

Hartford Solar Landfill Project

Mark Mitchell and Norbert Kovacs
Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice
March, 2011

The Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice (CCEJ) is a twelve-year-old, environmental justice organization with three locations in Connecticut: Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. CCEJ works to promote the fair and meaningful involvement of Connecticut's urban residents in environmental policies that affect where they live, play, and work. CCEJ does this by educating the community and promoting individual, corporate, and governmental responsibility toward Connecticut's city environments. Comprising 75% low-income people and 60% people of color from the community, the local CCEJ Steering Committee in Hartford is responsible for developing the environmental justice and environmental health priorities the nonprofit will address in that city.

CCEJ long has been concerned about the environmental impacts of the former Connecticut Resources Recovery Authority (CRRA) landfill in the North Meadows section of Hartford. The landfill, which ceased operations the last day of 2008, had been accepting garbage and waste from 77 towns in three states. The neighboring residents have complained that gases and odors from the landfill were not only a nuisance, but that they threaten public health. The nearby Hartford Public Works Garage has had to shut down on more than one occasion due to the smells. The site was also the dumping ground for incinerator ash containing highly toxic materials from Hartford's trash-to-energy plant, indirectly supporting those facilities' dangerous use of incineration. For more than



ten years, CCEJ had battled to have the landfill closed. CCEJ believes the landfill's closure is only the first step in remedying an environmental injustice for city residents.

The Landfill property consists of 124 acres, including a 45-acre landform containing municipal waste (which is subject to shifting) and a firm 7-acre landform containing incinerator ash. Both mounds are covered with a synthetic membrane and 18 inches of clean fill, and there are 78 six-foot tall methane gas wells protruding from the larger landform, connected to two electrical generators capable of producing a total of 1.9 megawatts.

CCEJ and its members wanted the landfill to go from being a liability to a community asset. We envisioned remodeling the space to yield multiple benefits. We saw economic benefits resulting from the installation of solar panels on the landfill's flat surface, as well as greenhouses. These would provide the city with a new source of inexpensive, renewable energy and a space to grow fresh fruits and vegetables for local sale. Trails atop the space would provide recreation and afford local residents a chance to view the nearby Connecticut River; many local residents currently have little access to the river and cannot see it, even though its waters border Hartford. Moreover, the solar panels would make green energy visible to local residents. Children could learn how green energy works when they visit the panels. The panels would convince more residents that solar power is a feasible option to power homes. We believed this vision for the future would be contagious among Hartford residents. In our talks with community members, we saw even the lowest-income people respond favorably to solar panels.



In its lease contract for the landfill CRRA had pledged up to \$1 million to design the landfill's post-closure use. The mayor of Hartford established a Landfill Reuse

Committee to solicit ideas from the public on the subject. The committee had two sets of public hearings.

In our project, CCEJ worked with a local community group, North Hartford Seniors in Action, to advance solar panel installation atop the landfill. Representatives of North Hartford Seniors held discussions with the city that led to the revival of the Landfill Reuse Committee. The seniors and CCEJ advocated the solar panel proposal at the committee.

The committee issued final recommendations in November 2010. These were to place walking trails, greenhouses, and solar panels atop the closed landfill. The panels will be put on the landfill's south face, which is flat and broad enough to be covered with a significant number of panels. A letter from our partner, North Hartford Seniors, played a significant role deciding the committee's choice of the solar panels.

The city of Hartford will have to follow up with CRRA to get funding to act on the recommendations, but momentum has been established for a new "green" space on an old eyesore.