

Testimony

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Site-Sourced and Stored Renewable Energy Conference

Presented by Llewellyn Wells
NYC Eco Districts
Living City Block

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My name is Llewellyn Wells and I am with the New York City Eco Districts team, which is being led by Living City Block. NYC Eco Districts is working in close alliance with the New York City 2030 Exploratory Committee to set up programs here in New York that will drive resiliency, equity and sustainability at the district scale while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other measurable indicators of social, economic and environmental health. Haym Gross of NYC 2030 will speak after I am finished.

It is an honor to be here speaking before the New York City Council Committee on Environmental Protection at this conference on Site-Sourced and Stored Renewable Energy. It is our goal today to inform the committee and other participants in today's proceedings about our district scale work, and how and why these processes can bring great value to the city and its communities, businesses and residents.

We are currently partnered with or are partnering with community-based organizations in East Harlem and the Lower East Side and are working towards launching Eco Districts in those communities by mid-2015. Discussions are also underway around potential partnerships in Brownsville Brooklyn and in Rockaways Queens.

As Rory Christian just so elegantly discussed, this is an extraordinary time of both need and opportunity in our city and state. Reforming the Energy Vision, through which the NY State Public Service Commission just yesterday released its Track One ORDER ADOPTING REGULATORY POLICY FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, is a transformational first step towards a new regulatory environment that will lead New York City, the state and the nation towards a more reliable and equitable energy distribution system composed in part of more distributed generation assets sited at a local level.

At NYC Eco Districts we believe that this vision of a more distributed and equitable energy production and distribution system can be realized more quickly and efficiently by focusing on part at the neighborhood or district scale. In the REV process there has been a great deal of discussion about both the "consumer" and the "community". And as evidenced by innovate programs like the NYSERDA's NY Prize Community Microgrid Program, there is a demonstrated desire to explore new models for aggregating consumers and communities into cooperative structures of some sort that will allow for a more fair distribution of benefits within communities and across the city. That is precisely where we bring value to New York City by engaging with local neighborhoods and districts through the EcoDistrict Protocol.

For instance, we have put together an application team for NY Prize and will hopefully be part of a community based microgrid team in NYC that will be exploring new models for shared benefits and partial ownership at the community level. These local microgrid systems will always attempt to integrate as much on site renewable production and storage as viable market based technologies will allow.

New York is a city of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are where people live, work and play. As we look at ways to introduce more clean, distributed energy into the grid in NYC, neighborhoods and districts offer a unique opportunity to involve community in the planning of appropriate locally based distributed generation assets, and then participate in the design, build out and long term management of those assets. Cleaner, more efficient locally sourced energy. These can and should be locally sited systems that are in part designed, built, managed and even owned by local energy cooperatives in partnership with third party implementation and finance firms.

Another very important point about the district scale that we work at is this: neighborhoods are large enough to roll out new programs and innovations that can be replicated across the city and taken to scale by both market and government based programs. Programs can rarely be introduced and implemented at a city-wide scale all at once. Yet this scale is small enough to be able to test out these new innovations and ideas without disrupting too much too quickly. Utility business models and distribution systems, which we all need to continue to function and serve our larger energy needs during this time of transition, are respected while they evolve over a reasonable period of time. The utilities are able to participate at a level of comfort and confidence that the work will benefit them as much as it benefits the community and the larger social good.

This is how the Eco District Protocol works:

We identify communities that would benefit from our process. We reach out to and partner with existing community organizations and building and business owners to share our program and how it will benefit their work and help further their existing goals and programs. We do an analysis of all the existing planning processes that have been done for and with that community, as well as all of the functioning city/state/utility programs that are available in the area. We then take a hard look at the gaps between what has been done, what is being done, what else still needs to be done, and what might be done better. Finally, in full partnership with the community we develop, attract funding for, and implement programming that serves what we call a local needs and opportunities matrix. This is a multiple year, preferably permanent process, and the ongoing measurement and management of programs is also done in full partnership with the community. In fact, when we are successful, our organization fades off into the rear view mirror and the community itself perpetuates the local programs and runs the cooperative entities required to make the work a permanent part of the community fabric.

We commit to hiring as much locally based staff as possible at launch, and commit to training all local staff to run programs over time. One of our most important and engrained principals is that this work must create not just local jobs, but new career opportunities for both young people and other local constituents needing to develop new skills for careers in what we believe will be the resilient and sustainable energy and resource systems of the very near future.

Examples of some of the things that we will work on range from larger district energy systems opportunities (like microgrids) to quick wins like driving greater uptake on existing energy efficiency programs by having staff on the ground that more deeply engages consistently with local residents and building owners. To be clear, we work on much more than energy issues, but today's hearing is focusing on those issues, and we do tend to address energy first within our process. We also work on green

infrastructure, waste systems, urban gardening and food systems issues, and other areas that comprise a comprehensive approach to resiliency and sustainability at the district scale.

We are looking forward to the publication of the De Blasio Administrations update of PlaNYC on Earth Day. We are certain that NYC Eco Districts will help drive 80 by 50 and other city programs in an efficient and community-focused manner. Communities, neighborhoods and districts can and must be at the forefront of the transition to a new energy economy and system here in New York City. We look forward to working closely with City Council and this committee to play a role in these efforts.