

1 Illinois Environmental Protection Agency  
2 Bureau of Air Construction Permit and  
3 Bureau of Land Development Permit  
4 Green Era Renewable Energy & Urban Farming Campus  
5 Public Hearing November 17, 2022, 7:00 PM  
6

7 Met pursuant to notice at the Auburn Gresham  
8 Healthy Lifestyle Hub 839 West 79th Street in Chicago,  
9 Illinois 60620.  
10

11 Panel Members:

12 Jeff Guy, Hearing Officer  
13 Bob Bernoteit, Bureau of Air  
14 Tom Hubbard, Bureau of Land  
15 Brad Frost, Office of Community Relations  
16 Kunj Patel, Bureau of Air  
17 Imran Syed, Bureau of Land  
18 Michelle Ryan, Division of Legal Counsel  
19

20 Also Present:

21 Sabrina Bailey, Office of Community Relations  
22

23 Bridges Court Reporting  
24 By: Michael J. Duffy, CER  
Notary Public

1 HEARING OFFICER GUY: We're going to go ahead and  
2 get started. Good evening.

3 AUDIENCE: Good evening.

4 HEARING OFFICER GUY: The current time is 7:00.  
5 On behalf of the Illinois EPA Director John Kim,  
6 welcome to tonight's hearing. My name is Jeff Guy, and  
7 I am the agency hearing officer. We look forward to  
8 receiving your comments after tonight's opening  
9 remarks. At this time, please silence all cell phones  
10 and other devices if you had not already done so.

11 This is a -- this informational hearing  
12 is being held pursuant to agency procedures for permit  
13 and closure plan hearings which can found at 35  
14 Illinois Administrative Code, Part 166, Subpart A.  
15 These regulations are available on the Illinois  
16 Pollution Control Board website at [pcb.illinois.gov](http://pcb.illinois.gov).  
17 My responsibility as a hearing officer is to ensure  
18 that this hearing is conducted in a fair and orderly  
19 manner according to these regulations. As part of the  
20 hearing proceedings, the Illinois EPA has prepared  
21 documents for public review that outline the permit  
22 terms and conditions that are the subject of this  
23 hearing. And those documents are available on the  
24 Illinois EPA public notice web page.

1                   Green Era Renewal Energy and Urban  
2 Farming Campus, or Green Era for short, has applied to  
3 the Illinois EPA Bureau of Air and Illinois EPA Bureau  
4 of Land for permits to develop a liquid and solid food  
5 waste recycling facility at 650 West 83rd Street in  
6 Chicago. Green Era has applied for a construction  
7 permit from the Bureau of Air. The construction permit  
8 establishes the emissions, regulations, compliance, and  
9 monitoring of air pollutants from the facility.

10                   Green Era has also applied for a Bureau  
11 of Land permit to develop a food waste composting  
12 facility. Upon completion of development, the facility  
13 will be required to obtain an operating permit. And  
14 our agency staff will give some more details on that  
15 here momentarily.

16                   The Illinois EPA has received the  
17 applications and made preliminary determinations that  
18 both applications meet standards for issuance and has  
19 prepared draft permits for public review and comment.  
20 The agency is holding a public comment period,  
21 including this public hearing, to provide an  
22 opportunity for the public to understand and comment on  
23 the draft permits prior to making a final decision.

24                   The agency is accepting written public

1 comments during the comment period as indicated in the  
2 public hearing notice, which we have about 20 or 30  
3 copies in the back if you should need one. So that  
4 public hearing notice -- the written comments must be  
5 received by midnight on December 19, 2022, and should  
6 be submitted to epa.publichearingcom@illinois.gov or to  
7 the Illinois EPA, attention myself, Jeff Guy, Hearing  
8 Officer, PO Box 19276, 1021 North Grand Avenue,  
9 Springfield, Illinois 62974-9276. Again, this  
10 information is included in the public notice at the  
11 registration desk if you need a copy.

12           Written comments are given the same  
13 consideration as oral comments made during this  
14 hearing, and the written comments may be submitted to  
15 the agency at any time during the comment period.  
16 Although we will continue to accept written comments  
17 through December 19, 2022, tonight is the only time  
18 that we will accept oral comments. The agency will  
19 fully consider and respond to all significant oral and  
20 written public comments and may make changes to the  
21 permits based upon the comments.

22           At this time, starting on my left here,  
23 on your right, agency staff will introduce themselves  
24 and provide information we believe is relevant to

1 tonight's hearing. This will be followed by additional  
2 instructions from me on how we will take public  
3 comments. I'll just pass this down. Do you want to  
4 introduce yourself, Michelle and Brad?

5 MS. RYAN: I'm Michelle Ryan with the Division of  
6 Legal Counsel for Illinois EPA Bureau of Land.

7 MR. FROST: Brad Frost, the Office of Community  
8 Relations. And then, we have Sabrina Bailey also with  
9 us, Community Relations, at the registration table.

10 MR. SYED: Imran Syed, Bureau of Land, Permit  
11 Section.

12 MR. HUBBARD: Tom Hubbard, Bureau of Land, Permit  
13 Section, the Disposable Alternatives Unit manager.

14 MR. PATEL: Kunj Patel, Bureau of Air, Permit  
15 Section.

16 MR. BERNOTEIT: Good evening. My name is Bob  
17 Bernoteit. I'm the manager of the Federally  
18 Enforceable State Operating Permit Unit within the  
19 Illinois EPA Bureau of Air, Permit Section. I will now  
20 provide a brief overview of permitting and of the  
21 permit that is the subject of tonight's hearing.  
22 Generally, permits are required in Illinois prior to  
23 construction and operation of air emission units and  
24 air pollution control equipment.

