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### **Connecticut River Watershed Council, Inc.**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** – December 8, 2004

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#### **Holyoke's Contract with Aquarion May Be Detrimental to the Connecticut River**

Holyoke, MA – The public comment period for the City of Holyoke's proposed contract with Aquarion ended today, and the Connecticut River Watershed Council (CRWC) has come out against the contract. CRWC has identified a number of possible problems with the contract, which may result in a negative effect for the River. The organization's concerns relate to the finances of the contract and the progress towards combined sewer overflow (CSO) abatement.

"The legal definitions in the contract leave plenty of room for Aquarion to *potentially* increase their costs and to avoid the performance guarantees in the contract," said Andrea Donlon, CRWC's River Steward. "We think the purported \$7 million savings could easily evaporate and that the contract could be a detriment to the River, which should not be acceptable to the ratepayers of Holyoke."

Donlon went on to express CRWC's concern about whether CSOs would be eliminated if Aquarion took over the wastewater treatment system. "Holyoke stands the best chance of progressing on CSO abatement if the City has the money to complete the necessary capital improvements," said Donlon. "Based on our review, we believe that this contract could have the effect of depleting city resources faster than if the City continued to run its own wastewater treatment plant – the contract thereby puts the river at greater risk than the status quo."

Another concern is that the 20-year contract addresses the abatement of only one CSO, albeit the largest in Holyoke. "Eliminating the Berkshire St. CSO would reduce the amount of raw sewage Holyoke is dumping into the Connecticut River each year by 60 %, which would be a significant step towards a cleaner river," says Donlon. However, over the next 20 years, Holyoke will need to tackle other CSOs and, according to Donlon, "This is seemingly ignored in the contract, which is odd, given the huge expense Holyoke will have to bear over the next several decades. Moreover, it concerns us that the

contract language is written in a way that could give Aquarion immunization from actual CSO abatement.”

CRWC remains in favor of a sewer rate increase to accomplish the long-term goal of fixing the City’s CSO problems and hopes that more federal money can be allocated to assist Holyoke, Springfield, and Chicopee with this goal. However, they feel that the contract presents the possibility that a rate increase would not necessarily result in full compliance with the state and federal requirement to fix the CSOs.

CRWC recommends that the mayor consider re-engineering the city-owned plant, or at least allow the City Council to hire an independent reviewer to examine the financial analysis and the contract, at Aquarion’s expense.

The Connecticut River Watershed Council is a non-profit organization that has advocated for the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of the Connecticut River for the past 52 years. Andrea Donlon can be reached at the Council’s headquarters in Greenfield at 413-772-2020 ext. 205, or by email at [adonlon@ctriver.org](mailto:adonlon@ctriver.org).