



Courtesy of DEP. An illustration of the new digesters that the city is planning at the Hunts Point Wastewater Treatment Plant.

CITY UNVEILS NEW DESIGN AT WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

The new design calls for demolishing the existing digesters and building four new, cylindrically shaped structures, which, the DEP says, will cause shadows to be cast over the park for less than an hour a day.

By Lakshmi Sivadas / May 14, 2019

Revised plan calls for digesters that cast fewer shadows over Barretto Point Park

In 2007, the Department of Environment Protection was forced to go back to the drawing board after community groups spearheaded opposition to its plan to build four large structures for processing waste at the Hunts Point Wastewater Treatment Plant. Mothers on the Move, The Point, Sustainable South Bronx and others were critical of the plan because the egg-shaped “digesters” would have cast shadows over Barretto Point Park for significant parts of each day.

But earlier this month, DEP officials presented revised design plans that were more favorably received by Community Board 2's environmental committee. The new design calls for demolishing the existing digesters and building four new, cylindrically shaped structures, which, the DEP says, will cause shadows to be cast over the park for less than an hour a day.

The structures will be 128 feet high, just as in the prior design, but the new design means that shadows would be cast by over the park between 10 and 10:45 a.m. during fall and spring, according to the DEP. The greatest shadow impact in will occur in the summer. The initial design from 2007 featured 13-story, 130-foot high egg-shaped digesters.

"They'll be siloes. The visual impact will be limited to the views east of Barretto Point Park," said Nat Federici, a DEP engineer.

"What we've done is we've updated the shadow studies, he added. "The shadows cast by the digesters themselves would not cause a significant impact to this park's usability or vegetation in any of the seasons."

The revised plan also features a 12-foot underground tunnel that will link existing facilities and house infrastructure for rain, sludge and gas produced by the tanks that will be sent back to the current site. The site will be fenced in, a feature Board 2 previously requested as a security measure, and which the DEP says will be consistent with the facility's surroundings.

"For the most part, we know that the plant needs an upgrade, so we welcome it," said Ralph Acevedo, Board 2's district manager. "The location of the new digesters is going to meet with criticism, but that is their property. We just need to make sure that the DEP remains transparent with the community – which they have been."

Board 2 residents also want the DEP to do everything possible to ensure the imposing new structures don't obstruct views over the East River.

"My only concern is that they continue to study and create design elements that will help it become less structurally imposing," said Fernando Ortiz, an environmental advocate at The Point CDC. "It's important to integrate artistic and cultural elements into the final design of the digesters, like architectural lighting. They have done this at Newtown Creek (in Brooklyn)."

Ortiz added that residents should be involved in design decisions because of Barretto Point Park's importance in the community, as a rare oasis of green in an industrial area.

Construction is expected to start in the spring of 2020, according to the DEP, and completed by 2024. Once construction of the four digesters is complete, the DEP will move onto the second phase of the project; a building to house thickeners and process sludge before it is fed into the digesters.

"The result of both projects will be improved biosolids," said Federici.

Biosolids are the final product in the wastewater treatment cycle. There are five stages of sewage treatment at the typical wastewater treatment plant in the U.S. The final product is sewage sludge. This sludge is also treated before digesters stabilize it, resulting in biosolids which are then used as fertilizer on agricultural land, or in landfills.

New York City produces about 1200 tons of biosolids a day. A significant portion of this is produced at the Hunts Point plant. The plant processes the third highest quantity of wastewater in the city at 200 million gallons a day.

The story was updated on May 19 to clarify that community groups, not Community Board 2, were the primary critics of the DEP's initial plan for the digesters. .