1                   The permit program and permits issued  
2 thereunder provide a consistent and systematic way of  
3 ensuring that air emission sources are built and  
4 operated in compliance with applicable state and  
5 federal air pollution control laws and regulations. In  
6 a permit application, the Illinois EPA requires a  
7 description of the emission source and its emission  
8 units proposed to be constructed, a list of types and  
9 amounts of the contaminants that will be emitted, and a  
10 description of the emission control equipment to be  
11 utilized.

12                   This information is used to determine  
13 whether the emission source can comply with standards  
14 adopted by the Illinois Pollution Control Board and the  
15 United States Environmental Protection Agency, or US  
16 EPA. In its review of an application, the Illinois EPA  
17 has no choice legally but to issue a construction  
18 permit to a source if the source will be in compliance  
19 with all state and federal air pollution control  
20 regulations.

21                   To ensure compliance, the Illinois EPA  
22 establishes conditions in the permit or requirements  
23 that the source must follow. Conditions may restrict  
24 such things as the number of hours of operation, the

1 amount and type of materials used, production rates, or  
2 the operating and control practices used by a source.  
3 Conditions within the permit also include requirements  
4 for testing, parametric monitoring, record keeping, and  
5 reporting to demonstrate that restrictions are, in  
6 fact, being met.

7 Failure to comply with the permit  
8 conditions subjects the source to the risk of  
9 enforcement that may include fines and other penalties.  
10 Additional tools for ensuring compliance include agency  
11 review of reports that a source is obligated to submit  
12 and on-site inspections of the source and its units.  
13 For example, a source must report its emissions to the  
14 Illinois EPA each year and must promptly report any  
15 deviation from permit requirements. These reports are  
16 reviewed by the Illinois EPA to assess compliance.

17 The Illinois EPA also periodically  
18 visits a source to confirm compliance through  
19 observation of operations and review of source records.  
20 If problems are identified by either review of source  
21 reports or direct observation, corrective actions will  
22 be required and legal action may be pursued.

23 In this proposed permit for Green Era,  
24 the facility would be authorized to receive liquid and

1 solid food waste to be processed and converted to  
2 produce a pipeline-quality biomethane gas through the  
3 use of anaerobic digesters and biogas treatment system.  
4 The permit requires the emissions from biogas handling  
5 and processing system to be controlled. That control  
6 train consists of a thermal oxidizer and flare.

7 The permit further requires inspection  
8 of the air pollution control equipment and a log of  
9 control equipment operation. The permit places limits  
10 on emissions from the operation and requires testing of  
11 particulate matter, particulate matter less than 10  
12 microns, particulate matter less than 2.5 microns,  
13 sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, and  
14 volatile organic material to determine the emissions  
15 from the source.

16 Also, the permit calls for parametric  
17 monitoring. This monitoring addresses the temperature  
18 of the thermal oxidizer combustion chamber and  
19 monitoring to ensure the presence of a flame when gas  
20 is being vented to the flare. And the permit calls for  
21 record-keeping and reporting for the stack testing and  
22 of the monitored parameters.

23 In addition to the generally applicable  
24 statutory and regulatory requirements, the Illinois EPA



1 has also required operation and emission limitations  
2 for the biogas handling and processing system, a  
3 fugitive emissions control plan for the roadways at the  
4 facility, and an odor control plan for the facility  
5 that was prepared by the applicant and was submitted to  
6 and was reviewed by the Illinois EPA. That concludes  
7 my opening remarks.

8 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Thanks, Bob.

9 MR. HUBBARD: Hi. Good evening. My name's Tom  
10 Hubbard. I'm the manager of the Disposable  
11 Alternatives Unit in Bureau of Land, Permit Section.  
12 Thanks, you all, for coming to this hearing regarding a  
13 possible issuance of the Bureau of Air and Bureau of  
14 Land permits for Green Era to develop a food waste  
15 composting facility. The facility covers approximately  
16 8.9 acres on 650 West 83rd Street. And my remarks  
17 today pertain to the possible issuance of a development  
18 permit by the Bureau of Land.

19 First, I'd like to provide some general  
20 regulatory background on how facilities like Green Era  
21 are regulated by the Bureau of Land. Green Era has  
22 applied for a development permit to compost food waste  
23 under the requirements stipulated in 35 Illinois  
24 Administrative Code, Part 807. If the development

1 permit is approved, Green Era will have to apply for an  
2 operating permit from the Bureau of Land once they've  
3 completed all the construction, and we will review this  
4 operating permit application and confirm the  
5 construction that's been completed in accordance with  
6 the approved design.

7           The waste can only be accepted after  
8 approval of the operating permit by the Bureau of Land.  
9 The development permit application proposes to  
10 construct a 35,000-square-foot processing building, a  
11 5,600-square-foot building for temporary storage of  
12 general-use compost and wood chips they commonly refer  
13 to as the pole barn, four hoop houses for indoor  
14 farming operations, a 1.64-million-gallon digester  
15 tank, and a 320,000-gallon equalization tank, biogas  
16 equipment, a flare, a thermal oxidizer, and all the  
17 associated piping and valves.

18           And now, I'd like to provide some  
19 background on the facility operations. The facility  
20 will receive waste from food processors such as various  
21 bakeries, potato chip plants, brewers, food fryers,  
22 meat packers, and pet food manufacturers, grocery  
23 stores, restaurants, commercial and residential  
24 establishments that generate source-separated,

1 post-consumer food scraps and source-separated bagged  
2 kitchen waste from neighborhood curbside collection  
3 programs in the Chicago area.

