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### **Blackouts in Queens Shine Light on Region’s Energy Woes**

Events in Queens over the past two weeks have vividly shown that we depend on electricity. The lives of the many thousands of families and businesses that were left without power were put on hold, unable to function productively without electricity. While this has been the case for at least a century, it’s one of those things that is true now more than ever.

Just in my short lifetime, (I’m 26), the number of energy-sucking appliances and gadgets has multiplied many times. I don’t remember televisions in every room when I was growing up, or computers and all the accessories that are now considered a necessity. On a busy night in the apartment I share with my girlfriend it’s hard to find a plug amidst the cell phones and iPods charging up for the coming day. And I don’t consider myself particularly gadget rich. Then there is air conditioning, which has gone from being an occasional luxury, available in a few select places, like one room of a house or a movie theater, to a basic right.

You might say these are all rewards of the modern age, but there’s a big catch. While we have basically been giving a giant collective “yes” to things that use more electricity, we have been giving a giant collective “no” to finding, developing and implementing new sources of electricity.

It’s true that I’m personally glad to see a movement away from fossil fuel power generation plants. They contribute to climate change, pollute our air, and force us to rely on unstable and often hostile nations. The Clean Air Act has necessitated that most recently constructed power plants are able to burn Natural Gas, the lightest hydrocarbon. But the Northeast is situated at the end of every pipeline that delivers natural gas from dwindling domestic and Canadian supplies and import facilities in the Gulf of Mexico. As we saw during the aftermath of Katrina, being at the end of the pipeline is a potentially risky situation. Yet many people find it equally risky to locate a Liquid Natural Gas import facility in Long Island Sound, which would provide a more reliable source of the cleanest of the fossil fuels.

The energy has to come from somewhere. As for other energy sources, nuclear power plants continue to generate intense opposition, for perhaps understandable reasons. But nuclear power uses no conventional fuel and contributes almost nothing to global warming. It should at least be examined with a neutral eye. It also pains me to see Wind Farms being fought so aggressively along the coasts of the Northeast, often by sincere “environmentalists.” I’ve also read about homeowners associations denying residents the right to put solar panels on their roofs because they violate aesthetic guidelines.

Not only do the power plants face intense NIMBY opposition, but transmission lines and sub-stations are also incredibly difficult to site. One company wants to build a series of power lines along the Delaware Valley, bringing electricity from small scale hydro dams in upstate New York to customers downstate and in northern New Jersey. Predictably, this too has faced intense opposition. Our new electric age has costs, but apparently costs that none of us are willing to bear.

Managing the region's energy future requires us to manage both demand and supply. The first and arguably easiest step is simple conservation. This can be done on a personal level by shutting off the light when you leave the room or turning off various devices when not in use. Planting trees and installing green roofs can reduce the urban heat island effect and the need for air conditioning. Buy Energy Star appliances when replacing old ones. If you want more sustainable energy, vote with your money and buy wind power at [www.newwindenergy.com](http://www.newwindenergy.com). This service and others allow you to pay a small premium to your current utility to get them to buy wind or small scale hydropower from around the nation. Or come out in support of local Wind Farm proposals and demand more projects like Con Ed's tidal generation test project in the East River.

On a collective level, we could explore remedies like allowing or encouraging utilities to use more "peak pricing," where consumers are charged more during times of intense demand, like very hot days. This would have the effect of reducing demand, as well as strain on the overall system. There are numerous other methods that could be used, some doubtless not invented yet.

Now is the time to devise an energy plan for our region. The most recent energy bill gave the Federal government power to override municipalities and states in order to site critical energy infrastructure. If we're not willing to make the difficult decisions on how to manage our energy future, the Feds will do it for us.

– David Kooris, Associate Planner for Regional Design

### **Bombs, Barriers and Bollards**

In the almost five years since the terrible events of 9/11, the city has tried its best to armor itself against future bombs or other types of terrorist attack. Barriers and bollards, fences, gates and giant planters proliferate on our streets and sidewalks.

While this reaction is understandable, and perhaps even necessary, it is deeply troubling on a number of grounds. If these physical restrictions are necessary, they should serve double duty, making the streets not only safer, but friendlier and more accommodating to their primary purpose, which in Manhattan is to handle pedestrian traffic. Many barriers now in place actually act as impediments to foot traffic. (This is perhaps fitting in a perverse way, given the Latin origin of impediment, which means no walking.)

Examples abound around the city, but perhaps the worst are the areas around Wall Street in Lower Manhattan, where various gates and shields have been erected to protect the New York Stock Exchange, Federal Hall and other priceless institutions. Visiting the area now, one sees crowds of workers and tourists alike being herded against the wall by iron fences. Overall, the proliferation of barriers against terrorist attacks generates subliminal fear and a false sense of security.

