



# Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy

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## Testimony to The Environmental Conservation Budget Hearing Executive Budget Appropriations for 2021 - 2022

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 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 to provide heating, cooling and electricity to the Capitol and Empire State Plaza (Plaza) has been rejected. We opposed the 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.

Although the process of transforming the Capitol and ESP to renewable energy has begun, much more needs to be done. Current renewable projects for the Plaza focus mostly on conservation and transiting some of the cooling from steam to electric generation. However, there is still no plan to convert the heating systems for the plaza to renewables.

**SHARE proposes that the 2021- 2022 New York State budget include:**

1. **\$600,000 for a study to convert the Capitol and Empire State Plaza Complex (Plaza) to renewable energy** with the goal of shutting down the Sheridan Avenue Plant (SASP) that 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. **\$250,000 for a study on how to transition the environmental justice communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill to renewable energy communities.** These neighborhoods have been polluted for over 100 years to provide power to the Plaza. 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, Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill should be one of the communities in the front of the line to utilize these funds to transition to a cleaner and renewable energy source with quality jobs and job training for the impacted communities. This study would help position this key environmental justice community for just transition funding as it becomes available and ensure effective utilization of the various funding sources.
3. **\$88,000,000 reappropriation in the Office of General Services Budget to continue current renewable projects for the Plaza.** These funds are being used to replace the polluting back up diesel generator for the Plaza that currently spews black smoke into people's homes, to electrify one of the chillers that provide air conditioning to the plaza, to install energy efficient lighting and other projects. This funding is currently in the Governor's budget proposal.
4. **In addition to our proposals for Sheridan Hollow, SHARE calls for an end to all non-essential fossil fuel subsidies.** New York continues to subsidize the fossil fuel industry with approximately \$1.6 billion in tax breaks, about half a billion of these must be ended now with a plan to end all subsidies within five years without negatively impacting low- and moderate-income communities. The pandemic has created economic hardship for countless New Yorkers and the burning of fossil fuels is creating a climate catastrophe. It is inexcusable to continue to give handouts to the big corporations that have created this climate emergency. Governor Cuomo's budget proposal includes some much-needed spending for renewable energy (although much more is needed). But we can't solve the climate crisis and get to net zero emissions by 2050 as required by the CLCPA by subsidizing the oil and gas industries.

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

First, although the proposed powerplant was rejected, SASP continues to burn fossil fuels to heat and cool the Capitol and ESP. This 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, 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, 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. We must make the Plaza a showcase for the rest of the state and the country. To meet these aggressive climate goals we must, not only stop new fossil fuel infrastructure, we must also begin to shut down existing fossil fuel facilities.

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 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.

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. Therefore, the Legislature should require a complete examination of renewable alternatives. A study to convert the Plaza is the next step in transforming the Plaza, the Capitol and our state to a renewable energy future.

## **Summary**

SHARE recommends that funds be allocated in the FY 2021-22 budget to require a study on 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 for a study to transition the communities of Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill. Since these communities have been polluted to power government buildings, they should be among the first in line to transition to renewable energy communities utilizing the funding provided for environmental justice communities in the CLCPA. Finally, New York must stop subsidizing the fossil fuel industry with tax breaks. We need to fund our transition to our renewable energy future.