

**Sheridan Hollow Alliance
for Renewable Energy**
www.SHAREAlbany.org

**Testimony to the
Environmental Conservation Budget Hearing
Executive Budget Appropriations for 2022 - 2023**

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)

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 that joined together to oppose the Sheridan Hollow Microgrid Project when it was proposed in 2017. The project, proposed by the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to install gas-fired turbines at facilities owned and operated by the Office of General Services (OGS) on Sheridan Avenue in Albany to provide heating, cooling and electricity to the Capitol and Empire State Plaza (Plaza) has been rejected. We opposed this original project as poorly conceived, both on environmental justice and climate grounds.

SHARE is pleased that the proposal for new fracked gas turbines in Sheridan Hollow has been scrapped and that NYPA is currently initiating several measures to reduce the greenhouse gas footprint of the Plaza, using the funds initially intended for the Sheridan Hollow Microgrid Project. These current projects focus on conservation, purchasing solar power, and transiting some of the cooling from steam to electric generation. In addition, OGS has recently contracted to develop an energy master plan for the Plaza, however, there is still no comprehensive plan to convert the heating systems for the plaza to renewables.

Legislation is being introduced in the Assembly and Senate to require the State Capitol, Empire State Plaza and other related buildings to move to 100% clean renewable energy within three years.

We call on the NYS legislature to:

1. Provide resources necessary to transition the Plaza complex to renewable energy, making it a model of how to achieve our new energy future with the goal of shutting down the Sheridan Avenue Plant (SASP) that burns fracked gas and pollutes the communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill. The study should emphasize geothermal and building efficiency measures and involve experts with demonstrated experience in geothermal and thermal load-share technology for large-scale systems. We call on NYPA to rapidly replace all the chillers that are powered by the SASP to chillers that run on electric power provided by renewable sources.

2. Fund the transition of the environmental justice community of Sheridan Hollow to a renewable energy community. New York's climate law, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) provides that 35% of energy funding go to environmental justice communities. Due to its history of being polluted by state government for over 100 years, Sheridan Hollow should be at the front of the line to utilize these funds to transition to cleaner and renewable energy sources.

NYSERDA recently provided a grant to Aztec geothermal to evaluate the potential for district geothermal utilization in the Sheridan Hollow area. In addition, the governor has proposed an ambitious plan to transition housing to renewables, noting that buildings create one third of New York's greenhouse gas emissions. By funding the Sheridan Hollow district geothermal project, we will help create a model of how to transition densely populated urban neighborhoods with older housing stock to renewable heating.

Justification for funding to transition the Plaza and Sheridan Hollow to renewables

The transformation of the Plaza and Sheridan Hollow to 100% renewable energy should be a model for how New York transforms its energy economy away from fossil fuels and toward meeting the greenhouse gas reduction goals of the CLCPA for the following reasons:

First, the SASP continues to subject the surrounding Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill neighborhoods, both consisting predominantly of low-income, people of color residents, to pollution. The SASP has burdened the community since 1911 burning first coal, then oil and now fracked gas. The notorious ANSWERS trash to steam plant released heavy metals and other toxic chemicals into these neighborhoods throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Community residents 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.

The continued pollution of the environmental justice community of Sheridan Hollow is particularly shameful considering that the SASP is maintained and funded by New York State taxpayers to

provide office space for New York government employees that are charged with implementing New York's climate and environmental justice laws.

Second, the SASP continues New York's dependence on fossil fuels in contradiction to the CLCPA that calls for 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030. New York has committed to transition to a renewable energy economy. To meet these aggressive climate goals we must, not only stop new fossil fuel infrastructure, but we must also begin to shut down existing fossil fuel facilities. The Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant is a good place to start for the above-mentioned reasons.

Finally, renewable options are available now. If we are to transition our state to renewable energy, we must teach our workforce and state agencies how it is done. NYPA can use the Plaza as a training center for future projects. 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 Plaza.

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 and Skidmore College in Saratoga. Stanford University recently replaced its co-generation fossil fuel power plant in favor of a heat sharing system with an energy savings of over 60%. A renewable energy solution incorporating geothermal technology for the Plaza would showcase New York as a climate leader and serve as a model for the nation.

Summary

SHARE requests funds be allocated in the FY 2022 - 23 budget to begin the transition to renewable energy alternatives for the Plaza and Capitol to lessen fossil fuel use and pollution in Sheridan Hollow, helping the community and helping New York meet its new climate goals. In addition, we recommend that funding be made available to transition the community of Sheridan Hollow to a renewable community. Since Sheridan Hollow has been polluted for over 100 years to power government buildings, this community should be among the first in line to transition to renewable energy utilizing the funding provided for environmental justice communities in the CLCPA. New York must invest billions of dollars into meeting our climate goals and must stop subsidizing the fossil fuel industry with tax breaks. We must stop funding climate destruction and instead fund our transition to our renewable energy future.