

NorthJersey.com

Dumont mayor asks state to check handling of DPW pollution

Thursday, November 4, 2010

Last updated: Thursday November 4, 2010, 1:23 AM

BY STEVE KELMAN

Twin-Boro News

STAFF WRITER

Dumont Mayor Matthew McHale is seeking a state investigation into the way a previous Republican administration handled long-time contamination at the borough's DPW facility.

The mayor's move is being criticized by Republicans as a campaign ploy timed to influence last week's council election.

In a letter sent Friday, Oct. 22 to Attorney General Paula Dow, McHale requested an investigation into the way the contamination was handled.

"It has become apparent that the borough will incur significant liability for the continued remediation, that there may be health and property damage issues that could present themselves, and as mayor of the borough, I am obligated to bring these issues to the attention of your office," McHale said in his letter.

Republicans who were council candidates in last week's election said they were incensed at what they saw as an attempt to discredit their party before the voting.

"This is a political tactic – something that was thrown up against the wall to see what would stick," former Mayor and council candidate William Bochicchio was quoted as saying.

"To give people in town a false idea of what happened as a fear tactic to vote Democratic really bothers me," he said.

Several Republicans questioned whether a Sept. 29 letter from the state Department of Environmental Protection, bringing attention to the pollution at the site and discussed by the governing body at a recent council meeting, was really the first time that the pollution-related issues were brought to the attention of the borough.

The DEP letter details 29 years of history at the site, including groundwater and soil contamination from underground fuel storage tanks, much of it taking place during

NorthJersey.com

the early 1990s.

Borough officials said that they learned about the contamination for the first time from the letter, and that there were no records about the pollution on file.

The mayor denied that the timing of his letter was political.

"After nine years of not hearing from the DEP, I did not ask them to send a letter on Sept. 29," the mayor was quoted as saying.

"This is the last thing I wanted the community to deal with, whether it's October or January."

In another letter written by the mayor to Gov. Chris Christie, McHale wrote that he found it, "unsettling that such a significant environmental hazard could remain open without follow-up from any state authorities for a period of nine years."

DEP inspectors visited the DPW site in July and September.

Borough Administrator John Perkins he was informed about the contamination in July after a DEP inspection. In an earlier report, he said inspectors did not provide details about the pollution but told him a letter would be

sent within 45 days.

Perkins said he briefed the council on the July inspection, but that a detailed letter did not come until after a second visit by DEP inspectors on Sept. 16.

Former Republican Mayor Donald Winant, in an interview that was part of an earlier report, said that there was no way that the borough could have ignored the DEP.

"We went through years and years of investigation," he was quoted as saying, "With the DEP, you can't just drop the ball."

Winant was mayor from 1992 until 2005.

In a brief telephone interview last week, McHale said he was hopeful that an investigation would "finally get some justice from those who bankrupted our town."

E-mail: twinboro@northjersey.com