

MORNING MIX

For sale: Multibillion-dollar, non-working nuclear power plant, as is

By [Derek Hawkins](#)

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When Jim Chardos started working at the Bellefonte nuclear power plant in 1994, he had high hopes.

The plant, located on the Tennessee River in northern Alabama, had been under construction since the mid-1970s. One of the state's biggest energy projects, it once employed about 4,800 people and promised to generate 1,200 megawatts of power for the surrounding area.

Construction ground to a halt in 1988, when energy demand in the region flat-lined. Still, Chardos, the Bellefonte site director, said he expected to see the plant up and running one day.

But Bellefonte has never burned an ounce of nuclear fuel or delivered a watt of power. The plant employs a mere 50 people. Dust covers the piping. Turkey vultures have perched on the 480-foot pale-gray cooling towers.

Now, after more than \$5 billion in investments and 40 years of stops and starts, the plant's owner is putting it up for sale — for a small fraction of the overall cost.

The Tennessee Valley Authority, the nation's largest federal utility, is set to begin accepting bids for Bellefonte on Monday, with a minimum price tag of \$36.4 million, [according to the Associated Press](#).

Plant officials said demand for power in the region never rose to the level they anticipated when they broke ground on the project. As recently as 2011, TVA sought to restart work on one of the reactors, but by 2014, the utility was ready to abandon the project again. Experts said it could cost \$8 billion to complete, the [Chattanooga Times Free Press reported](#).

For Chardos, who said he commutes 90 minutes to work every day, the sale is unfortunate but necessary.

“If you’re going to make 1,200 megawatts, you need to sell it to somebody, and if there’s no need for it, you’re not going to finish,” Chardos told the AP. “And that’s really what’s happened.”

Construction on the plant began at the tail end of a surge in nuclear energy production in the United States. TVA initially envisioned four reactors but backpedaled on those plans when it became clear that the project would outpace electricity demand.

The nuclear industry as a whole slowed after the meltdown at Three Mile Island in 1979 in Pennsylvania. Since then, U.S. regulators have approved construction of only two new nuclear reactors.

TVA is offering up quite a lot in its sale of Bellefonte: a pair of partially-finished nuclear reactors, transmission lines, eight miles of service roads, a parking lot with a 1,000 spaces, and office buildings — all on 1,600 acres of riverfront property.

TVA officials said they hope to find a buyer by October. What the buyer does with the property? TVA isn’t concerned. Spokesman Scott Fiedler told the AP that the agency has no problem with the future owner using it for manufacturing, energy, recreation or even housing.

“It’s all about jobs and investment, and that’s our primary goal for selling this property,” Fiedler said.

One company, Phoenix Energy, has already offered \$38 million to use the site for renewable-energy production, according to the AP.

Frank Duke, a pipefitter who worked on the plant for a decade, still calls Bellefonte “one of the best plants TVA ever built,” even though it may never generate power. Now the mayor of Hollywood, Alabama, where the plant is located, Duke said he wants to see his work come full-circle. His town needs the jobs the plant promised to create, he told the Free Press.

“The plant was 90 percent complete when TVA quit building it, and I know they would have to change and update some things,” he said, “but I sure hope somebody could operate it to make power.”

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