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A tank at 223rd Street in Laurelton, Queens. New York City wants to reopen nearly two dozen wells in Queens.



PUSH TO PROTECT LI AQUIFER

NEWSDAY / ALEXANDRA VILLA

Senator's bill seeks to require study before city can use abandoned wells

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A Long Island state senator has introduced a bill aimed at stopping New York City from reopening nearly two dozen shuttered Queens wells that pump water from the aquifers under Long Island unless the state conducts a full environmental review.

The bill, filed by Sen. Jack Martins (R-Mineola) on Friday, would add a provision to state law, narrowly tailored to Long Island, that would effectively deem New York City's well system abandoned since the wells have been inactive for more than two years.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation would have to conduct an environmental review before renewing the city's well permit, according to the bill.

Martins said he wrote the bill to ensure a study that includes the effects of the pumping on Long Island would be

completed before the city's Department of Environmental Protection could renew its well permit with the state. The city's current permit for its Queens wells will expire at the end of 2017.

"The DEP has a responsibility to ensure whatever they do doesn't impact the residents here in Nassau County," Martins said.

The move comes nearly two weeks after a Feb. 23 meeting at Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano's office with federal, state and local leaders at which the city's DEP commissioner discussed plans to reopen 23 dormant wells in southeast Queens that are sunk into the aquifer system shared by the city and Long Island.

The last time any of the wells have been used as a public water supply source was 2007.

The city, which plans to spend about \$200 million rehabilitating the wells, wants to begin pumping 33 million gal-

lons a day from the system by 2020 while it repairs leaks in its upstate aqueduct system.

The city also has said it plans to conduct an environmental review of the effects of the project, with the review scheduled to begin this fall.

But the project has raised concerns among Long Island policymakers and environmentalists, who say pumping in Queens could affect the water supply in Nassau — including a drawdown of the water table, a shift in contamination plumes and increased saltwater intrusion on the coasts.

In addition, four of the wells the city wants to reopen are sunk into the fragile Lloyd aquifer, Long Island's oldest and least contaminated source of water — adding another layer of concern.

Both Nassau and Suffolk counties are federally designated sole-source aquifers, meaning the Island's nearly 3 million residents rely solely on groundwater for their water supply.

"The city has the alternative of tapping into their resources in upstate New York," Martins said. "We don't."

The city did not provide comment on the legislation Friday.

The bill drew praise from Mangano, who thanked Martins "for introducing legislation that sets an environmental review process prior to the reopening of any wells."

The bill does not yet have an Assembly sponsor, but Martins said he expected "no issue finding ready partners" in that body.

In addition, Martins wrote to DEC Commissioner Joe Martens last week, asking that the state agency withhold renewing the city's Queens well permit unless an environmental review under DEC oversight is completed.

A DEC spokesman said Friday that the agency was reviewing the letter.

A source who was at the Feb. 23 meeting said the moves underscored the importance of Long Island's concerns about the future of its drinking water.

"The letter and legislation is clearly meant to get their attention," the source said of the city. And, the source added: "It's going to wake up the DEC."