Covering
Avon Grove,
Chadds Ford,
Kennett Square,
Oxford, & Unionville Areas

Chester County PRESS

www.chestercounty.com

October 28, 2019

Water, Water Everywhere, Nor Any Drop To Drink

"Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink," forebodes The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. What Coleridge suggests is that despite being surrounded by abundance, many times people cannot benefit from it. We'd like to expand that idea and suggest it includes that despite being surrounded by abundance, people have no voice in how that abundance is used.

One example of this in Chester County also ironically involves water—the Chester Water Authority (CWA), a municipal authority organization dating back to 1866 that serves public water to 200,000 people in Chester County, Delaware County and the City of Chester.

Right now, we are in the middle of a battle. It is a battle over who has control over the water and whose voices will be heard. A private company, Aqua PA, Inc,. wants to purchase CWA. Sadly, this sale does not have any benefit to the residents but does present possible disastrous drawbacks.

In September, we had the opportunity to visit the Chester Water Authority's water treatment plant to learn more about this important public authority's processes. What struck us was the deep concern, great knowledge, and outstanding professionalism of the management and staff of CWA. Their ultimate goal is to provide quality water at a fair price to residents—not to provide profits to shareholders.

CWA water mostly comes from the Octoraro Creek, which feeds the Octoraro Reservoir in Chester County, and some from the Susquehanna River. In addition to clean, quality drinking water, CWA owns and maintains 2000 acres surrounding the 2 billion gallon Octoraro Reservoir. It is a beautiful, natural open space that is home to wildlife, such as bald eagles and herons. CWA even works with the PA Game Commission to offer turkey hunting. From fishing to hiking, most of the lands are open to the public for enjoyment and recreation. There is a very real fear that if Aqua PA buys CWA, they will be able to sell the preserved land for development both residential and commercial, and residents will no longer be able to use the land for recreational purposes.

Aqua PA has a history of buying local water authorities across Pennsylvania, and they are infamous for buying high and passing on the price to residents by sometimes doubling their water rates. In May 2017, Aqua PA made an unsolicited offer to buy CWA. In a unanimous decision by the CWA board, this offer was rejected.

Any sale is decided by CWA's nine-person board comprised of three people appointed by the Chester County Commissioners, three people appointed by the Delaware County Commissioners and three people appointed by the City of Chester. Currently, there is a vacancy on the board for one of Chester County's seats. Many of the Chester County municipalities affected by CWA, including Oxford borough, Penn Township, Lower Oxford Township, East Nottingham Township, West Nottingham Township and others have sent letters to the commissioners requesting that they appoint board members that will oppose the sale of CWA. According to transcripts of phone messages by former Chairman of the Pennsylvania Republican Party (and former Chairman of the Chester County Republican Party), Val DiGiorgio, the Republican party was in full support of the sale and tried to influence CWA board votes to make sure it went through (transcripts and audio available on chesterwater.com). Thankfully, the ethics of the CWA board members prevented that from happening in 2017.

If the CWA board approves the sale, we believe residents are likely to see rate hikes and possibly the loss of access to the Octoraro Reservoir for recreation. That would be detrimental to Chester County families. These sentiments were echoed at the Penn Township Supervisors' Town Hall on Oct. 10. Residents and local government officials alike were very concerned that their voices were not being heard.

As Chester County Commissioners, we will do everything in our power to stop the sale of CWA. If not already done, will appoint board members to Chester County board positions on CWA who would reject the sale. As your Chester County Commissioners, your voices will always come first.

~Josh Maxwell and Marian Moskowitz