



Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy

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Testimony Joint Budget Hearing on Environmental Conservation

The Honorable Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee and

The Honorable Helene Weinstein, Chair, Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Submitted by:

The Honorable Merton Simpson, Albany County Legislator

and Ruth Foster, Co-Chairs of the Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy (SHARE)

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The Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy (SHARE) is pleased to have the opportunity to submit this testimony to the Joint Budget Hearing for Environmental Conservation.

SHARE is a coalition of community and renewable energy organizations -- local and statewide -- that joined together in 2017 to oppose a plan to add two new fracked gas turbines to the facility on Sheridan Avenue that heats and cools the Capitol and the Empire State Plaza. The legislature rejected that proposal in 2019 and SHARE turned its attention to shutting down the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant (SASP) that heats and cools the Capitol, the Empire State Plaza and other state-owned buildings in downtown Albany (Capitol Complex). To do this the state must transition the heating and cooling of the Capitol Complex to renewable energy.

SHARE calls for the Renewable Capitol Act (A5633 / S2689) to be included in the final state budget, along with a \$50 million appropriation to complete the fact-finding and planning process and begin construction. The bill requires the Capitol Complex to be powered, heated and cooled by 100% renewable energy within three years.

SHARE totally rejects the state’s proposal announced during Commissioner Moy’s, January 30th, FY 2024-25 Executive Budget Testimony for the Office of General Services (OGS) which calls for a mere 50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions at Plaza within ten years, and a vague promise to examine whether full decarbonization can be achieved “long-term.”

A ten-year timeline is unacceptable.

The New York Power Authority (NYPA) and OGS have already been working on renewable solutions for the Plaza for five years. In 2019 when the legislature rejected the proposal for new fracked gas turbines on Sheridan Avenue, the legislature directed that the \$88 million for that project be used for renewable projects to the extent practical. NYPA has used those funds to install efficient lighting, a new electric chiller and a new backup generator. These projects, we have been told, have already reduced plaza emissions by 17%.

In addition, two years ago NYPA commissioned a study to develop an “Energy Master Plan” for the plaza. The results were due last summer but have not been released to date. Finally, last year the legislature appropriated \$30 million to develop shovel ready plans to decarbonize the state’s top 15 emitting facilities (\$5 million each) of which the Plaza is included. OGS and NYPA have clearly gone down the wrong path with these studies. Despite the resources already directed at this project, as best as we can tell, planning and work is moving at a snail’s pace and common sense solutions such as geothermal heating and cooling haven’t been considered.

The State of Michigan recently took 18 months from start to finish to convert its state Capitol to geothermal energy. And the plans for the \$1.7 billion Buffalo Bills stadium should be completed within two and a half years.

The only real debate is the question of when - not if - the state will start the job of converting the Capitol to renewable energy and when they will complete it. An additional ten years to get half the work done is unacceptable. There is no reason that the Capitol conversion can’t be done in three years, other than the commitment of our state government.

Reducing emissions by 50% is unacceptable.

The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) which passed in 2019 requires a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in just six years and 85% by 2050. The plan announced by Commissioner Moy does not come close to meeting the emission targets and brings up the question of whether the administration is committed to meeting its own climate goals. If New York can't get its own house in order, how can we expect private industry to meet these goals?

Equally important, by allowing 50% emissions to continue well into the future, we are continuing the legacy of environmental racism for years to come. Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill have been plagued with toxic pollution from the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant for over 100 years. Environmental justice demands that the plant be shut down as quickly as possible.

We urge NYPA and OGS to keep their commitment to an open public process to redesigning the state Capitol which must include consulting with the residents of the Albany communities that are directly impacted, climate organizations that helped pass the climate law, and all who have the expertise to develop solutions.

Justification for the Renewable Capitol Act

The SASP has burdened the Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill communities since 1911, and the notorious ANSWERS trash to steam plant released heavy metals and other toxic chemicals into these neighborhoods throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The people who live there have high rates of health problems including asthma and cancer. Continued operation of the SASP is contrary to DEC's Environmental Justice Policy (DEC Commissioner Policy 29), which provides that:

No group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations.

Second, allowing the SASP to continue to operate continues New York's dependence on fossil fuels well into the future. For New York to meet its commitment to transition to a renewable

energy economy, we must, not only stop new fossil fuel infrastructure, we must shut down existing fossil fuel facilities. NYPA is tasked with decarbonizing state facilities based on the passage of the Build Public Renewable's Act last year. What better place to start than the center of New York's government—the Capitol complex?

The states of Oklahoma and Colorado heat and cool their state capitol buildings with geothermal energy and so does St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Stanford University shut down its co-generation fossil fuel power plant in favor of a heat sharing system with an energy savings of over 60%. And Michigan has seen a 25% reduction in annual costs since the recent transition of its Capitol to geothermal.

Finally, renewable options are available now. Nationally known geothermal expert Jay Egg has demonstrated, with a team of experts involved in the design and development of large-scale projects, that geothermal and thermal load sharing are thoroughly viable options for heating and cooling the Capitol Complex.

The Renewable Capitol Act will make the Plaza a showcase for the rest of the state and the country and will be a model of how we can transition to a renewable energy future. NYPA can use the Plaza as a training center for future projects and a training center for the workforce we will need to complete the transition to renewable energy for our state.

SHARE calls for bold climate action in the FY 2024/2025 budget

The climate is in crisis, devastating communities in New York and around the world. Low income and communities of color including Sheridan Hollow have borne the brunt of climate destruction. New York with our large economy and talented workforce must lead the way toward a sustainable energy economy that protects all New Yorkers from future climate damage. In addition to the Renewable Capitol Act, SHARE calls for the following proposals to be included in the FY 24-25 budget:

1. **The NY Heat Act** (A4592 / S2016) aligns the Public Service Law with New York's climate law to transition our homes and buildings off dangerous and expensive fossil fuels while

lowering utility bills for low and moderate income families and supporting a just transition for gas utility workers to new green jobs.

2. **The Climate Change Super Fund Act** (A3351 / S2129) establishes a program to require companies that have contributed to the buildup of climate-warming gases in the atmosphere to pay for the damage they have caused. This proposal will raise \$3 billion annually for projects to repair damages from storms and other severe weather, and build resiliency to protect against future climate destruction.

3. **The Stop Climate Polluters Handout Act** (A7949 / S3389) eliminates over \$330 million in tax handouts to the fossil fuel industry targeting the highest polluting fuels and their most unreasonable uses. Tax breaks that benefit the public such as home heating are not eliminated. It is inexcusable to continue to give handouts to the big corporations that have created this climate emergency.

These are only a few of the many policy changes that New York must take to meet or exceed the goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. SHARE urges the governor, and all state agencies to take seriously the threats that the warming climate pose to our communities. This is a climate emergency. Let's act like it!

Summary:

SHARE calls on the legislature to include the Renewable Capitol Act in the final FY2024/2025 budget along with a \$50 million appropriation. New York must commit to meeting its climate goals with urgent and bold action. Anything less will doom the next generation to an uncertain future.