

WATER QUALITY AND CONTAMINATION

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH**

TESTIMONY OF *INGRID BEER*

Homeowner, Plains Road, New York and Member, Plains Road Water Watch

September 7, 2016

My name is Ingrid Beer. I live on Plains Road in New Paltz, New York.

We have come to Albany today to ask your help in avoiding a likely environmental disaster in New Paltz, New York.

We desperately seek your help. Underground water is a priceless resource. What is about to happen in New Paltz is the destruction of a resource *that took millions of years to create.*

To summarize quickly: A temporary, backup water source will be required in New Paltz during several, ten-week periods of repair to the Catskill Aqueduct. This will begin in late 2017. New York City has agreed to pay for the temporary source. But the only "solution" -- for which New York City will pay -- will dewater our wells, spoil our wells, and spoil the wells that service dozens of homes on Plains Road and in the surrounding community.

Several *completely feasible* alternatives exist for the temporary water supply that is needed. One environmentally-sound alternative is water from the Wallkill River. The Wallkill River, runs through New Paltz, directly behind the property in

question. Wallkill River water could easily be treated and supply the temporary backup that is needed. Also, the nearby Town of Lloyd filters its water and has an abundant supply. Temporarily using water from the Town of Lloyd would not disturb the Plains Road aquifer at all.

It is known that there is a grave risk here. Hydrogeologist Paul Rubin has written:

“The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation should deny a temporary 10 week water supply application, because doing so will unnecessarily and adversely affect a community when several alternate water sources may be suitable.”

The horrible and sad aspect of this situation is that even though the water source is needed for a **temporary** time frame, once the underground water supply is drawn down, the damage to the Plains Road aquifer will be **permanent**. We need a *temporary* fix for a *temporary* lack of water. But the decision to pump at Plains Road will be irrevocable; the damage will be forever.

The Town admits that if pumping is permitted, this groundwater will never come back as clean water again.

The decision to use and destroy the Plains Road aquifer was made behind the scenes. The Town Board and NYC selected the most environmentally-damaging is option . No valid scientific or environmental reasons were ever given for rejecting other options. All efforts have concentrated on the Plains Road site, without creating any "Plan B."

Regrettably, due to the influx of "New York City money," Town officials have taken the viewpoint that they will "take the money and run."

SEQRA, the state law designed to safeguard our environment, has been short circuited dramatically in New Paltz.

In their decision making, New Paltz Town officials relied solely on the local engineer's report. We are concerned that this same engineer, who did the limited SEQRA study, will be paid for the design and construction work. There should be independent review. Officials and firms in the Town of New Paltz are being paid by the Town to oversee their own work. This is an inappropriate conflict of interest.

We want to make sure that our community conducts this large water project the right way. We do not have a single thing to gain here. We remain personally neutral.

NYC should also want to make this right. Historically, we know that, in its search for public water, New York City has sometimes created havoc in small, upstate communities. Here, once again, New York City has not taken sufficient care of the costs – including social costs, economic costs and environmental costs-- to local residents and the community.

The New Paltz Town Board can, at best, be seen as scrambling, inadequately informed, and willfully overlooking all opinions except one. State and local officials been uncooperative and obtuse toward our concerns. Our FOIL requests to local officials have been ignored -- sometimes for months -- and denied.

We want the Town and Village of New Paltz to plan correctly for water usage in our community. In Hoosick Falls, Newburgh and elsewhere, terrible consequences have come from poor planning, questionable practices and mistakes

in judgment. Government officials were aware of problems long before the public was notified.

We are asking you to look very closely into the situation . We are asking the State Department of Environmental Conservation to direct that our Town Board to look toward a better environmental choice.

Do not destroy the Plains Rd aquifer. In our opinion, the best choice at this juncture is to pump water from the Town of Lloyd, where there would be no conflict of interest and no possibility of environmental devastation to a healthy aquifer.

Lloyd's water will comfortably meet the future water needs of our growing community with a known cost factor and availability.

In summary, here is what we are asking you to do. We want an overall and independent planning agency for water in New York State . Small towns do not have water experts.

We ask the State to compel the Town of New Paltz to do a better job. The state should look at the SEQRA process and direct the Town do further study. The Town Board of New Paltz will be applying for a permit to the allow these massive water withdrawals on Plains Road. We call on the state to deny this permit. If a permit is granted, the result will be destruction of an ancient and critical aquifer.

Please help us *now* to avoid a pending disaster in New Paltz.

Thank you.