



SEAN D. ELLIOT / The Day

■ The Groton Municipal Reservoir is a key element of the region's water supply.

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Groton Utilities hopes plan will cut costs, improve quality

From C1

For customers, the plan would mean not only better quality water but also lower costs, because poor quality water requires more intense treatment, said Lori Mathieu, supervisor in the state health department's drinking water division.

Winkler said the legislation did not include an estimated \$200,000 needed to craft the plan, but that she is working with the Department of Public Health to find \$100,000 to get it started this year.

"It is a locally developed plan that is going to have state recognition," Winkler said.

Groton Utilities asked the state in 2004 for help in assuring the long-term quality of what is now seen as a regional drinking supply, Mathieu said.

Though the water quality is one of the best in the state, Mathieu said, Groton is especially vulnerable to the pressure of development, with I-95 and routes 117 and 184 running through the distribution reservoir.

Al Dion, a manager at Groton Util-

ities, said the key is to balance economic development with protection of the watershed, which includes reservoirs and the surrounding land that drains into them.

When the Mystic Marriott was built, for example, Groton Utilities was able to use innovative treatment techniques, with catch basins and storm-water facilities, because the hotel is so close to the watershed, Dion said. It did the same when the Pequot Medical Center expanded, he said. Both are on Route 117.

The water protection plan will contain such information as an inventory of water sources, assessments of quality, and proposed ordinances to ensure water quality, Dion said.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has awarded the project a \$6,000 grant to get started.

Mathieu said the project could also address policies such as the state's opposition to the extension of sewer mains and water mains into a watershed area.

That policy, to discourage higher density development near a water-

shed, has protected the sensitive areas for 30 years, Mathieu said. But recently, more towns no longer depend on state funds to extend such lines.

Instead, developers are willing to use private funding. That's when the policy doesn't work.

"This doesn't mean we just protect everything nor can you simply pave over the watershed," Mathieu said.

With the plan, local and state officials will be prepared to address future threats to the water supply instead of scrambling at the last minute to comment on individual development proposals, she said.

The state is coordinating a series of workshops that began in April to define the plan, Mathieu said.

The next one will be held July 20 at the Groton Utilities treatment plant from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. In January 2009, the Commissioner of Public Health is to submit findings and recommendations on the plan to the legislature.

http://www.dph.state.ct.us/BRS/Water/Source_Protection/toolbox.htm
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