There's an obvious larger solution here. Many streets in Lower Manhattan serve little or no purpose for moving vehicles. Why not just close them off to most vehicles and create a vehicle-free environment much of the day? London did this many years ago in its historic center city in response to terrorist attacks from the Irish Republican Army. Today, the narrow streets there, so similar in many ways to those of Lower Manhattan, are more pleasant and safer against attacks from more contemporary terrorists such as Al Qaeda.

While Lower Manhattan is perhaps the worst example of ham-handed security measures, there is no shortage of other candidates. One other egregious example is a spot along Madison Avenue in the upper 40s, where a line of planters splits the sidewalk in two on the avenue that already has the narrowest sidewalk in Midtown. Why not at least move these horticultural marvels to the curb, adding more effective width and eliminating the possibility of illegal curb side drop-offs by cars and taxis in the bus lane?

The point is that urban planners should work intimately with security officials so that fences and barriers of any type serve larger social goals beyond just protecting the public from the possible bomb. Thinking along this line may be happening to some extent, but obviously not enough. In a democracy, it is important that our streets remain, at least in appearance and feel, open places where we can gather and mingle.

Over 30 years ago Regional Plan Association studied the space needed for pedestrians to walk comfortably in Manhattan, and concluded that the proliferation of barriers such as vendor carts, phone booths and open cellar-doors were overly restricting pedestrian traffic. As terrorism concerns add new and different obstructions, it's important to remember that conclusion still holds true.

– Jeffrey Zupan, Senior Fellow for Transportation, RPA

Questions Or Comments On What's In This Issue? Send Them To The Editor Of  
Spotlight On The Region, Alex Marshall At [alex@rpa.org](mailto:alex@rpa.org)

## Calendar

### July 29 through August 5th

**The CUNY Lecture Series on Governors Island.** CUNY presents an environmental lecture series open to the public on Governors Island this summer. Lectures include slide presentations and are held in Pershing Hall, a two-minute walk from the ferry terminal on the Island. For information, contact Dr. Stephen Pekar at: [stephen.pekar@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:stephen.pekar@qc.cuny.edu)

#### July 29, 12:30 p.m.

##### **Asteroid Impact and the Extinction of Sharks**

Dr. John Chamberlain, Brooklyn College, will talk about the extinction event that occurred 65 million years in which as many as 75% of the species then alive became extinct, including non-avian dinosaurs. In his talk, he will also talk about how sharks also suffered a severe decline as a result of ecosystem collapse associated with this impact.

#### August 5, 12:30 p.m.

##### **Lingering Effects of the World Trade Center Exposure**

September 11 happened nearly 5 years ago, but some workers who worked at Ground Zero still live with the event and its health aftermath. An occupational and environmental medicine physician at Queens College, Steven Markowitz MD will discuss what we know about the health impact of September 11, especially on workers who cleaned up Ground Zero.

### July 31

Join NY/NJ Congress for the New Urbanism on a **field trip to visit three New Urban projects currently being implemented in two communities that straddle the NY-NJ border**. The tour will be followed by a 1 hour wrap-up at Vernon Town Hall, where public officials and planners will make a short presentation followed by Q & A and discussion. Light food and refreshments will be available. Event is free, but a reservation is required. Email Dan Heyden at [danh@meltzemandl.com](mailto:danh@meltzemandl.com) in order to reserve your place. More Info: Ted Andrews at [edandrews@earthlink.net](mailto:edandrews@earthlink.net)

### August 1

**"A Storm in the Port: Keeping the Port of NY & NJ Open"**. Author Alex Lechich discusses the environmental concerns that affect the harbor, considers solutions to complex dilemmas that threaten its future and makes clear the desperate need for new ocean policies that tread the delicate line between protecting the world's oceans and preserving their economic and recreational value. A book signing follows in the South St Seaport Melville Gallery, 213 Water St between Fulton & Beekman (A/C/J/M/Z/2/3/4/5 - Fulton St- Bw'ay-Nassau station). For more info call 212.748.8568.

### August 2, Noon - 2 p.m.

**Putting the Breaks on NJ's "Ratables Chase"**. Sponsored by New Jersey Future, this forum will provide a frank discussion about property tax reform, how it connects to where we live, how we govern ourselves, how we develop our land, and how much it costs us. Thomas Edison College, 101 West State Street, Trenton, NJ. For more information, please visit the NJ Future website at [www.njfuture.org](http://www.njfuture.org) or contact Scotia Macrae at [smacrae@njfuture.org](mailto:smacrae@njfuture.org).