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Communities in Odenton will continue their 30-plus year fight to stop a landfill from coming to town after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined an endangered bat species would not be threatened by the project.

National Waste Managers, an entity run by Halle Companies of Silver Spring, has sought to put a rubble landfill, which will store debris including asbestos, in Odenton since 1988. The surrounding neighborhoods, including [a historic Black area](#) and a large retirement community, have been working to stop it for decades.

Their [latest attempt to block the project](#) involved the northern long-eared bat, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had classified as endangered in March 2023.

The service, a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior, runs the 13,000-acre Patuxent Research Refuge, which abuts the proposed landfill site. It has been studying plant and animal life in the area for decades and conducted acoustic bat surveys there between 2012 and 2017 that suggested the northern long-eared bats may be nearby.

The bureau wrote a letter to the Maryland Department of the Environment last May alerting it to the fact that the northern long-eared bat had recently been listed as an endangered species.

The developer was required to have an endangered species consultation performed with guidance from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under the Endangered Species Act.

In November, the service sent a letter to the corps saying it had determined the project did not appear to pose a threat to the bats, said Maryland Department of the Environment spokesperson Jay Apperson.

The pieces of the property on which operations will take place used to be sand and gravel mines, therefore northern long-eared bats would likely not have created homes in those areas. The developer did agree, however, not to clear trees during the bats' active season between April and November, according to a letter the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wrote to the Corps.

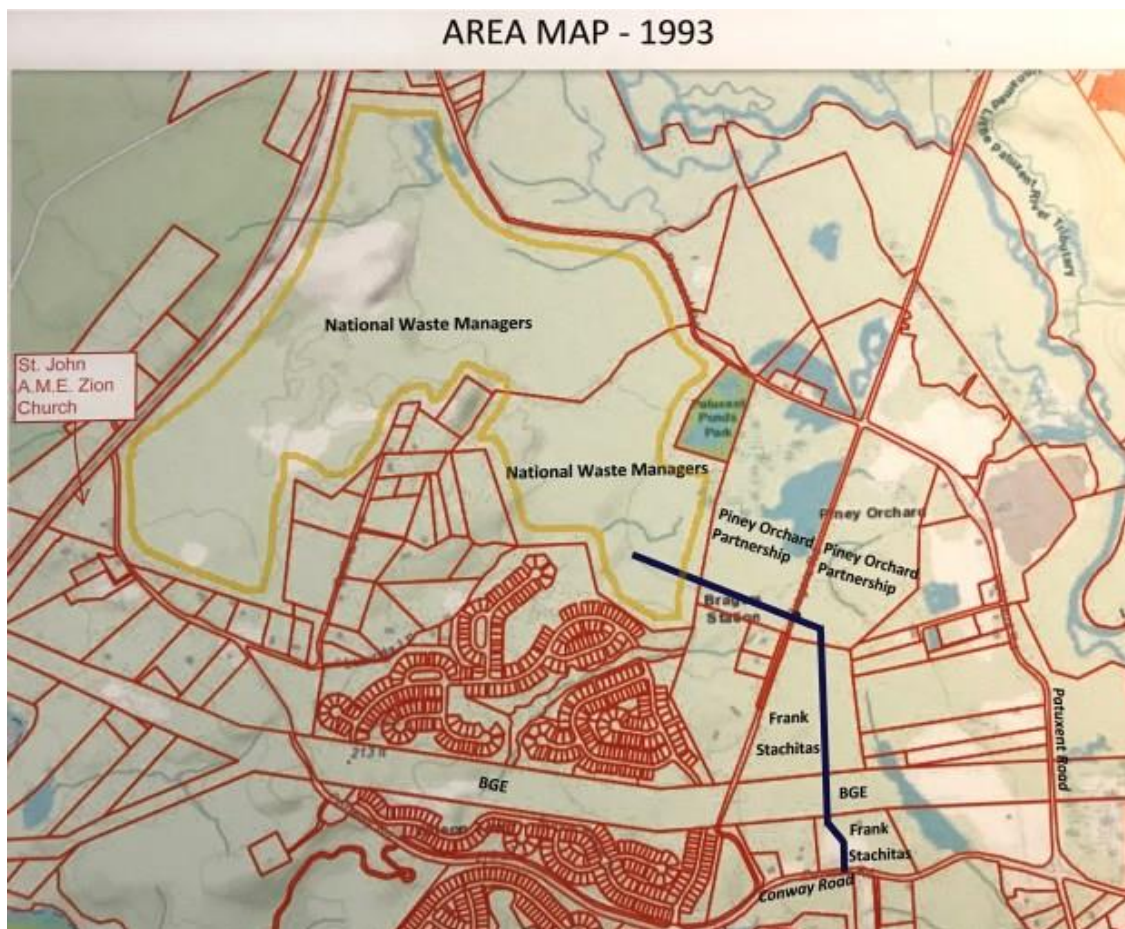
"Based on the project description and evaluation of effects, the Service concurs the project may affect, but not likely to adversely affect the [northern long-eared bats]," the service wrote.

This enabled the department to keep working on the company's permit, which is likely to be decided on soon.

Northern long-eared bats were listed as an endangered species because of a fungal infection they are prone to that leads to dehydration and starvation. White-nose syndrome, as it's known, has been decimating the bat population since the mid-1990s, according to the Department of the Interior.

"We knew the bats were probably a long shot, but it was worth it," said Julie Hummer, the area's representative on the Anne Arundel County Council, who reaffirmed her and County Executive Steuart Pittman's long-held positions that they will do whatever it takes to block the landfill.

Once the developers receive the permit to dispose of refuse at the site, they need to get county approvals to operate there. A condition that was tacked onto the project stipulates that the entrance to the site had to be at a specific location on Conway Road. The county purchased that property years ago to build Two Rivers Elementary School, which officially opens in the fall, Hummer said.



The project would be dead in the water if the current county administration were to be in place in perpetuity, but another administration more sympathetic to the developers could help them work around the stipulations that had been set forth. Another county executive could appoint a director of planning and zoning who would accept another entrance point and enable the project to move forward.

Many area residents speculate that was the reason behind [employees of Halle Companies and their families donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to Jessica Haire's campaign](#) when she ran against Pittman in the 2022 county executive election. The former Anne Arundel County Council member from Edgewater lost to Pittman, the incumbent. Pittman's second and final term runs through 2026.

Halle Companies did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

"Hopefully we will be able to follow all the legal channels while we're still with this administration and fight," Hummer said. "If not, I am certain it will be a campaign issue for the next county executive."

One group who will make sure of it is the Two Rivers Residents — Landfill Opposition Committee, a group of residents in a nearby retirement community that is firmly against the landfill, [fearing it could affect the quality of their drinking water and pose other environmental hazards](#).

Given that the Maryland Department of the Environment offered a tentative approval notice before the bat issue was raised, the committee expects the refuse disposal permit will be granted and is eager for the next stage, when the fate of the project is in the county's hands.

"We are looking forward to having the permitting responsibility get through the county," said Ed Riehl, a Two Rivers resident who leads the opposition committee. "It is a frustratingly slow process. We remain optimistic, but we're looking forward to getting to the end."

This may not be the end of the developers' battle with the area's wildlife. The monarch butterfly and tricolored bat species are likely to become listed as endangered soon, the service said in its letter. If they do, the developers will need to do more endangered species consultations.