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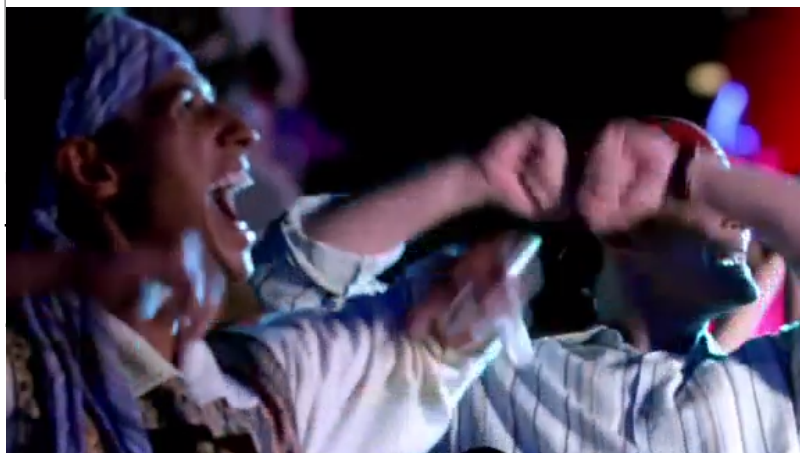
Concern over proposal to divert million gallons a day from Norwalk River

By Pat Tomlinson Updated 3:15 pm EDT, Wednesday, October 24, 2018

WILTON — An application to withdraw up to one million gallons of water from a Cannondale well field has sent ripples of concern throughout town.

The Aquarion Water Company is seeking to divert water from the well, which it built in 1982 near the Norwalk River, to improve the company's "drought resiliency," according to the application submitted to the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Oct. 3.

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Aquarion, a subsidiary of Eversource that supplies water to more than 625,000 people around the state, said the diversion will be a burden on the western Connecticut that are tied

to more resources," said Peter

The drought, the worst in the state since the 1960s, required emergency lines to be placed along the Merritt Parkway, as well as emergency irrigation restrictions. At the drought's peak, Greenwich was down to 45 days worth of water, according to Fazekas.

Fazekas said tapping into this previously unused well, which sits between Danbury and Pimpewaug roads just south of the Cannondale train station, could ensure such measures won't need to be taken in another such drought. The application, however, would allow Aquarion unfettered access to the well on an ongoing basis for up to 25 years.

According to the application, the water will be drawn from both below-ground sources and the Norwalk River. Similar diversions are being made from reservoirs in the greater

Bridgeport system in Fairfield, too.

"It simply makes a lot of sense to use a water resource that we've already developed that is in the southwest region to provide for that region," he said.

Despite Aquarion's reasoning, town officials and residents are alarmed by the plan.

"This is a great matter of concern for myself, for the town employees that are involved, neighbors, residents of the community," First Selectwoman Lynne Vanderslice said.

"Town staff and town counsel are all giving this their full attention."

Vanderslice said the town is still in the fact-gathering phase, and that getting all the information on the application is "critical." The town has "engaged" attorney Stephen Studer of Berchem & Moses, who has experience with municipal water diversion applications, to investigate the state's timeline for the diversion.

State Rep. Gail Lavielle, R-143, echoed the first selectwoman's concerns during a town hall forum at Middlebrook School last week.

"I am concerned. I don't know how concerned I am yet, because I don't have all the information. I know the town is taking the necessary measures to consult on this ... We do need to be concerned," she said.

The application claims there will be "no permanent construction-related impact" to surrounding wetlands. Mitigation plans for the project include a permanent stream gaging station for the Norwalk River that would limit pumping-related activity to "10 percent of the calculated seven-day average Norwalk River flow" so as to maintain aquatic life.

The pumping, the application added, would not be done during the "critical vernal pool breeding period" between March and June.

The mitigation plans, however, have done little to allay the concerns of Louise Washer, president of the Norwalk River Watershed Association, and other stakeholders.

"This would potentially reduce the flow in the river by up to 10 percent and affect the wetlands near the river, and potentially people's wells nearby — those are our concerns,

as well as the degree to which those effects would degrade water quality," she said.

Washer expressed concern that the water diversion project could compound the potential environmental degradation resulting from other large state projects like the Walk Bridge Project and the Route 15-Route 7 interchange work that will be happening in Norwalk.

"We need to step back and look at the combined effects of all of these projects," she added.

Washer will be meeting with other stakeholders, including Harbor Watch, and concerned residents in the lead-up to a Nov. 7 closed-doors meeting with Aquarion.

Doug Hoskins, an environmental analyst for DEEP, said that the department has 180 days to review the application, however he is aiming to have it completed within 60 days.

Following the review, the department can choose to have or forgo a public hearing as it sees fit. Either way, the department must post a public notice. However, if a petition of at least 25 signatures is received within 30 days of the notice being posted, DEEP must hold a hearing.

After a public hearing is held, the hearing officer must render a decision within 120 days of the hearing's closing. If no decision is offered by then, the application is deemed granted.

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