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Energy Needs Not as Urgent as Anticipated, City Says

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The city will be able to meet its growing power needs for at least four years longer than originally anticipated, potentially delaying the need for new power plants until 2012, according to a Bloomberg administration report to be released today.

Two years ago, a task force examining the energy supply concluded that the city would need about 25 percent more electricity by 2008 and recommended steps to meet that need, including building new power plants, which generally spark fierce opposition in the neighborhoods where they are to be located. The increased electrical resources would be needed, the panel said, for economic expansion, to make energy prices competitive with those in other cities and to fill a void created by plants that are mothballed.

But after putting in place measures to conserve energy and to make its production more efficient, the New York City Energy Policy Task Force is reporting, based on a Con Edison study, that no additional resources will be needed until at least 2012, and perhaps as late as 2014.

"It's not that we don't have to deal with this anymore but now we can plan for our future needs in a thoughtful way," said Gil C. Quiniones, a senior vice president of the Economic Development Corporation and chairman of the task force. "We really need a combination of solutions."

The city's population growth and construction boom have increased the demand for power, a trend that is expected to intensify as enormous new developments take shape, including those on the Far West Side of Manhattan, around ground zero and along the Brooklyn waterfront.

Responding to that need, the task force, created by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in 2003 and comprising more than a dozen utility executives, environmentalists and economic development officials, issued 28 recommendations the next year.

The recommendations included building new power plants, retrofitting existing ones, simplifying the processes for locating and financing them and making sure the city's zoning rules provided sufficient industrial land to accommodate the plants.

As the city is continuing those efforts, it is also pursuing ways to minimize the need for them.

One strategy has focused on upgrading and expanding existing plants. Since the task force's 2004 report, three projects fueled by natural gas, a cleaner form of energy, have been completed, including two new plants and one that has been upgraded.

The city is also looking into ways to tap excess power from upstate New York and from New Jersey, which are able to generate more energy than those areas need.

In addition, working with Con Edison, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental advocacy group, the task force has begun a program to encourage conservation.

Aimed at lowering demand to reduce the risk of a system shutdown, that program includes offering consumers money if they cut back temporarily on electricity when use is highest.

The program also offers incentives to residents and developers to install systems and equipment

that are energy efficient. Officials expect the program to save the equivalent of what a large power plant could generate, Mr. Quiniones said.

"It doesn't only defer the need for a power plant but creates environmental benefits and a reduction in power prices," he said. "It is important that we have sufficient and reliable power because it enables our growth and economic development."

The city has also enacted legislation requiring that its own new buildings meet higher environmental standards, and is pushing private developers to include so-called green strategies in their designs as well.

According to city officials, the Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development are working on environmentally conscious development proposals worth more than \$2.5 billion.