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TOP STORIES

Nassau looks to monitor NYC water plan

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Nassau Republicans are moving to resurrect the county's 1970s-era Water Resources Board in response to New York City's plan to reopen dozens of wells in Queens that take water from the aquifer the city and the county share.

But Democrats in the county legislature say the measure doesn't go far enough and argue that it would likely become a sanctuary for political appointees.

The legislation, which is to be introduced into committee today, updates the board's mission to include examining external threats to the county's groundwater system.

"We want to be proactive rather than reactive," said Presiding Officer Norma Gonsalves (R-East Meadow). "We don't want to wait for something to happen before we do anything."

Policymakers and environmentalists have been concerned that reopening the Queens wells will hurt Nassau County's access to its sole source of water — the aquifers that lie under geographic Long Island, which includes Brooklyn and Queens.

The New York City Department of Environmental Protection has proposed reopening as many as 52 of its wells to bolster the city's water supply

while it repairs leaks in its upstate aqueduct system.

Historically, pumping at the Queens wells had caused "serious effects" on underground water in Queens and Nassau, according to a 1986 state Department of Environmental Conservation report.

A spokesman for New York City's Department of Environmental Protection did not respond to a request for comment, but an environmental impact statement or review on the reopening of the wells is expected this fall. The city has said it expects to begin working to reopen the wells in 2016.

The re-created county board would be tasked with examin-

ing the city's findings, in addition to attending public hearings on the plan and ensuring that the county's view is represented at the state level.

"It's not like we can direct what New York City does, but we can certainly oversee it," said Christopher Ostuni, majority counsel and senior policy adviser for the county legislature.

The new board would have five to nine members. While the legislation allocates no funding for it, the board would have access to county resources, such as the county attorney's office. "I think it has the teeth it needs," Gonsalves said.

But Legis. David Denenberg (D-Merrick), speaking for the

minority caucus, criticized the measure. "What you're doing is establishing a board where there is no required expertise, no required work, no funding to do the work and absolutely no power," he said.

Denenberg said Democrats planned to introduce an amendment to the legislation that would provide funding and require that members have expertise in water issues.

While the board currently exists, it hasn't met for about a decade, said Kenneth Robinson, a Syosset lawyer who also is the board's chairman.

Over the years, members have left and new ones were never appointed, Robinson said.