

The City of Jamestown and Public Power to Have or Have Not

Much discussion, both pro and con, has been presented on why the Jamestown Board of Public Utilities (JBPU) should continue in the power generation business. Exposure to a complex idea or project in a public forum with joint discussion and debate has helped to build this city. The founding fathers of our Municipal Electric Utility had such a discussion that led to the creation of an electric plant for Jamestown. This plant has advanced through over a hundred years of operation and continues to provide low-cost reliable electric power to Jamestown's residential, commercial and industrial customers.

How much value did this decision add to our community in over a century of municipal power plant operations? What would the substitute cost be for our electricity if this public power asset was not built and allowed to evolve in the domain of local control, operation and ownership?

Since the mid fifties the availability of Jamestown's public power has been based on the equation of local generation and hydropower allocations. This joint principle has worked well for Jamestown because it has provided a great return on kilowatt-hour cost versus power consumption. The cost of electricity to Jamestown consumers has been a bargain compared to outside users. However, time and use has inevitable impacts on mechanical equipment associated with power production. Even with constant maintenance, facility reinvestment and technology enhancement, the realities of continued operation, decreased efficiency, obsolescence and environmental regulations have eroded it. It is this erosion process that must be stopped or it will be allowed to continue to the point of abandonment.

The cost to secure transformation and continue power generation in Jamestown will not be cheap. The amount is estimated at \$145,000,000. For this investment the JBPU will build a new 40-megawatt Circulating Fluidized Bed Power Plant utilizing clean coal technology and fuel diversification. The plant will preserve and maintain local power generation for Jamestown and the surrounding service area for decades. It will also result in future kilowatt-hour cost stability while additional tax equivalent payments will support community infrastructure and retain and expand resident jobs.

The cost of abandonment would also be expensive. With no new physical asset to provide power generation the local consumer base will have to buy this replacement power from outside sources. The current power equation for Jamestown is approximately 80% hydro via the New York Power Authority and 20% local provided by the JBPU. If local generation is removed the equation will change forever. What will a future kilowatt-hour cost if we choose abandonment and what would the related impacts be to our community in the decades to come?

With either of these choices (transformation or abandonment) the cost for electricity in Jamestown will go up. The process of delivering electricity in final form to end-users is complex and expensive to do. Ready and online electric power is a precious commodity we take for granted until an outage occurs.

I believe Jamestown must reinvest in a new power plant to preserve and protect its electricity future. We need to secure our local public power generation not out source it to others to control, operate, and own.

Submitted by,
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Retired 2004

This is one piece of a series of op-ed's that will appear in the Post Journal over the next several weeks prior to the Jamestown Strategic Planning & Partnerships Commission's and City Council's Public Dialogue and Fact Finding Forum on the proposed BPU Clean Coal project. The articles are intended to provide different aspects of the proposed project in order to have a better understanding of this critical issue facing the City of Jamestown. The Community Forum is scheduled for Wednesday, April 6th at 7:00 p.m. at the Reg Lenna Civic Center. All are encouraged to attend.