4           Approximately 80,000 tons of food waste  
5 will be received per year, and the average daily  
6 acceptance rate is 200 tons of solid food and 100 tons  
7 of liquid food waste. The food waste will be received  
8 in the -- at the facility in compactors, roll-off  
9 boxes, dump or walking floor trailers. And liquid food  
10 waste will be received in tankers that are sealed. All  
11 food waste will be received and processed within the  
12 enclosed processing building. The food waste will be  
13 normally processed the same day as received, and the  
14 equipment processing areas will be cleaned every day  
15 waste is received at the facility.

16           The number of trucks accessing the  
17 facility, including the trucks delivering food waste  
18 and trucks that are moving food packaging and other  
19 nondigestible material and truck transporting composted  
20 cake solids from the facility, will vary from 16 to 28  
21 trucks per day.

22           All trucks will go in the South  
23 Wallace -- sorry, Wallace Street through a gated  
24 entrance, and waste-hauling vehicles are not allowed to

1 queue outside the facility boundaries.

2           The solid and liquid food waste will be  
3 combined to form a pumpable slurry, which will be  
4 treated in an anaerobic digester system. Free water  
5 from the digestate will be slurred to the MWRD, the  
6 Metropolitan Water Reclamation District's Stickney  
7 Water Reclamation Facility, and the cake solids will be  
8 transported offsite for blending with soils and compost  
9 for a soil amendment.

10           The facility is expected to produce 50  
11 tons of cake solids per day. And biogas that is  
12 produced by the anaerobic digestion in the food waste  
13 will be injected into the local natural gas pipeline  
14 owned by Peoples Gas. Flare was also provided to --  
15 and combust excess biogas and if there's any problems  
16 with the pipeline or anything like that. And tail gas,  
17 consisting mostly of carbon dioxide and about  
18 seven to nine percent methane, will be directed to a  
19 thermal oxidizer which will combust the poor-energy  
20 gas.

21           An odor control plan is provided in the  
22 application and includes procedures designed to reduce  
23 occurrence of odors to the site, such as maintaining  
24 negative pressure in the processing building, ionizing

1 the air within this processing building, and drawing  
2 that treated air through activated carbon beds and  
3 venting the receiving tanks and processing equipment in  
4 the processing building to the odor-controlled  
5 equipment. The plan developmental permit will include  
6 conditions that require the facility to record and  
7 report every odor complaint received. And  
8 additionally, the facility must within seven days  
9 report actions taken in response to any odor complaint.

10 In closing, the Bureau of Land's  
11 initial evaluation has found the application submitted  
12 for the proposed development of the food waste  
13 composting facility meets the applicable regulatory  
14 requirements. And accordingly, the Bureau of Land  
15 intends to issue a development permit for this  
16 facility. We welcome your comments and questions on  
17 these proposed permit actions. Thank you.

18 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Thanks, Tom. We  
19 will be taking public comments here in just a minute.  
20 Just a couple of things first, if you have extensive  
21 oral comments this evening, please consider giving just  
22 a summary of those comments and then submitting the  
23 entirety of your comments to the agency in writing  
24 before the comment period. Again, that's December 19,

1 2022. While the record is open, all written comments  
2 will be placed into the hearing record as exhibits.

3 Agency staff here this evening, we will  
4 answer questions if those answers are readily  
5 available. But if the question calls for research or  
6 is too complicated for a quick answer, they will  
7 address your comments as part of the agency's  
8 responsiveness summary, which will include a summary of  
9 all significant public comments, whether written or  
10 oral, submitted during tonight's hearing or during the  
11 time the hearing record is open. The responsiveness  
12 summary will also provide a statement of the agency's  
13 final action.

14 All who provide their e-mail address,  
15 mailing address, or submit written comments during the  
16 comment period will be notified of the agency's final  
17 decision in this matter and the availability of the  
18 responsiveness summary, which will be available on the  
19 agency's public notice web page. If you have not yet  
20 completed a registration card, please do at the desk up  
21 front, and then check the appropriate box on the card  
22 if you desire to make comments this evening.

23 If anyone does not wish to make  
24 comments or, for some reason, we can't accommodate

1 everyone who wishes to make comments, which I don't  
2 think that's the case -- we have about six or seven  
3 speakers. But for whatever reason, if that does occur,  
4 please remember, you can submit your comments in  
5 writing. And again, written comments are given the  
6 same consideration as comments made orally at this  
7 hearing.

8           Anyone wishes -- anyone wishing to  
9 provide comments this evening, please be mindful of the  
10 court reporter at the end down here, who is making a  
11 verbatim record of this proceeding. Therefore, please  
12 keep the general background noise in the room to a  
13 minimum so that all comments can be properly recorded.  
14 Any comments made from the audience without a  
15 microphone will not be recorded by the court reporter  
16 or part of the official hearing record. The transcript  
17 of this hearing will eventually be posted on the  
18 Illinois EPA public notice web page.

19           As a hearing officer, I intend to treat  
20 everyone in a respectful manner, and I ask that the  
21 agency staff and the public please do the same.  
22 Everyone has a right to express their comments on this  
23 matter this evening. However, please do not argue or  
24 cross-examine or engage in prolonged discussions with

1 agency staff. Any person who wants to make comments  
2 may do so, as long as their comments are relevant to  
3 the issues at hand. If your comments fall outside of  
4 the scope of this hearing, I may ask you to proceed to  
5 your next issue.

6 Comments should be addressed to our  
7 hearing panel. When it is your turn, I will call your  
8 name. And then, please state your name and affiliation  
9 for the record. It would be helpful if you would spell  
10 your last name as well. We're going to limit the time  
11 between five and ten minutes per speaker. So we will  
12 now take public comments, and our first speaker is  
13 going to be Jason Feldman, followed by Vernon Fleming.

