

Arbor Hill Development Corporation
Summary of Community Engagement regarding the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant

7.23.20

The Affordable Housing Partnership engaged Arbor Hill Development Corporation (AHDC) to conduct a series of neighborhood meetings regarding the proposed redevelopment of the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant. The steam plant, located between Sheridan Avenue and Orange Street at the edge of downtown Albany, produces energy for Empire State Plaza. From 1981 to 1994, the plant created power via garbage incineration and neighborhood residents suffered negative health impacts from soot and toxic air pollution. In 1994, the plant was converted to a natural gas fueled system, keeping an existing diesel fueled emergency back-up system.

In 2019, NYS Office of General Services (OGS) and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) proposed restructuring the plant to address the need to replace the emergency back-up system and convert the gas plant to a combined heat and power system with the goal of increasing efficiency.

Community members expressed concerns with this new proposal and the on-going negative health and environmental impact of an energy plant fueled by fracked gas. In addition, the conversion to the CHP system came in significantly above budget. NYPA and OGS agreed to change the proposed redevelopment of the plant as follows:

- electrify one of the 5 on-site chillers and reduce local emissions by 18%;
- upgrade the diesel back up system to reduce emissions; and
- install LED lighting throughout Empire State Plaza to reduce demand for electricity.

NYPA and OGS have agreed to pursue further opportunities for reduction in emissions and have agreed to continue to listen to community concerns. To that end, AHDC was engaged to reach out to the neighborhood associations and other stakeholders to determine neighborhood priorities and to provide a unified voice to neighborhood concerns.

AHDC worked with the Albany Law School Community Development Clinic and with Aaron Mair, local environmental advocate, to help lead discussions, provide context, and answer questions. Presentations and discussions were held at the Sheridan Hollow Neighborhood Association, the Arbor Hill Neighborhood Association, and the Ten Broeck Triangle Neighborhood Association.

AHDC facilitated meetings with neighborhood leadership both before and after the neighborhood association meetings. The Community Development Clinic summarized neighborhood concerns as follows:

1. Residents who live near the existing power plant must deal with emissions from the plant and wish to know the type and extent of emissions and toxic chemicals affecting them. Possible exposure to radiation is also a concern. Neighbors would like the State to continue to explore non-combustion alternatives such as geo-thermal.
2. Many residents of the Community have health concerns. As long as residents live next to an active power plant, the Community needs resources to identify health concerns caused by consistent poor air quality as early as possible through early health screenings. In addition to

funding for health screenings, residents require ongoing care to mitigate harmful health impacts.

3. Some neighborhoods lack parks, playgrounds and other recreational facilities. Neighbors want their community to have less of an industrial feel and to be safe and environmentally friendly for children and others to enjoy, and to make the area more livable.
4. Residents living in close proximity to the Plant often suffer from severe flooding on the streets and lower levels of their homes due to inadequate drainage and large amounts of runoff from the Plant
5. There is a lack of adequate lighting and proper maintenance of roadways in Sheridan Hollow
6. Many neighborhood homes contain outdated and inefficient heating and cooling systems and would benefit from shared power from a power plant located in the neighborhood.
7. Any redevelopment projects should include local and minority hiring and training

Neighborhood meetings are scheduled to continue to develop proposals in advance of a community conversation with NYPA and OGS.