

NEW YORK
STATE
SENATE



SENATOR MICHAEL N. GIANARIS
12TH DISTRICT
DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER

Testimony of Senator Michael Gianaris, Deputy Majority Leader

Department of Environmental Conservation

Re: Astoria Gas Turbine Power Replacement Project Appeal

March 7, 2022

I am submitting this testimony to reiterate my strong opposition to the proposed Astoria gas turbine replacement project and urge the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to reject their appeal. This project is an affront to efforts made in New York to combat the climate crisis. The DEC was right in its original denial for the protection of our waterfront community and our ongoing fight against the climate crisis.

The DEC should deny this appeal as the proposed facility does not comport with the goals laid out in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). Since we secured the Senate majority in 2019, our leadership and members have made climate justice a priority. One of our most significant achievements was enacting the CLCPA, which commits New York to an equitable clean energy future – with 70% of electricity being renewable by 2030, 100% carbon-free by 2040, and an 85% overall emissions reduction by 2050. Crucially, at least 40% of investment is reserved for areas that have suffered from climate injustice. These ambitious goals are critical, and they are the law. We must do what it takes to win a clean-energy future, secure a livable climate, and fully fund a just transition for frontline communities.

This proposed plant would be yet another fossil fuel plant sited in western Queens. The argument that natural gas is cleaner than prior sources rings hollow. It is still a fossil fuel, it is non-renewable, and emits toxins into the air. The operator’s promise to convert the plant to a hydrogen facility “someday” does not carry water either, as that technology is questionable and years away from use in any event. NRG has even gone so far as to file notice that their existing generation units will be retired in 2023, in compliance with air pollution regulations. This means NRG acknowledges the damage their current facilities cause yet they are still committing to a fracked gas model at this site, continuing the harm to public health and the environment, instead of moving away from fossil fuels entirely.

The area where this plant resides is known to local residents as “Asthma Alley” – a portion of the western Queens waterfront where residents have higher rates of asthma, emphysema and other lung-related ailments. Additionally, this area is home to lower income individuals, immigrants, and public housing tenants. It is wrong to burden residents, already suffering the consequences of prior energy generation choices, with even more exposure.

What we need going forward is simple: a transition to a renewable energy future. There is much work to be done, and the clock is ticking. We cannot move backwards with this dirty, fossil fuel fired plant in western Queens. We need bolder ideas and just solutions to solve our climate crisis. Therefore, NRG’s appeal must be rejected.