14 MR. FELDMAN: Hello. My name is Jason Feldman,  
15 F-E-L-D-M-A-N, and I'm with Green Era. On behalf of  
16 Erika Allen, Green Era's board president, and I, Green  
17 Era is excited to be in the final stretch. Since we  
18 began this process five years ago, this is our -- there  
19 have been 30-plus meetings in our community-centered  
20 design process.

21 We have collected and listened to  
22 feedback for a large-scale planning effort, engaging  
23 more than 1,500 local stakeholders, including strong  
24 partnerships with local schools committed to STEM



1 education, such as Simeon Career Academy and Leo High  
2 Schools, which is located just next door to us, and  
3 also partnering with other community leaders on  
4 complementary health-related developments such as the  
5 Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corps' Healthy  
6 Lifestyle Hub, which we're in right now. We are proud  
7 of the community connections we have created, and we're  
8 here tonight to hear your feedback and work with you.  
9 At each meeting, we have learned and we are excited to  
10 see new faces and to connect.

11           The Green Era Renewable Energy and  
12 Urban Agricultural Campus is transforming nine acres of  
13 contaminated brownfield into a vibrant hub for organics  
14 recycling, green energy, living wage jobs, fresh  
15 produce, small business incubation, educational  
16 programming, and community green space. Climate change  
17 is upon us. It is not 20 years away; it is now.

18           And Green Era's excited to bring a  
19 green solution to Auburn Gresham that fully engages the  
20 Quality-of-Life Plan, one that provides living wage  
21 green jobs and career ladders, recycles food scraps to  
22 recirculate this valuable resource into clean,  
23 renewable energy and beautiful nutrient-rich compost to  
24 support local food production, jobs, benefit the

1 environment, community, and local economic development.  
2 The campus will infuse the neighborhood with critical  
3 resources to promote an equitable recovery of health  
4 and economy and help us weather future crises.

5           It will allow Chicago to build a secure  
6 urban food shed to feed the city. To help build that  
7 food shed, one of our key community partners is Urban  
8 Growers Collective, an innovative urban farming  
9 organization in Chicago with a 20-year track record.  
10 Here tonight is our cofounder Laurell Sims, who will  
11 also speak. Thank you.

12           HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thank you, Jason. Next is  
13 Vernon Fleming, followed by Norma Sanders.

14           MR. FLEMING: Hello. Hello all, my name is  
15 Vernon Fleming, and it's Fleming, F-L-E-M-I-N-G. So as  
16 a member of this community for the last 28 years, one  
17 thing that I do see is that we really do need an  
18 economic revitalization, not just that, but an area for  
19 us to actually access fresh produce. Not many of you  
20 may know, but the only grocery store we have within the  
21 local community is our local Aldis and Walmarts.

22           Outside of that, where people can get  
23 fresh produce, fresh food, anywhere is their local gas  
24 station or their local liquor store, where those

1 produces are pretty much spoiled, have gray meats, bugs  
2 in your food, things of that nature, things that you  
3 wouldn't see in any other side of the city but the  
4 South and West Sides here. And so when we talk about  
5 how we can bring a revitalization of community, and not  
6 just a community, but in an area when the family's net  
7 worth is at a negative \$8, right?

8           And so from the resources of our  
9 schools being shut down to even mental health  
10 facilities, this area is in need of resources. Green  
11 Era is not just a digester. It's a way for people to  
12 actually get that prosperity, a way for them to get the  
13 fresh produce that any other area in the Chicagoland --  
14 you know, prefecture can access. You don't see this  
15 type of disparity on the North Side. You don't see  
16 these type of disparities in the north suburbs.

17           You only see these type of disparities  
18 in what we like to call the landfill ring, landfill  
19 circles. It's only when you see areas of economic  
20 distress when you see these type of resources being  
21 taken away from constantly. And for the first time in  
22 my 28 years here in the South Side of Chicago, in the  
23 Englewood area and the Auburn Gresham area, we actually  
24 have something beneficial coming in here. We have a

1 way for people to actually have a job, a way for people  
2 to get fresh food and produce.

3 I've seen 200 different kids just over  
4 the last summer come to Green Era, and they're excited  
5 about something in their community for once, like,  
6 literally excited. Not just talking about the gun  
7 violence that's happening here, not talking about who  
8 got shot last night, but they're excited about learning  
9 about their fresh fruits, about their fresh produce,  
10 about understanding what a tomato is and how it's  
11 different than a pear fruit or an apple.

12 I've seen kids who have never picked  
13 collard greens get excited and have a bag full of them  
14 so they can take home to their families. Like, it  
15 brings great joy in my heart to know that when people  
16 visit Green Era, they're not just getting excited for  
17 what's coming into their community, but they can take a  
18 little bit of that home to cook for their families.  
19 Like, this is the type of revitalization that we need  
20 in our communities.

21 And I'm not just saying that as a  
22 person who works for Green Era, but as somebody who,  
23 day in and day out, works his butt off to make sure his  
24 community is better. And what I see right now is a job

1 opportunity, a way for somebody to have fresh food, a  
2 way for somebody to get educated in a field -- an area  
3 that they never had a opportunity for. So I really  
4 hope that you all consider not just what Green Era  
5 might represent but what Green Era can bring to the  
6 people that really are resource starved.

7           And so, you know, that's just my little  
8 two minutes up here, but I really hope you consider the  
9 social benefits of it, the human aspect of it. You  
10 know, we have violence. We have all of these gangs  
11 because people don't have economic resources, right?  
12 Nobody wants to stand on a corner all night selling  
13 drugs. They do that because they have to feed their  
14 family. This is a way for them to feed their family.

