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STERLING

## Sterling town board candidates to meet with water protection group

The Citizen staff  
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David Wilcox

The Citizen staff

**C**andidates running for Sterling Town Board seats in this year's election will participate in a forum organized by a group of residents concerned about the impact a commercial water bottling business could have on the area.

Sterling Water Stewards has organized the candidate forum that will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 18, at the Fair Haven Fire Hall. The group said town board candidates Joan Kelley, Charles Krul, Michele McIntyre and Caren Thompson have agreed to take part. Kelley, McIntyre and Thompson are vying for two four-year terms, while Krul is running unopposed to fill out a term that expires in 2023. Sterling Water Stewards said on its website that Scott Crawford, the current town supervisor who is running unopposed for that seat, did not respond to its forum invitation.

Since a western New York-based developer, Acquest Development, in 2020 acknowledged its interest in building a water bottling plant on land it purchased on state Route 104A, Sterling Water Stewards has been advocating for the town to adopt laws that would protect the existing aquifers in the area that supply municipal water districts and private wells.

Under a company it formed called Sterling Spring Water LLC, Acquest bought a 60-acre parcel of mostly vacantly land in 2014 for \$150,000. Last year, it purchased a 13.5-acre parcel for \$194,000, county property records show. No formal applications for the water plant have been filed.

The Sterling town board has been considering a bulk water extraction moratorium, but its stated reason for that pause is so it can perform tests ahead of a new well permit it is seeking from the state Department of Environmental Conservation. The board actually approved one-year moratorium in June, but then determined that it had to hold another public hearing and re-vote on that measure because the original moratorium that had been subject to a June public hearing was for six months.

Sterling Water Stewards supports a one-year moratorium but also wants the town to go further and implement zoning law changes to permanently protect the water supply in the area.

"When water is extracted, bottled, and trucked away, it inevitably lowers the water table," the group stated at a June public hearing on the matter "Commercial development in the area surrounding public wells also poses a groundwater

contamination threat. If our wells get contaminated, we'll pay for remediation — or perhaps even have to find a new source of water."