

Chicago, IL: Masters Project to Inventory Land Reuse Sites for Energy Innovation Potential

Erika Arias, MS candidate, June 2018

Wind and solar power are growing in availability and use. A vacant property might be the perfect place for an energy project. For her Master of Science degree project in Sustainable Management, Arias worked with ATSDR and a local Chicago community leader (Mr. Bruce Montgomery, Executive Director of Urban Energy Innovation). The project identified sites that could be reused for energy innovation (solar farms)—and as economic drivers in distressed communities.

First, Arias conducted site tours and observed conditions. Then she used the Site Tool to evaluate a number of land reuse sites throughout Chicago's south side, including south and west Cook County. She found the necessary data in two local Land Bank databases ((CCLBA, 2017) (SSLBDA, 2018)) and on EPA's Cleanups In My Community website (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2018) to select sites larger than 10 acres with the potential for energy innovation projects. Arias identified 10 sites over 10 acres, including an old hospital, a landfill, and several industrial sites.

The City of Blue Island IL landfill, at over 80 acres, is among the largest of the sites (Figure 1). This unrestricted site is adjacent to several brownfields properties, residences, and businesses. Arias entered the 10 sites in the Site Tool to create her inventory. The data she collected included:

- Addresses
- Coordinates
- Contaminants
- Environment affected by contamination
- Distance to residents, facilities, or sensitive populations (day-care center or nursing home)
- Ownership.

Figure 1: Landfill in Blue Island, IL. Source: Google Maps (Google Map Image of Landfill at 119th and Vincennes in Blue Island, IL, 2018)



Despite having a large number of land reuse and brownfields sites, Blue Island has been involved in a number of land reuse planning projects to benefit the entire community

- Community gardens,
- Parks and playgrounds,
- A local swimming pool offering lifeguarding and fitness classes,
- Lead abatement training for contractors,
- A large-scale expansion of the Salvation Army facility for community use.

There's no question that these new locations and facilities improve life and health for residents of Blue Island!

Erika Arias completed her Masters of Science in Sustainable Management from DePaul University, Chicago Illinois. She graduated in 2018.

References

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