15           And thus, it may even lower the crime  
16 rates around here, might give people hope, might give  
17 somebody something to hold on to when they don't have  
18 anything left to eat at home. You can come to Green  
19 Era. You can come pick some fresh produce. You can  
20 come and get some free food at our Fresh Moves vans.  
21 You can be a part of what's being built here. So, you  
22 know, that's just my thing, from Vernon Fleming, a  
23 resident of this community for the last 28 years.

24           HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thank you, Vernon.

1 Appreciate that. Norma?

2 MS. SANDERS: I feel like I should ask for a  
3 point of order. Would it be possible for me to let  
4 Carlos Nelson, who is my chief executive officer, go  
5 next? Is that -- are the rules --

6 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Well, did he -- sign -- a  
7 card with his name?

8 MS. SANDERS: Did you sign a card, Carlos?

9 MR. NELSON: I did not sign a card.

10 MS. SANDERS: You did not?

11 MR. NELSON: I don't think so.

12 HEARING OFFICER GUY: You can certainly speak,  
13 but I would just appreciate if you would go ahead and  
14 fill out one of these cards so we can have your  
15 information. We can hold for just a minute, if you --

16 MS. SANDERS: Yeah. I would like to him -- have  
17 him go before me.

18 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. So we'll just take  
19 just a couple-minute break.

20 MS. SANDERS: Okay.

21 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay.

22 MS. SANDERS: That's okay. And I do have one of  
23 our constituents that needs to leave earlier. If she  
24 could go after them.

1 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. And who was that?

2 MS. SANDERS: Michelle Merritt.

3 MS. MERRITT: I did submit a card.

4 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Come on up.

5 MS. MERRITT: Thank you. Thanks, Norma.

6 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Next is Michelle Merritt.

7 MS. MERRITT: Thank you. Hi, good evening. My  
8 name is Michelle Merritt. I'm a community and economic  
9 development consultant and practitioner with over  
10 15 years of experience working in communities  
11 throughout the South and West Sides of the City of  
12 Chicago. I'm here to express my support for the Green  
13 Era and Urban Farming Campus for three reasons. One,  
14 the expertise and commitment of this team whose work  
15 I'm familiar with for the past 2 years. They've been  
16 very intentional about how they've engaged the  
17 community, how they've listened to the community, and I  
18 just find their work to be extremely commendable.

19 Secondly, the local jobs that it will  
20 help to bring to the Auburn Gresham community. This is  
21 a community that's in need of jobs, and to have an  
22 opportunity to have the campus support additional jobs,  
23 local jobs, I think is important. And then, lastly,  
24 the real-life application that students that live --

1 the students and youth that live in the Auburn Gresham  
2 community will get to experience at the digester, for  
3 them to be able to see live STEM education, to learn  
4 more about sustainable and renewable energy is very  
5 important. So thank you very much. Have a good  
6 evening.

7 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thank you, Michelle. Is  
8 Laurell Sims here?

9 MS. SIMS: I am, but Carlos can go next. That's  
10 fine with me.

11 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't  
12 know you were back. Carlos Nelson.

13 MR. NELSON: Good evening, everyone. Carlos  
14 Nelson. Nelson is N-E-L-S-O-N. I am the CEO of  
15 Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation. So  
16 incorporating within my comments a welcome to our  
17 humble abode here, to the Auburn Gresham Healthy  
18 Lifestyle Hub. Actually, this is the first formal  
19 meeting held, as we just had our grand opening on  
20 Friday, November 11.

21 So welcome to a building that -- a  
22 60,000-square-foot building that has sat vacant for  
23 nearly 30 years right here on 79th Street. If you  
24 don't know, 79th Street is the busiest bus line in the



1 entire City of Chicago, steps away from Halsted,  
2 Route 1, which is another very busy, bustling corridor  
3 that goes not only through the City of Chicago from the  
4 North Side, but as you know, continues all the way  
5 through the tip of the State of Illinois. Yet in our  
6 community, as you can plainly see if you leave Downtown  
7 Chicago, you will see tracks and tracks and tracks of  
8 vacant, underutilized, disinvested land in our  
9 communities.

10                   Yet, GAGDC, Greater Auburn-Gresham  
11 Development Corporation, in partnership with Green Era  
12 Development, were able to bring back to life two  
13 long-vacant, underutilized assets; this  
14 60,000-square-foot, four-story asset and a nine-acre,  
15 deplorable brownfield site at 650 West 83rd Street,  
16 which is why we're here today. And so, imagine, as  
17 Vernon mentioned, in many -- most other communities,  
18 communities that have vibrances, that have assets, that  
19 are respected, including the people, those type --  
20 these types of commentaries wouldn't be had.

21                   You wouldn't have a nine-acre site  
22 that's steps away from 83rd and Halsted just sitting  
23 there in a deplorable condition that unfortunately was  
24 owned by the City of Chicago brownfield site. Yet, we

1 are now being able to bring to life that site with a  
2 renewable energy and urban farming campus, something  
3 that is very unusual for communities like Auburn  
4 Gresham and Englewood and West Chatham and Washington  
5 Heights. Not only are we bringing that back to life,  
6 but we are revitalizing opportunities -- economic  
7 development opportunities.

8           We're engaging the kids from, as you  
9 heard, Leo High School, which is just 50 feet away from  
10 this building; Simeon Career Academy, a few feet  
11 away -- a few hundred feet away from the renewable  
12 energy campus. And so -- and telling these kids that,  
13 "Hey, this is a community that has opportunities coming  
14 to its community. This is a community that you  
15 shouldn't, you know, aspire to leave to find other  
16 opportunities. You can have -- you can find those  
17 opportunities for good paying jobs for the green  
18 economy right here in your community."

