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OPINION

OP-ED

Time to build power plants in the city

By Arthur "Jerry" Kremer

New York City is about to lose 25% of its electricity and yet little consideration is being given to a direct solution: build more power plants within the five boroughs.

With the Indian Point nuclear plant set to close in 2021, taking with it a quarter of the city's power, the clock is ticking for replacement power. A new 24/7 baseload power plant would need to be powered by natural gas. Other baseload sources—nuclear, coal, and hydro—are not economically viable in the city.

Wind and solar can only produce power intermittently, typically less than 30% of the time. In fact, after much attention and nurturing in recent years, wind and solar today produce less than 3% of New York state's power.

The city's electricity challenges are attributable to more than Indian Point closing. In a grippingly informative July report, the New York Building Congress notes that the projected growth in the city's population and economy, the closure of Indian Point and in-city power generating plants "present significant risks to the city's electric supply outlook that merit immediate attention."

In the current political environment, these solutions include expanded use of pipelines and transmission lines to bring power into the city, improved efficiency, and increases in renewable power. The report also notes that while there are 24 in-city power plants, there are no new generating facilities planned for New York City during the 2017-2027 period. The closest new plants are in Dutchess and Orange counties.

Power plants are a foundation for economic growth and modern life. The potential exists to re-power—that is, to replace—older, less efficient, higher polluting plants. Just as Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium were replaced by modern adjacent facilities, so too can many power plants be.

For 15 years, much of New York has also been burdened with "peakers"—small, loud, polluting, diesel-fueled generating facilities that come on when demand for electricity spikes. Having new, expanded plants lessens the need for these disruptive facilities.

Locally generated power also means more reliable power. When power coming from other states is in demand in those states, less of it—if any—will get to New York.

It is also important that individual communities not be overburdened with power facilities. The city's needs can best be met with diversely sourced and located facilities that include baseload plants, distributed generation (power generated at the point of consumption) and even storage facilities.

Larger amounts of in-city power are also a hedge against future uncertainties. For example, if electric car and truck usage spikes in the next 10 years, replacing higher polluting gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles, it will be crucially important to have additional in-city generation.

Power plants also bring permanent jobs and economic activity, including substantial tax payments.

New York is fortunate to have groups like the Building Congress and companies such as Con Ed thinking and planning for the formidable electricity supply challenges ahead. At a time of rigorous not-in-my-backyard activism, and hostility by numerous politicians to any new power that is not wind or solar, common sense must prevail.

We need to seek out, approve, and build new in-city power plants to ensure the city literally has a bright, prosperous and clean future.

Arthur "Jerry" Kremer served in the New York State Assembly from 1966 to 1988 and is now chairman of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance, an organization of more than 150 business, labor, and community leaders and organizations including Entergy, the owner of Indian Point, Con Ed and the New York Building Congress.