**STERLING WATER STEWARDS**

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**STATEMENT FOR TOWN OF STERLING PUBLIC HEARING**

**CONCERNING A MORATORIUM ON SPECIAL USE PERMITS**

**FOR BULK WATER EXTRACTION**

June 21, 2021

I am Karen Haas with Sterling Water Stewards.

Sterling Water Stewards is in favor of the proposed moratorium. But it does not go far enough. We need at least a 1-year moratorium to give us time to implement strong Zoning laws to protect public wells. In the Source Water Protection Zone, there would be no bulk water extraction allowed, and no land uses that could pollute the groundwater. We also need to tighten the Special Use Permit law to better protect rural landowners’ water.

William Huntress, the multi-millionaire investor who wants to pump Sterling water and build a bottling plant within the recharge area surrounding the public wellfield, has a reputation for getting his way, regardless of the cost. The Town of Sterling will have only one chance to get this right. The Town of Amherst, near Buffalo, mis-managed its interactions with Mr. Huntress when he wanted to build in a protected wetland area. Decades of legal battles followed. Amherst taxpayers are now paying off a $3.94 million judgment that Huntress won against the Town. Plus all those legal bills.

When Mr. Huntress’ firm applies to the Town of Sterling for bulk water extraction, we want him to have to seek a Zoning Variance, because variance requirements are much stricter than special permit requirements. In 2016, the Town of Sterling rejected the idea of stronger zoning protections for our public water. We can’t miss this opportunity again. The Town of Rose and the Village of Cazenovia have public aquifer protection zones. We demand first-class protections—ASAP!

The Huntress plan is spectacularly ill-advised. When water is extracted, bottled, and trucked away, it inevitably lowers the water table. Commercial development in the area surrounding public wells also poses a groundwater contamination threat. If our wells get contaminated, we’ll pay for remediation—or perhaps even have to find a new source of water.

The actions of the Sterling Town Board in the matter of the moratorium have been disturbing. The Board shortened the Village’s proposed moratorium period from 1 year to 6 months, with no explanation beyond “we can always extend it.” The Board deleted a prohibition of drilling equipment in the area surround the wells. Both changes seemed geared to Mr. Huntress’ interests.

The Town Board has taken votes in silence without discussion. When challenged, the Town Supervisor has stated, “we up here will make the decisions.”

Sterling officials, we call on you to make better decisions.