



To: PURA.ExecutiveSecretary@ct.gov
From: The Greenwich Tree Conservancy
Date: March 20, 2020

Docket 20-01-58

Application of *Aquarion* Water Company to Dispose of 80.271 Acres of Unimproved Real Property Located at 836 Lake Avenue, Greenwich, CT

There are limited opportunities in southwestern Connecticut to protect over 72 acres of woodland as open space. The Greenwich Tree Conservancy (GTC) believes that the wooded track just North of the Merritt Parkway in Greenwich, CT, currently owned by *Aquarion* provides a historic opportunity for the water utility, Town of Greenwich and the Greenwich Land Trust (GLT) to collaborate on a land preservation project that will protect this forested open space land from development in perpetuity. As land owned by a water utility, it is presently classified as Class III lands. The GTC supports the sale of this land for open space purposes.

In 2004, the Connecticut General Assembly, working with environmental advocates including the current GTC President Cheryl Dunson, recognized that water utilities throughout the state had significant land holdings that could be sold for development. It was also recognized that protecting these lands would help the State reach its open space goals. As such, the CGA passed Public Act 04-200. This law provided incentives to water utilities to place permanent conservation easements when transferring lands, including Class III lands, to new ownership.

The GTC strongly supports the protection of this specific land parcel and the preservation of our rapidly diminishing urban tree canopy and wetlands. Forested wetlands provide tremendous value in ecosystem services including mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration, flood control, water quality, air quality, temperature moderation, and wildlife habitat. Its location adjacent to the Merritt Parkway increases its value as a buffer from noise, dust, and auto emissions for the surrounding community. In addition, it is a critical addition to our existing greenway that includes the Babcock Preserve and helps both the Town and State reach their open space goals.

PA 04-200 is a law of *intended* consequences promoting preservation of land and its many community benefits while simultaneously benefitting the water utilities. We therefore ask PURA to approve the sale of the *Aquarion* owned land to the Town of Greenwich and the Greenwich Land Trust.

Thank you for your consideration,

Greenwich Tree Conservancy

Francia Alvarez Advocacy Board Member
JoAnn Messina, Executive Director