19           But for the fact that Green Era is  
20 developing this nine-acre site, it would sit there as  
21 it has sat there for far too long. But for the fact  
22 that GAGDC developed this building, it would sit here  
23 30 years vacant. These two projects -- or that  
24 particular project is a project that must happen. We

1 really appreciate your ear. It's very important that  
 2 we get this permit in motion so that we can turn on  
 3 this anaerobic digester. We can continue the community  
 4 engagement that has gone on swimmingly, led by our  
 5 Urban Growers Collective.

6 And you heard from Vernon. Erika  
 7 Allen's not here. You'll hear from Laurell  
 8 momentarily. But this is an asset that we must have.  
 9 The community has spoken. The community has really  
 10 rallied around bringing this opportunity -- this rare  
 11 opportunity to our community. So thank you for your  
 12 time. And welcome to the Chicago Bears community room.  
 13 Hopefully, you guys are all Chicago Bears fans, as we  
 14 are. Thank you.

15 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Well, thank you, Carlos.  
 16 And who wanted to go next, Norma or Laurell?

17 MS. SIMS: Norma and then me.

18 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Norma Sanders.

19 MS. SANDERS: Good evening, and thank you for  
 20 allowing us to speak. I did promise Jeff a couple more  
 21 community people, but I promise you everything --

22 HEARING OFFICER GUY: That's just fine.

23 MS. SANDERS: -- in here is the right story; it  
 24 really is. Again, my name is Norma Sanders,

1 S-A-N-D-E-R-S. I am the director of special  
2 initiatives at the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development  
3 Corporation. And what Carlos didn't say is we are a  
4 comprehensive community development organization, and  
5 we have a mission -- a passion, but we have a mission  
6 to support and revitalize low-income communities.

7 The cool thing about that, though, is  
8 we also have a Quality-of-Life Plan for our  
9 neighborhood, where the community came together and  
10 decided what a quality community, what a healthy  
11 community meant to them. And there are three aspects  
12 of that Quality-of-Life Plan that Green Era, Jason  
13 Feldman, Erika have been all along the way with us.  
14 That was in 2016. So this is a five-year process.

15 But I just want to share a few minutes  
16 about, on behalf of the community that's here and not  
17 here, why it's so important to bring Green Era in, to  
18 actually, literally have that connect to Peoples Gas,  
19 because part of this mission is for us to teach people  
20 how to fish for themselves. We see this as a wealth  
21 generation, job generation -- you heard that, and  
22 you're going to keep hearing it -- for our community.

23 But when we started on this journey  
24 with Green Era, we learned that the Quality-of-Life

1 Plan actually had this embedded in it without knowing  
2 it. The kids know way more about green technology,  
3 RNG, air quality, which I had a group of STEM students  
4 for -- called MAPSCorps for about three years that  
5 measured air quality all over Auburn Gresham, including  
6 on the campus. They can't wait to commit that what  
7 we're doing on that campus will not impact air. They  
8 have the devices; they're trained to use them, and  
9 they're ready to do that. But by itself, that's just  
10 one huge benefit that we have.

11           Green Era, I mean, it sounds maybe not  
12 so impactful, but if you drove around that site before  
13 it was remediated, because I think some of you have  
14 been to the campus after remediation, it was a dump.  
15 It wasn't just a city dump. Anybody was dumping there.  
16 And what Green Era has already done is they've made a  
17 promise to remediate. And it was expensive; we know  
18 that. I think you guys helped us do that. But it is a  
19 beautiful, clean site that we have engineered and made  
20 a promise to ourselves to make this work with the right  
21 technology.

22           So that benefit -- the center is  
23 designed to bring jobs, some engineering jobs, some  
24 laborers, some farmers, but a really high-tech campus

1 that I think everybody in the community is proud of.  
2 So when you think about the African roots in  
3 African-American communities, we have more green  
4 gardens and farms and people that are just waiting.  
5 But we have also let them know it's a mechanism for  
6 them to invest in themselves and to invest in their  
7 community. And that's why the way they can  
8 interconnect is really, really important to me.

9 I teach small businesses. There is one  
10 African-American hauler that is just feet of -- couple  
11 feet away from the campus, and we're trying to work  
12 with him as well, to learn how to expand his business.  
13 And if you look at some of the -- oh, yeah. I think it  
14 is there, the one rendering there at some of our small  
15 business expos in the city. There are people that saw  
16 that one little truck a year ago and said, "How can I  
17 start my trucking business to be a part of this?" So  
18 that's economic opportunity, as Carlos said.

19 And this is what we're bringing to the  
20 community, a way to fish and build your own wealth,  
21 clean up the area, and promote green technology in the  
22 future. And what Jason did not say is when we engaged  
23 Simeon High School through a whole semester, the  
24 students redesigned half the campus. And I tell you,

1 it's going to be phenomenal. I can't wait. I'm  
2 looking for the permit to come. And if there's  
3 anything that I can do to help provide more  
4 information, I look forward to it.

5 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thank you, Norma.

6 MS. SANDERS: You're welcome.

7 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Laurell Sims?

8 MS. SIMS: Hi. Good evening. I'm Laurell Sims.  
9 It's S-I-M-S, and I'm the cofounder of Urban Growers  
10 Collective. And thank you all for having us here  
11 tonight. As Jason Feldman said tonight, that climate  
12 change is real. It's here now, and I know that you all  
13 live and breathe that. But particularly for  
14 communities of color, they're the first to be impacted  
15 by it. And as you see -- you know, we say climate  
16 change is now, but in communities like Auburn Gresham,  
17 divestment has been here for the last 40 years.

