

Community Town Hall: RMG Expansion Proposal  
Saturday, July 25, 2020 1-3 PM

Alderwoman Garza welcomed everyone to the town hall meeting and thanked them for taking time for this conversation. She talked about the importance of this issue to her, that her children and grandchildren also live in the neighborhood, and her history of fighting for environmental justice. The Alderwoman then introduced Angela Tovar, Chief Sustainability Officer in the Mayor's Office, and Dr. Allison Arwady, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH).

Angela Tovar thanked people for taking time to participate. She announced that CDPH released the [Air Quality and Health Report](#) which combines indicators of air pollution, health and social factors and shows that low-income and communities of color are disproportionately burdened by air pollution. She announced that the Mayor's Office is working towards a number of air quality reforms. The reforms include the launch of an Environmental Equity Working Group, zoning changes to improve public engagement in the process and strengthen environmental review and further regulation of heavy industry. See more [here](#).

Dr. Arwady gave a presentation providing background on CDPH's work, environmental commitments, new large recycler rules and permitting. She highlighted the Lightfoot administration's commitment to environmental justice and CDPH's new report which maps areas that should be prioritized for efforts to mitigate air pollution. She reviewed the strong new requirements found in the large recycler rules. These requirements include an air impact study and ongoing air monitoring, real time notification when particulate matter reaches a certain threshold, traffic studies for new facilities, dust mitigation plans, enclosure of post processed autofluff, enclosure of shredders at new and expanding facilities and public notice and opportunity to comment on permit variances. Dr. Arwady detailed the types of permits issued by CDPH, their requirements and the status of any permitting activities. No recycling can begin until the facility has received both permits, and at this time CDPH has not received any permit applications. She reviewed what CDPH will do as part of oversight of the facility which is to ensure that all permits meet requirements, add special conditions to permits as necessary to protect public health based on community input and other expert advice, actively enforce permits that are issued in partnership with community and continue to strengthen environmental rules and regulations. She stressed that CDPH cannot deny permits that meet existing zoning and environmental requirements, impose our own quantitative emissions standards, collect data on emissions or close facilities without documented violations of applicable laws. Dr. Arwady then reviewed the environmental protections RMG has committed to putting in place such as a shredder enclosure, water trucks and misters for dust suppression and planting trees.

Nancy Loeb, Director of the Environmental Advocacy Center at the Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, provided comments in her role as advisor to community groups on the Southeast side. She expressed concerns about the RMG expansion planning process and stated that the City should help RMG find an alternative site. Problems with recyclers include autofluff, torch cutting and diesel emissions from trucks which were not considered in IEPA's permitting process. She stressed that CDPH does have the authority to deny the permit. She mentioned the 30 recent citations for the facility on the North side and referenced the new CDPH air quality and health map for why the facility shouldn't move to the Southeast side.

The meeting was then opened to questions and comments from the public.

1. Resident and Registered Nurse, commented on the physical and mental impacts of pollution, citing asthma and autism in children and breathing problems in adults. It is unacceptable to allow these permits. The community is awake and aware that they can say “no.”
2. Resident commented that the neighborhood smells like gasoline and it is hard to breathe. Her yard has 12 times the allowable limit of lead in the soil, according to EPA. The community is not a dumping ground. She will be emailing several questions.
3. Resident commented that he is tired of hearing that the permits will be approved and invited the Alderwoman to join them in protest at 118<sup>th</sup>. He believes that jobs are important, but that those jobs should be with companies that use cleaner technology and should reinvigorate the canal.
4. Resident commented that the company already has a recycling facility and they are moving a facility that the North side doesn't want. Why not just leave it where it is? Need new, cleaner technology for the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward.
5. Resident commented that she is against the proposal. She is for environmental equity, and this is not transparent. If the community did not rally outside the Alderwoman's house this meeting wouldn't have happened. The Alderwoman said she had a survey that showed that environmental justice was not at the top of the community priorities, and she would like to see the results. Commenter has her own survey that residents don't want General Iron and want better programs.
6. A resident of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Ward, asked why the City thought that this time things would be different. She detailed many issues with the existing facility and efforts to close it.
7. A resident of the North side commented on the 30 violations in 8 months at the existing facility. Said there is a lack of enforcement, and that regulations are only useful if they are enforced.
8. A resident of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward and member of the Southeast Environmental Task Force (SETF), commented that calling the proposal an expansion is misleading and that the permitting process is not transparent. This is to cause confusion. There were problems with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) evaluation process. Planting 200 trees won't make a difference.
9. A representative from a local church began with an Indigenous land acknowledgement and talked about the connection between the health of the land and human health, and he is concerned about the health of the community if RMG is granted a permit by CDPH. He commented on concerns about the cumulative impact of pollution from VOCs, metals and manganese from heavy industry.
10. A high school teacher in the community, asked what entity would be applying for permits – General III or RMG? Dr. Arwady responded that we don't know, and are waiting for permit applications. He then commented on environmental racism.
11. Representative with the NAACP Environmental Justice Committee, commented on the connection to COVID-19 and said that the Committee has their own research that they can share.
12. Resident commented that it feels like public comment processes are pointless because nothing changes.
13. Resident from Lincoln Park said that she doesn't support the move, but believes that the facility provides a service through recycling. Says should be rezoned.

14. Resident of East Side said that the officials do not know East Side. Commented that his family had been in the community for several generations to work in industry there and it has been polluted since the 1950s. Now more and more facilities are coming in, including the Ford Plant expansion.
15. Representative from the Environmental Law and Policy Center, ceded her time to allow additional comments from community residents.
16. Resident commented on the connection between COVID-19 and environmental racism.
17. Representative from SETF commented that the City's Industrial Corridor Modernization started on the North side. SETF has research on the impacts that they have presented to the City. The Office of the Inspector General report on air pollution enforcement shows that improvements are needed.

Dr. Arwady, Angela Tovar and Alderwoman Garza provided closing comments, including that there will be further opportunities for engagement in this process. Additional comments and questions can be emailed to [cdphpermits@cityofchicago.org](mailto:cdphpermits@cityofchicago.org) before August 1<sup>st</sup> and responses will be posted to the RMG Expansion microsite available here: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/rmg-expansion/home.html>.

CDPH received 82 written comments about the proposed RMG expansion via email.

- 77 of those are opposed to the facility receiving permits on the basis of past violations at the current site, pollution burden in the neighborhood and health risks.
  - Five emails included 23 signed letters submitted by the United Neighbors of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward and 1,775 petition signatures from online members and activists of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).
- Five supported the expansion as an opportunity for economic development and to keep materials out of landfills.
  - Two emails included 1,622 letters from supporters submitted by RMG.