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11 New Hempstead Road, New City, NY (845) 638-5100 Fax: (845) 638-5675 E-mail: legclerk@co.rockland.ny.us.

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Contact: Hon. Harriet Cornell Laura Incalcaterra, Community Relations Coordinator (845) 638-5753 (845) 638-5184

Independent report: Millions of gallons of water available to Rockland County Rockland Task Force files major water study with state

New City, NY (July 28, 2015) - The Rockland County Task Force on Water Resources Management has submitted to the state Public Service Commission key findings on the status of the local water supply, determining that repairing a leaky system and boosting customer conservation could add millions of gallons to the inventory.

The report, *Water Losses and Customer Water Use in the United Water New York System*, offers "a data-driven independent review," said Rockland County Legislator Harriet Cornell, who heads the Task Force and is chairwoman of the Legislature's Environmental Committee.

"This is the first time such an analysis has been done, and it will serve as the basis of a second study which will provide specifics on how to capture 'lost' water and conservation strategies. This important Report will enable the Task Force to move forward with our efforts to ensure a safe, cost-effective, long-term water supply for Rockland," Cornell said.

Amy Vickers, a nationally renowned water conservation and efficiency expert, engineer and author based in Amherst, Mass., conducted the study for the Task Force. The review was in response to the Public Service Commission's November 2014 order instructing United Water to work with the Task Force to identify ways to reduce water demand by 2 million gallons per day.

The order also called for the supply to be increased by 2-million-to-3-million gallons per day. The PSC requested a progress report on the efforts.

Vickers' report shows that as much as 4.4 million to 7 million gallons per day of supply could be available through a reduction in customer demand and the repairs of leaky water mains and pipes. That translates to a 15 percent to 25 percent reduction in current demand levels.

The report indicates that better record-keeping by United Water, which supplies water to approximately 90 percent of the homes and businesses in Rockland, could also improve the ability to determine how much water is being supplied, imported, exported, consumed by retail customers or lost to the non-revenue/unaccounted category.

One recommendation is that United Water improve its pace for water line replacements and water leak surveys. At its current pace, it would take the company 704 years to replace all lines; and 14 years to check for leaks, well beyond the New York State DEC's recommended maximum 3-year schedule.

Vickers also notes that water demand in UWNY's service area has been largely flat since 2000 despite an 11 percent population growth, a trend that could continue and is likely the result of state and federal water efficiency standards, including those governing improved-efficiency appliances. Vickers wrote the national water efficiency standards for plumbing fixtures adopted under the U.S. Energy Policy Act of 1992 and authored or co-authored precedent setting state laws on efficiency standards.

The report also recommends that a combination of conservation, water reuse technologies, rainwater harvesting and green infrastructure options be tapped to help Rockland further drive down demand and increase water supply independence.

County Legislature Chairman Alden H. Wolfe praised Vickers for her professional analysis and said her independent findings provide a foundation for true water resource management.

"It provides vital information that can guide us as we focus on demand-side management versus strictly supply-side activities, which simply add to the supply no matter the costs," Wolfe said.

County Executive Ed Day said, "Rockland County's economic and environmental future is enhanced by our ability to maximize precious natural resources.

"This report identifies common-sense solutions to increase Rockland County's water independence, which will ultimately lead to a long-term supply of safe, clean water," Day said. "I commend all the members of the Task Force for their efforts to promote water efficiency and sustain healthy water resources for future generations."

Margie Turrin, a scientist at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory who chairs the Task Force's Conservation Committee, said the report helps give direction on how to proceed.

"The Conservation Committee of the Rockland County Water Task Force is very happy to have this independent analysis of our water resources use and management," Turrin said. "The report will be extremely useful as we identify and recommend effective conservation projects to the Task Force and the County."

The Task Force was created in June 2014 and is comprised of 19 members representing the County Executive, County Legislature, United Water, and local governments, academia, business and advocates.

It resulted after United Water's effort to build a costly Hudson River desalination plant galvanized residents into opposing the facility in favor of further studies of the existing supply and demand, and deeper exploration of alternatives.

In November 2014, the PSC determined that while Rockland may one day need more water, it doesn't need it until at least 2020. In the same decision, the PSC said opponents of the plant would now have the time they needed to implement conservation measures designed to possibly delay or prevent the project.

Task Force chairwoman Cornell said the Task Force is moving forward aggressively to develop strategies for conservation and leakage control, building upon the Vickers Report. Additionally, Task Force committees are working on a number of priority issues; a green infrastructure feasibility study on groundwater recharge and surface water storage to be done by engineering students at the Stevens Institute of Technology is on track to start in September.