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Easton Suburban Water Authority to challenge Bethlehem Authority claim to service area

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By **EDWARD SIEGER**

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PALMER TWP. | Easton Suburban Water Authority's board of directors Monday formally approved challenging Bethlehem's proposal to expand water service into Easton Suburban territory.

Board members met behind closed doors for about 30 minutes before voting unanimously to file a petition opposing Bethlehem's expansion plans. Notice of Bethlehem's proposal to expand its water service into the Kreidersville section of Allen Township and along the Route 33 corridor in Bethlehem Township appears in this week's Pennsylvania Bulletin.

Anyone opposed to the expansion, including Easton Suburban, must file a petition by Feb. 23.

The Easton authority has hired the Harrisburg-based law firm of Hawke, McKeon and Sniscak to oppose Bethlehem's request. Authority Manager Roy White said he had no estimate for how much it will cost the authority to oppose the request.

What he does know is how much Easton Suburban stands to lose if Bethlehem takes over its coverage area.

A pair of proposed housing developments could bring an estimated 1,400 homes to Freemansburg Avenue, and St. Luke's Hospital is developing its 383,000-square-foot Riverside complex. White estimates the development could bring in about \$5 million in tapping fees and about \$600,000 annually in metered water sales.

White said a map accompanying Bethlehem's petition appears to show Bethlehem also proposes taking over about 500 existing customers in the Wagner Farms development.

The authority has invested about \$14 million in infrastructure over the past 21 years in the area and owns water mains to the north, east and west of St. Luke's property on Freemansburg Avenue, White said.

"We're already sitting at the doorstep of every one of those projects," he said.

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