

Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy

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Testimony to the Joint Public Hearing to examine the legislative and budgetary actions necessary to implement the Climate Action Council Final Scoping Plan

The Honorable Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee; and
The Honorable Kevin Parker, Chair, Senate Committee on Energy and
The Honorable Pete Harckham, Chair, Senate Committee on Environmental Conservation

Submitted by:

The Honorable Merton Simpson, Albany County Legislator, and Ruth Foster
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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 Public Hearing to examine actions necessary to implement the Climate Action Council Scoping Plan.

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 due to its environmental justice and climate impacts. The project, proposed by the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to install gas-fired turbines at facilities owned 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. NYPA is currently undertaking several measures to reduce the greenhouse gas footprint of the Plaza using the funds initially intended for the Sheridan Hollow Microgrid Project focusing 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.

We call on the New York State legislature to:

- 1. Pass the Renewable Capitol Act** (A9341 McDonald / S8221 Breslin, *2022 session bill numbers*) and provide funding for the project in the budget to require the State Capitol, Empire State Plaza and other related buildings to move to 100% clean renewable energy within three years, with the goal of shutting down the Sheridan Avenue Plant (SASP) that releases climate destroying greenhouse gas emissions and toxic pollutants into the communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill in Albany. The plan should emphasize geothermal and building efficiency measures and involve experts with demonstrated experience in geothermal and thermal load-share technology for large-scale systems.
- 2. Fund the Sheridan Hollow district geothermal project.** NYSERDA recently provided a grant to Aztec Geothermal to evaluate the potential for district geothermal utilization in the Sheridan Hollow area. By fully 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.
- 3. Pass the All Electric Building Act** (A8431b Gallagher / S6843c Kavanagh, *2022 session bill numbers*) to begin the process of transitioning buildings to renewable energy. We know that buildings create one third of New York's greenhouse gas emissions and that Governor Hochul has proposed building 800,000 new housing units in her State of the State address. New York must require that these new homes be all electric and must enact the All Electric Building Act with the requirement that small buildings be all electric by 2024. In order for New York to meet its greenhouse reduction goals mandated in the Scoping Plan all electric buildings must be a top priority. Building new homes now with gas heat will only burden new home owners with the need to transition to renewables in the near future.

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

Sheridan Hollow is uniquely positioned to be a starting point for the state's transition to renewables as outlined in the Climate Action Council's Scoping Plan. What better place to start than the buildings that our government workers go to work in every day. The Climate Action Council approved the Scoping Plan in the Empire State Plaza meeting rooms that are heated by burning fossil fuels in Sheridan Hollow.

State Agencies including NYPA and OGS must lead the transformation to renewables and the Plaza can be a training ground for state agencies and the workforce on how to make the transition to renewables. By shuttering the SASP New York can become a model for how New York transforms its energy economy away from fossil fuels and toward meeting or exceeding the greenhouse gas reduction goals as outlined in the Scoping Plan.

Climate Justice demands that we start the transformation to reduce the pollution and climate burden of disadvantaged communities. 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 operated since 1911 burning first coal, then oil and now fracked gas in the densely populated community. 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.

The SASP continues New York's dependence on fossil fuels in contradiction to the Scoping Plan that calls for 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030. New York has committed to transition to a renewable energy economy. The All Electric Building Act is needed to stop the expansion of fossil fuels in new buildings. However, 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 and because NYPA proposed replacing the plant in 2017 claiming it was old and inefficient.

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 using geothermal technology, conservation and thermal load sharing for the Plaza would showcase New York as a climate leader and serve as a model for the nation.

Summary

SHARE requests that New York pass the Renewable Capitol Act, and the All Electric Building Act and include funding in the FY 2023 - 24 budget to begin the transition to renewable energy alternatives for the Plaza and for district geothermal in Sheridan Hollow. The climate crisis and New York's Scoping Plan demand bold and urgent action. 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 Scoping Plan. New York must stop funding climate destruction and instead fund the necessary transition to our renewable energy future.