

Testimony for House Committee Policy Hearing

Hazleton City Authority

The Hazleton City Authority is a Municipal Authority supplying drinking water and fire service protection to 15, 200 customers and a population of 45,000 people in 14 municipalities in three counties in the Greater Hazleton Area. The Authority uses 4 reservoir sources and 8 smaller stream and ground water sources and a 2.5 MGD allotment from the Lehigh River to supply raw water to a 10 MGD conventional filtration plant. The Hazleton City Authority has applied to the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) to approve an increase in the Hazleton City Authority's allotment from the Lehigh River from 2.5 MGD to 5.0 MGD.

The Hazleton City Authority service area is on the top of a mountain and access to water sources that provide the quantity and quality of water required to serve any expansion of the area is extremely limited. The Greater Hazleton Area has recently experienced an increase in potential for expansion with impending development of large industrial projects that may add a significant amount of jobs in the Greater Hazleton Area. One project involves a bottled water/beverage manufacturing facility that has requested up to 3 MGD of water in the next few years. Another project involves Mericle Commercial Real Estate who has purchased 1,100 acres in Hazle Township for development of a high-end industrial park with expected build-out in the next ten years.

The recent expansion, said to be spurred by the Hazleton Area's close proximity to interstates I-80 and I-81 and availability of land and labor, may continue for several years. Current and future expansion in the Greater Hazleton Area is very much dependent on continued and additional access to the Lehigh River. Setting aside water in the Frances E. Walter Dam to support drinking water supplies in New York City may limit expansion, growth, and prosperity in the Greater Hazleton Area as well as numerous other communities located near the Lehigh River. Any restriction or diversion of water from the Frances E. Walter Dam by New York City may limited future access to drinking water suppliers and recreational users and may be detrimental to many area stakeholders. It is essential that stakeholders, through current regulators, maintain local influence over how water in the Frances E. Walter dam is controlled.