

Plugging In?

A South Bronx district mulls over proposals to install an electric generating plant on its turf. Could new turbines make pollution any worse?

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FILE

At a recent meeting of Community Board 1, district manager, Cedric L. Loftin, reported on plans by the Power Authority of New York to install a 44,000-kilowatt gas-powered generating plant at a site in district 1 of the Bronx. The purchase of this plant along with 10 more will cost the state \$200 million.

Loftin informed almost two dozen attendees that a total of 11 simple-cycle gas turbine generators are going to be installed throughout New York City to meet the urgent need for new electric sources while larger plants are constructed. According to Loftin, these generators would prevent blackouts similar to the one in Washington Heights, Manhattan, in 1999. He said that a mild summer in 2000 helped the city to avoid the sorts of outages that hit Washington Heights a year earlier. Still, the Power Authority of New York, the state office that supervises utilities and the generation of electric power, estimates that the city faces a shortfall of 315,000 kilowatts in the summer of 2001.

Held at Lincoln Hospital located at 234 Morris Avenue in the Bronx, the meeting on November 16 was an informal gathering. It lasted approximately an hour and a half.

Loftin said the generating plant, model LM600 manufactured by General Electric, would be located at 132nd Street and the Harlem River in the South Bronx. It is expected to be ready to begin operation on June 1 2001. The project has already been approved by state regulators and now awaits the go ahead from the City of New York.

If the Power Authority's entire project is approved, the 11 power plants to be built would provide the city of New York with approximately 520,000 kilowatts of new electric capacity. According to information from the New York Power Authority provided by Loftin, the 520,000 kilowatts would be enough to meet the demands of the city for more electric power between now and the summer of 2002. Larger plants with more capacity are expected to be built in 2002. Loftin said that according to NYPA, these 11 smaller units would assure that lights don't go out next summer.

The idea of this project was born in 1999 after a blackout that lasted about fifteen hours in Washington Heights, one of upper Manhattan's neighborhoods. According to Beth Gardiner, an Associated Press writer, the outage occurred when temperatures rose

to 101 degrees, and people trying to combat the heat wave caused an overload in power lines. Loftin assured his audience, however, that the new generating power plants would prevent such problems.

The announcement of this project at the meeting was met with concerns that the new plants would add to the area's air pollution problems. "We [the neighborhood] are the capital of asthma" said Estel Fonseca, a Community Board member. According to Fonseca, the neighborhood has an extremely high number of people with asthma and so far, a cause of the problem has yet to be found. Community Board 1 Chair George Rodriguez said that he has requested studies on the matter, but that little has been done. As a result, Rodriguez urged the people present at the meeting to write to political leaders such as U.S. Congressman Jose Serrano and Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer to request that studies be done to find the cause of this problem. Rodriguez also urged Loftin to do more research on possible second-hand effects of these generating plants.

According to statistics provided by the New York Power Authority, the gas-turbine generators installed at the Bronx location

would be the cleanest in the city and would use the best environmental technology available. The Power Authority will spend another \$50 million on additional equipment to insure that the plants remain clean. The expenditure would cover a system that would reduce the emission levels of nitrous oxide and carbon monoxide. And according to Loftin, the Power Authority is conducting studies to reduce the noise pollution level that the plants might produce.

The Power Authority of New York (NYPA) is a non-profit, state-owned corporation that provides electric power to governmental institutions such as the New York City Transit, to governmental offices, to job-providing companies, to non-profit organizations and to private utilities such as Con Edison for resale. It also provides the city with electric energy for streetlights.

On December 14th, the NYPA planned to hold an additional meeting at Lincoln Hospital, to inform the community about the project. The agency planned to send representatives to the gathering to fully explain the project and to answer questions. Loftin, Rodriguez, the whole district 1 assembly, and community members are expected to attend the meeting as well.