

SO, WHAT IS GOING ON WITH THE WATER? QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS

By John Karas

The Bloomfield Town Council told a full house of citizens at its February 22 meeting that its only action on the Niagara facility had to do with a tax abatement. The building and related site considerations are under the control of the town Planning and Zoning commission, town officials pointed out. That explanation did not assuage an obviously upset assembly of citizens, many of them from neighboring communities that overflowed the town council chambers to vent their frustration with learning of the town's approval of the Niagara Water Company's plan to construct a 400,000 square foot water bottling facility on the east side of Woodland Avenue in an industrial zoned district.

Niagara and owner Frank Sponzo senior finalized their deal last week, with the parcel on Woodland Street changing hands for a little more than \$5 million dollars. Niagara also paid about \$500,000 in taxes and permit fees for the planned facility, which is planned to eventually house three bottling lines, consuming an estimated \$1.8 million gallons of water, provided by MDC.

While opponents to the project have stated a number of environmental concerns for the facility, four points they make seem to have gained some political traction and are already eliciting response from the local and state political leadership.

- The transparency of the permitting process in Bloomfield, that some say was exceedingly covert.

- The tax abatement the town gave Niagara to convince the company to locate its facility in Bloomfield

- The lower price that Niagara will pay for the water it will use, that is far less than that of residential users.

- The possibility that in case of drought, residents may have to curb their water use, while Niagara will still be bottling and selling it.

During the Monday meeting Mayor Joan Gamble unveiled a series of measures to increase transparency of the town's functions, and specifically the permitting process. Among them, the Mayor proposed emailing to interested residents the agendas of meeting and the schedules of various committees, and also obliging developers to disclose the name of the entities

that will benefit from an application. Niagara, the company claims for business competition reasons, did not reveal its name as the interested party in the project until late in the process.

Gamble, whose start in politics was a very similar situation, when she spearheaded

islation to address a number of the problems that became obvious during what many in the area call the "water-fight."

The legislation, that was successfully raised for public hearing by Planning and Development aims to:

1. Prohibiting discount pricing

DAVID BARAM AND BETH BYE PROPOSE LEGISLATION



State Representative David Baram

State Representative David Baram and State Senator Beth Bye have introduced legislation that would:

1. Prohibit discount pricing for commercial users (with some exceptions for hospitals etc) below what residential consumers pay.

2. Make rationing in a shortage apply equally to commercial and residential users.

opposition to a proposed business facility, announced also her willingness to meet with "Bloomfield Citizens," the group that has coordinated the response to the plan.

On the tax abatement, on the other hand, town officials are adamant: the town has already signed the contract, and cannot be rescind it without facing a lawsuit that Niagara will very probably win.

As for the availability of the water Niagara plans to use, MDC held a press-conference and public hearing, Wednesday, explaining the organization's reasoning. Not only there is excess water capacity, because industrial use in the state has dropped precipitously, the fact that Niagara will use that water will lead to a drop in price for residents - MDC says it could amount to \$30 per year.

State Representative David Baram and State Senator Beth Bye have already proposed leg-



State Senator Beth Bye

3. Prevent the commercial exporting of water outside of CT in case of a declared water shortage.

4. Require more transparency in local applications for zoning and wetland permits and tax abatements by requiring disclosure of the "developer" so the public has notice of the anticipated user.

ing for commercial users (with some exceptions for hospitals etc) below what residential consumers pay.

2. Making rationing in a shortage apply equally to commercial and residential users, by eliminating commercial preferences.

3. Preventing the commercial exporting of water outside of CT when there is a declared water shortage.

4. Requiring more transparency in local applications for zoning and wetland permits and tax abatements by requiring disclosure of the "developer" so the public has notice of the anticipated user.

While these measures possibly address future problems, members of the Bloomfield Citizens said this week, they make no difference in the present situation.

The group is collection signatures to send a petition to the town council.

WHOSE WATER IS IT?

[Editor's note: We received the following letter on the topic, which we feel represents well the opinions of those who are concerned about the plan. It DOES NOT represent necessarily the opinion of the newspaper.]

Whose Water is It?

Safe clean water is one of our most treasured resources. We are all responsible for using it wisely and protecting it for ourselves and future generations.

In 1929 the general assembly recognized the need for safe drinkable water and sanitary water disposal systems and established the Metropolitan District Commission to provide potable water and water systems to the people and businesses of the Hartford area.

The MDC was established as a public non-profit corporation and over the last 87 years has built reservoirs, water treatment plants and sewer systems to serve us all. We can be grateful for the safe water that easily flows out of the tap and the safe disposal of household waste when we flush water down the drain or toilet.

This enterprise was funded by over the years by the money we have paid to the MDC for their services.

Recently our trust in the MDC has been called into question by an arrangement made among the MDC, the Bloomfield Town Government and the Niagra bottling company that is based in California.

In a recent Hartford

Courant article the CEO of MDC stated, "we don't have the authority to say who does and does not get water". Many citizens of the region believe that the MDC has overstepped its authority and did not have the authority to sell any of the water in Bloomfield or any other MDC town to anyone who is not a customer of MDC which includes MDC towns and non-MDC towns with a business arrangement with MDC.

The CEO of the MDC has further protested that "the only way we can grow is to focus on industrial". But the MDC is not a for-profit corporation; their responsibility is to their customers who have the right to be notified and to vote on any business venture of the MDC just as they voted on the Clean Water Project.

Since we cannot trust the MDC to act responsibly, we must ask our legislators and the governors to place specific restrictions on the MDC so that their role and limits are spelled out clearly in the law. Please write or call your representatives and senators and tell them to act now to protect our water. Ask them what they can do to stop the Niagra bottling company from taking our water and shipping it out of state. Check upcoming town council agendas to see when Windsor MDC representatives will be present at a Town Council meeting and please come out to voice your concerns.

Linda S. Alexander
Windsor CT



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