18 So while this, you know -- this very  
19 real thing is impacting us today, divestment has been  
20 impacting Auburn Gresham for the last 40 years. And so  
21 for us to be able to really impact this neighborhood,  
22 it's really time for us to be able to -- we really need  
23 to be able to invest now in green technology to help  
24 further and create a healthier environment for this

1 neighborhood in particular.

2 We know that racism is structural and  
3 our response to that has to also be structural. And so  
4 one of the things as Urban Growers that we're really  
5 excited about is to be able to have access to compost.  
6 We know that for the last 20 years, while we've been  
7 growing in Chicago, the biggest barrier to be able to  
8 increase urban farms in the area and across Chicago is  
9 access to good, high-quality soil.

10 As Norma pointed out and Carlos pointed  
11 out, the site that we're -- we'll be growing on, the  
12 new four-acre farm that we'll be developing was a  
13 brownfield. You know, as Norma described it as -- it  
14 was a dump. And to be able to grow in areas across  
15 Chicago, we really have to have high-quality soil, and  
16 that's a huge barrier to new growers across the city.  
17 And so to have a digester that's helping us provide  
18 that with really high-quality organic materials that  
19 will really help expand food production in the city  
20 will just be a huge boon for the local economy, for  
21 food access.

22 And I think, you know, we saw,  
23 especially during COVID, how fragile our food system  
24 is, you know, with just the lack of produce on shelves.



1 We know that the time really is now to invest in our  
2 local food community. And so I think, you know, having  
3 a resource like Green Era is going to be just a huge  
4 investment for Chicago to be able to really create  
5 security across the board, both environmental but also  
6 food and just economic, to be able to just make a  
7 healthier Chicago.

8 For phase two, we're really excited to  
9 be able to offer 30 jobs for teens on-site. We're  
10 going to have a high-tech greenhouse on the four-acre  
11 farm that will have -- that will allow for adult job  
12 training programs to really help invest in the  
13 community, allow folks, especially folks coming from  
14 the prison to pipeline system, to be able to learn how  
15 to do high-tech growing, and to help with it -- to --  
16 with job placement.

17 We're also really excited to offer over  
18 18,000 square feet of just green space for folks to be  
19 able to come and do -- and walk in the community.  
20 We'll have a really beautiful nature trail. We'll have  
21 a nursery and just other -- a nursery, a grocery store.  
22 So it's just going to be a really beautiful hub for  
23 folks to be able to come and just really -- just, you  
24 know, to be able to access the space. So we're really

1 excited to be able to offer that for the community and  
2 to really get this started. So we're really looking  
3 forward to the permit passing and to be able to offer  
4 this in Auburn Gresham. Thanks so much.

5 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thank you, Laurell. Next,  
6 we have Derrick Patrick, followed by Bob -- is it Hagen  
7 (sic)?

8 Derrick Patrick.

9 MR. PATRICK: Yeah. Hello. Hello, everybody.  
10 Derrick Patrick, P-A-T-R-I-C-K. I'm here, really, as a  
11 member of the community and sitting over here getting  
12 emotional just because I feel like I represent some  
13 youth here. I walked in. They asked me was I high  
14 school. I'm not. However, I'm still young, in my 20s  
15 still. And I'm just inspired by everybody behind me  
16 that has spoken so far about bringing this new  
17 revitalization to the community.

18 And as a farmer and a cook with very  
19 close ties with Urban Growers Collective, I can  
20 definitely vouch from a very boots-on-the-ground level  
21 with Fresh Moves distributing that produce that's grown  
22 in South Chicago that I actually was growing as an  
23 apprentice is really impacting the community. I can  
24 speak for the South Side and the West Side. I grew up

1 on the West Side. I'm traveling all the way over here  
2 to get the resources. We really need it. And I want  
3 to be part of the inspiration for other youth to get  
4 involved in it and just spread it around.

5 This is a great hub, like Laurell said,  
6 and we're excited. We want to know when the permit's  
7 going to be ready and so we can get it going and  
8 available for the people. So the question, I guess,  
9 when can we expect that? Thank you.

10 HEARING OFFICER GUY: I'll have to pass that  
11 question on to our Bureau of Air and Land experts.

12 MR. HUBBARD: Well, we can't issue a permit until  
13 after the comment period is over and we've responded to  
14 all the comments. So it would have to be after the  
15 comment period was over, which is the 14th of December?

16 MS. RYAN: 19th.

17 MR. HUBBARD: 19th of December.

18 HEARING OFFICER GUY: 19th.

19 MR. HUBBARD: And then, it probably takes at  
20 least a week to answer all the -- get all the answers  
21 collated and hear a response to this.

22 MS. RYAN: And it's Christmas.

23 UNKNOWN MALE 2: Then it's a Christmas present.

24 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thanks, Derrick. Next is

1 Bob --

2 MR. HEUER: Heuer, H-E-U-E-R.

3 HEARING OFFICER GUY: H-E-U-E-R. Thank you, Bob.

4 MR. HEUER: Hi. Bob Heuer, H-E-U-E-R. I'm with  
5 HNA Networks in Evanston. We're a public affairs  
6 consultancy, help organizations navigate the  
7 intersection of food, farming, and regional economies.  
8 So I'm really glad to hear the Illinois EPA is moving  
9 along in this thing. I've been watching this with real  
10 live excitement for at least a couple of years. Just  
11 echoing what Vernon Fleming said, just to hear this new  
12 narrative coming out of this community is really  
13 exciting.

14 I'm going to share the -- in the  
15 comments an article I wrote in the Chicago Reader in  
16 1993 that just speaks to the despair and also to the  
17 way our economy's been organized around, essentially,  
18 paving over cheap land and continually moving outward.  
19 So it's great to see this investment. And really, I  
20 look at what this project represents and think of it  
21 almost as an anchor tenant of the shopping mall of a  
22 climate economy and a community-driven agrifood  
23 nutrition and conservation economy.

