is being disposed of in the landfill and does the landfill take waste from outside of the County?

In our current local negotiated agreement, only 5% of our waste is allowed to be from outside of Dane County. The actual quantity of out-of-county waste we accept is far less, and we only exercise this option in unique circumstances.

The majority of Dane County's waste is disposed of at the Rodefild landfill, but not all of it. Each municipality is responsible for waste collections and can contract for their waste disposal services which sometimes results in waste leaving the County (most commonly if a contracted hauler also owns a landfill).

19. What are the steps for permitting a landfill?

Permitting a landfill is a multi-step process that is under the jurisdiction of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). The first step, is obtaining the WDNR's initial opinion on the suitability of a proposed landfill site. This included an onsite inspection with WDNR staff. This first step also included a preliminary report assessing the locational criteria (setbacks from waterways, private wells, etc.). These first steps are formally referred to as the **Initial Site Inspection** and **Initial Site Report**.

The next step included a preliminary design for the site and the WDNR assesses the need for the landfill and determines the feasibility of the concept. This step took several years to complete and includes extensive groundwater monitoring and subsurface investigations. This step is formally referred to as the **Feasibility Study/Report**. The local **negotiated agreement process** was a requirement of this step of the permitting process.

The last major step includes the development of a plan of operations for the site. This includes a more detailed design of the landfill, a phasing plan, and takes several months, or even years, to prepare. This step is formally referred to as the **Plan of Operation**.

The entire process is expected to take another year or two.

20. What level of screening is going to be provided for nearby homeowners and golf course users?

To the extent possible, Dane County will protect and save existing mature trees on the site. Additional screening, most preferably natural screening, such as trees and shrubs, will be planted in advance of the project to allow time for maturation of the trees. Screening could also come in the form of soil berms or fencing. We are required to provide adequate screening of the landfill and during the final stages of permitting, Dane County will need to obtain the WDNR' approval of plans for providing screening.