



Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy

Testimony to the Environmental Conservation Hearing on Executive Budget Appropriations for 2023 - 2024

The Honorable Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee and
The Honorable Helene Weinstein, Chair, Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Submitted by:

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SHARE, a coalition of community and climate justice organizations is pleased to present testimony on the executive budget appropriations for fiscal year 2023 to 2024. We call for the legislature to shut down the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant (SASP) that heats and cools the Capitol and Empire State Plaza in Albany, and to fund the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood to build a cleaner sustainable energy future. Specifically, we urge the legislature to:

- 1. Pass the Renewable Capitol Act (S2689 Breslin / A--- Fahy)** which requires the Capitol, Plaza and other state-owned buildings in Albany that are heated and cooled by the SASP to transition to renewable energy within three years.
- 2. Include a \$1.5 million dollar appropriation in the New York State budget this year to develop a plan on how to transition the Capitol and Plaza to renewables.** 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.
- 3. Fund the transition of the environmental justice community of Sheridan Hollow to a renewable energy community.** Due to its history of being polluted by state government for over 100 years, Sheridan Hollow should be given special consideration as funding is allocated for transitioning urban neighborhoods to renewables.

In addition, SHARE calls on the legislature to take bold and urgent action to address the climate crisis and meet New York's climate goals by enacting the following proposals:

- 1. All Electric New Building Act (A920 Gallagher / S562 Kavanagh)** with a deadline of 2024 for all new buildings to be all electric as a first step to making all buildings in New York gas free.
- 2. New York Home Energy Affordable Transition Act (NY HEAT) (S2016 Krueger)** to eliminate subsidies for new gas hookups, enable neighborhood scale building decarbonization, and ensure energy affordability for low- and moderate-income families.

3. **Stop Climate Polluter Handouts Act** (S3389 Krueger) to eliminate subsidies to the fossil fuel industry.
4. **Governor Hochul's budget calls for the funding of 800,000 new housing units.** This proposal must be made with the approval of advocates for low and moderate income housing and **any new homes funded under this program must be all electric.** At this point in the climate crisis it is unconscionable to build new homes using fossil fuels and it is unacceptable to burden new homeowners with the task of transitioning the buildings to renewable energy as New York implements the greenhouse gas reductions as required in the Climate and Community Protection Act.

Background for the Renewable Capitol Act

Sheridan Hollow is an environmental justice community just blocks from New York's Capitol that has been polluted by the New York State government for over a century. The Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant, (SASP) that heats and cools the Capitol and Empire State Plaza, burned coal then oil and now fracked gas. The ANSWERS garbage incinerator, also run by the New York Power Authority (NYPA) spewed black clouds of toxic soot over Sheridan Hollow in the 1980s and 1990s. Residents of Sheridan Hollow suffer from high rates of asthma and cancer.

In 2017 NYPA proposed to build a new fracked gas plant in Sheridan Hollow as an upgrade to the SASP. Due to the efforts of SHARE and with the support of the New York State Legislature, the proposal was scrapped and the funding for that project was reallocated for renewable projects for the Capitol and Plaza. With this funding NYPA is currently replacing the lighting in the Plaza, transiting some of the cooling from steam to electric generation and upgrading and relocating the back-up generator for the Plaza – all projects that are expected to reduce the greenhouse gas footprint of the Plaza.

Although the process of transforming the Capitol and Plaza to renewable energy has begun, much more needs to be done. The Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant (SASP) continues to release greenhouse gasses and pollutants into Sheridan Hollow.

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

First, continued operation of the SASP is contrary to basic principles of environmental justice. DEC's Environmental Justice Policy (DEC Commissioner Policy 29), states 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 taxpayers to provide office space for New York government employees that are charged with implementing New York's climate and environmental justice laws.

For this reason, Sheridan Hollow is an ideal community to begin the process of transforming existing housing to renewable energy. Aztech geothermal, under a grant by NYSERDA has studied several factors unique to urban communities that need to be considered in the transition to the new energy economy: providing renewable heat to older housing stock, financing the transition to not burden community residents, district geothermal, dealing with storm water management, and providing space for other renewable systems such as solar and EV charging. Aztech is currently applying for the second phase of this project to develop a plan for the transformation. SHARE strongly supports the continued funding for this project.

Second, as the center of New York's government, transitioning the Capitol and Plaza to renewables is important symbolically to show New York's commitment to urgent and bold climate action. In order to meet the greenhouse reduction goals of the Climate and Community Protection Act we must transition buildings and power generation. The Capitol and Plaza can serve as a model of how to make the transition a just one supporting fair wages and prioritizing environmental justice communities.

In addition, the SASP continues New York's dependence on fossil fuels in contradiction to the Climate Action Council's Scoping Plan that calls for 40% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030. 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. 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. District geothermal in the neighborhood of Sheridan Hollow would demonstrate how to build and fund the renewable energy transformation in communities without burdening the residents.

Summary

SHARE requests \$1.5 million be allocated in the FY 2023 - 24 budget to begin the transition to renewable energy alternatives for the Plaza and Capitol to lessen fossil fuel use and pollution in Sheridan Hollow and help New York meet its new climate goals. The climate crisis is upon us and New York must take bold and urgent action to transition our buildings and communities toward our renewable energy future. Let's start with the symbol of New York's government – our Capitol with the communities that have been most burdened by our fossil fuel past especially Sheridan Hollow.