



Testimony
Elizabeth Gara
Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA)
Before the Environment Committee
Public Hearing
March 16, 2012

Re: SB-347, AN ACT CREATING THE STATE'S OPEN SPACE PLAN

CWWA supports the intent of SB-347 with revisions.

CWWA has long supported efforts to protect Connecticut's water supply watershed and aquifer lands by preserving these lands as open space. Connecticut has made tremendous progress toward the goal of protecting 21% of the state's land as open space by the year 2023 due to programs like the Open Space and Watershed Acquisition program and the tax credit for donation of open space land at discount prices. These programs provide powerful incentives to water utilities and the state to acquire and preserve open space lands to help protect Connecticut's ecological habitats, its natural beauty and its outdoor recreational areas.

However, we are concerned with the wording change in the bill beginning on line 38 which authorizes the state Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP), the CT Environmental Quality Council, municipalities and regional planning agencies to set a goal for land held as open space by municipalities and water companies. Although water companies have taken steps to preserve watershed land as open space and Class I and Class II lands are already subject to conservation easements, we are concerned that this language authorizes the state to impose a goal that could be construed to require water companies to purchase additional lands and/or maintain lands that are not needed for water supply or source water protection purposes, as determined by the state Department of Public Health.

We therefore recommend that the reference to water companies be deleted in line 45. Current law provides sufficient incentives for water companies to protect land as open space. This approach has been enormously successful in preserving hundreds of acres as open space lands. Imposing a goal for the acquisition and/or protection of open space lands by water companies could wind up subjecting water customers to increased rates associated with the purchase and maintenance of lands that are not necessary for water supply purposes.

The Connecticut Water Works Association, Inc. (CWWA) is an association of private, regional and municipal water supply utilities serving more than 500,000 customers, or population of about 2½ million people, located throughout Connecticut. As purveyors of public water supplies, our members have an obligation to provide sufficient quantities of high-quality water at a reasonable cost to consumers of the communities served.