24 And I've been in dialogue with

1 organizations in Will County and Kankakee County that  
2 are very interested in sort of seeing this thing  
3 succeed as a building block for an ecosystem. And I've  
4 been in conversation with the Illinois Department of  
5 Agriculture and the Illinois Finance Authority about  
6 developing a three-county South Metro Chicago pilot  
7 that will support the launch of the -- of a proposed  
8 community-based farming, food funding program.

9           The IFA and Department of Ag have  
10 applied for a \$4.9 million USDA grant to establish what  
11 they call Cultivate 40. And I'll provide the details  
12 on that later, but I just -- really pleased to hear  
13 this and have a chance to come and see for myself what  
14 a great investment this represents, not only for  
15 Chicago -- the South Side of Chicago and the region,  
16 but I think it's going to be a message for the country,  
17 so -- and Illinois in a leadership role, so thank you  
18 very much.

19           HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thanks, Bob. And by any  
20 chance, can you tell me what your e-mail address is?  
21 I'm kind of having a hard time --

22           MR. HEUER: It's bob@hnanetworks.net.

23           HEARING OFFICER GUY: HNA Networks --

24           MR. HEUER: Networks.net.

1 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Thanks.

2 MR. HEUER: Thank you.

3 HEARING OFFICER GUY: And the last speaker --  
4 is it Iyata, or?

5 MS. SIMBA: Iyana.

6 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Iyana, I'm sorry.

7 MS. SIMBA: That's fine. Hi, everyone. My name  
8 is Iyana Simba. I am the City Programs director for  
9 the Illinois Environmental Council. I'm also a youth.  
10 There's another one of us here today. But I'm here on  
11 behalf of the Illinois Environmental Council. We are a  
12 nonprofit that represents over 100 different  
13 environmental organizations in the state and the city  
14 of Chicago, including the Urban Growers Collective.

15 Each year, Chicago generates about  
16 522,000 tons of organic waste. It's no secret where  
17 that waste ends up going. It goes into landfills and  
18 generates methane, which contributes to climate change.  
19 The Green Era project is an opportunity to convert that  
20 waste into useful energy and, at the same time, provide  
21 clean energy jobs to a community in a city that needs  
22 more and better quality employment. Last year,  
23 Illinois passed the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act.  
24 That same month, Chicago invested nearly \$200 million

1 in climate infrastructure.

2 At the federal level, we have nearly  
3 \$370 million in -- for climate and clean energy  
4 products. That being said, Green Era is a blueprint  
5 for what can be done, not only in Auburn Gresham, what  
6 can be done in Chicago, Illinois, and the nation to  
7 combat climate change with jobs in innovation. So  
8 again, I'm here in support of this project and hope for  
9 the permit's approval. Thank you.

10 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Ma'am, can you spell your  
11 first and last name again, just for the record?

12 MS. SIMBA: Yeah, I-Y-A-N-A, and the last name  
13 Simba, like Lion King, S-I-M-B-A.

14 HEARING OFFICER GUY: S-I-M-B-A? Okay.

15 MS. SIMBA: Yes.

16 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Thank you. Is there anyone  
17 else that would like to say anything, make a comment  
18 this evening that hasn't done it? You can still sign  
19 up, or feel free to come up to the microphone and say a  
20 few words if you'd like.

21 (No verbal response.)

22 HEARING OFFICER GUY: Okay. Well, that's going  
23 to conclude our public hearing, then. If you did not  
24 present oral comments tonight but still wish to

1 comment, please submit your comments to the agency as  
2 directed in the public notice, which can be accessed at  
3 the Illinois EPA public notice web page, and we have a  
4 bunch of copies as well.

5           Again, written comments will be  
6 included in the record and reviewed by the agency as a  
7 responsiveness summary is prepared. The record closes  
8 at midnight on December 19, 2022. Please send your  
9 written comments to the attention of myself, Jeff Guy,  
10 Hearing Officer, as indicated in the public notice.  
11 The repository of documents is available at the Woodson  
12 Public Library at 9525 South Halsted Street in Chicago,  
13 and that ZIP Code is 60628. And Illinois EPA offices  
14 are located at 1021 North Grand Avenue, Springfield,  
15 Illinois 62794-9276 and at 9511 West Harrison Street,  
16 Des Plaines, Illinois 60016.

17           The draft permits, the public notice,  
18 and other pertinent documents are available on the  
19 Illinois EPA public notice web page. You can obtain  
20 copies of these documents through a Freedom of  
21 Information request to the agency. This can be done  
22 through our website, or you can contact the agency  
23 directly. You can contact myself if you need help with  
24 that.



1                                   That concludes our hearing this  
2 evening. I really appreciate your participation. And  
3 for the record, the current time is 7:50 PM Central  
4 time, and this public hearing is adjourned. Thank you,  
5 folks.

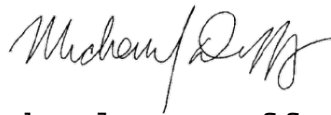
6                                   (Meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.)

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1 STATE OF ILLINOIS )  
 ) SS.  
2 COUNTY OF DUPAGE )  
3

4 Michael Duffy, being first duly sworn, on oath  
5 says that he is a Certified Electronic Reporter doing  
6 business in the City of Chicago, County of Cook and  
7 State of Illinois.

8 That he reported the proceedings had at the  
9 foregoing Illinois EPA public hearing. And that the  
10 foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the  
11 reported proceedings so taken aforesaid and contains  
12 all the proceedings had at said hearing.

13  
14 

15 Michael J. Duffy  
16 Certified Electronic Reporter  
17 Notary Public  
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