



Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy

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Testimony Joint Budget Hearing on Environmental Conservation and Energy

The Honorable Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee and
The Honorable J. Gary Pretlow, 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 and Energy.

SHARE is a coalition of community and renewable energy organizations -- local and statewide -- that joined together in 2017 to stop the New York Power Authority (NYPA) from building a new greenhouse gas (GHG) emitting fracked gas plant in Sheridan Hollow, an environmental justice neighborhood next door to the Capitol. The legislature rejected that proposal in 2019, and SHARE turned its attention to shutting down the Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant (SASP) that heats and cools the Capitol, the Empire State Plaza and other state-owned buildings in downtown Albany (Capitol Complex).

SHARE calls for the Renewable Capitol Act (A3466 Romero / SXXX Fahy) which mandates that the Capitol Complex be transitioned to renewable energy, be included in the Article VII language of the 2025-2026 state budget, along with an initial appropriation of \$150 million this year for planning and construction costs for a thermal energy network as identified by the Empire State Plaza Energy Infrastructure Master Plan, May 2024 (Ramboll study).

A timeline of delay

- In 2017 NYPA proposes a new fracked gas power plant in Sheridan Hollow. SHARE opposes the plant and calls for the transition of the Capitol Complex to renewables.
- In 2019 the legislature rejects NYPA's proposal and reallocates the \$88 for the plant to be directed toward renewable energy projects. NYPA used the funds to improve lighting

and switched one of the chillers to electric. However, six years later, \$25 million remains unspent.

- In 2020 the Office of General Services (OGS) commissioned a study to develop an “Energy Master Plan” for the plaza. OGS and NYPA didn’t consult SHARE or the community about what should be in the study and ignored our FOIL requests for more information. The Ramboll Study was finally released four years later in June 2024 without a clear path to a renewable Capitol Complex.
- In 2024 the Ramboll study calls for a 50% reduction in GHG emissions over ten years, (by 2035) predominately by moving the Wadsworth Lab out of the Corning Tower and adding electric chillers. (Note that New York’s Climate Act, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, requires a 40% GHG emission reductions by 2030).
- In ten to fifteen years, during “Phase 3.2” of the Ramboll Study, the Study recommends \$150 million for a thermal energy network which may, or may not be fully renewable (i.e., the Study does not say).
- Finally, in the FY 2023 Budget, the legislature appropriates \$30 million to establish decarbonization action plans for fifteen of the highest-emitting state-owned facilities. The Capitol complex is one of the top three top emitters. NYPA is just now developing plans for the studies that are required to be completed by 2026.

How long must we wait?

As communities in our state deal with ever increasing climate destruction of superstorms, wildfires, floods and drought, instead of stepping up to the task, the Hochul administration has decided to slow-walk climate action and back pedal on the mandates of the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act).

Sheridan Hollow and Arbor Hill, low income, people of color neighborhoods next door to the Capitol have been polluted from the burning of coal, oil, garbage and gas to heat the Capitol Complex for over a hundred years. Community members suffer from high rates of asthma and cancer. New York’s Environmental Justice Policy states: “No group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations.” How long must the people of Sheridan Hollow have to wait for New York to comply with its own environmental justice policy?

There is no reason to wait

New York claims to be a climate leader, however, as the timeline above shows, a task as clear as transitioning the Capitol to renewables has hit roadblock after roadblock. Common sense solutions such as geothermal heating and cooling won’t even be considered under the state’s Ramboll plan until 2035, 18 years since community members first asked for the transition to renewables. The proposed ten to fifteen additional years to get half the work done is unacceptable.

According to geothermal experts, there is no reason to delay geothermal for the Capitol. Work on the thermal energy network could be done in conjunction with the maintenance work planned for Phase 1 of the Ramboll study. The State of Michigan recently took 18 months from start to finish to convert its state Capitol to geothermal energy and is already seeing savings. Oklahoma, Michigan and Colorado all heat their Capitols with geothermal, as does St Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. We have to ask ourselves, why does New York continue to delay?

We urge NYPA and OGS to acknowledge the urgency of the climate crisis and move forward with bold plans to transition all state facilities to renewables. We call for an open public process which includes communities that are directly impacted, climate organizations that helped pass the Climate Act, and all who have the expertise to develop solutions. If New York can't get its own house in order, how can we expect private industry to meet the Climate Act goals?

The Renewable Capitol Act will make the Capitol and Empire State Plaza a showcase for the rest of the country and can be used as a model for the transition to a renewable energy future with quality jobs.

In addition to the Renewable Capitol Act, SHARE calls for the following proposals to be included in the FY 25-26 budget:

SHARE urges the governor, the legislature and all state agencies to take seriously the threats that the warming climate pose to our communities. New York must move quickly and deliberately to meet, or better yet, exceed the goals of the 2019 Climate Act. This is a climate emergency. Let's act like it!

1. Most importantly, New York must fund the transition to renewables. We call for at least \$10 billion in funding this year for the implementation of the Climate Act.

An analysis by the Climate Action Council (CAC), the task force of agency heads and public members found that it would take \$10 billion in investments each year to meet the Climate Act mandates. The Executive Budget proposal to add \$1 billion in climate spending over a five-year period is an insult to anyone truly concerned about the climate. The \$200 million a year that the governor proposes is less than a tenth of the \$3 billion that cap and invest was supposed to raise this year.

Cap and Invest regulations must be released and implemented immediately to bring in at least \$3 billion this year. The program must include provisions to ensure that the revenue generated is wisely spent to further the goals of the Climate Act and must include state mandates to meet or exceed the Climate Act's GHG targets with annual benchmarks and strong, enforceable penalties.

SHARE also supports the Invest in Our New York (IONY) package, which would raise well over \$40 billion to support our state's most urgent needs, including climate transformation.

2. The full NY Heat Act (A4592 / S2016: 2024 numbers) which aligns the Public Service Law with the Climate Act to transition our homes and buildings off dangerous and expensive fossil fuels while lowering utility bills for low- and moderate-income families.

3. **The GAP Fund** (A2101 Kelles /SXXX Gonzalez) which establishes a green affordable pre-electrification (GAP) program to fund and provide technical assistance for homes and buildings in need of a wide range of currently unfunded retrofits that are necessary for healthy buildings and achievement of New York's climate mandates.
4. **The Stop Climate Polluters Handout Act** (A7949 / S3389: 2024 numbers) eliminates over \$330 million in tax handouts to the fossil fuel industry, targeting the highest polluting fuels and their most unreasonable uses. Tax breaks that benefit the public such as home heating are not eliminated. It is inexcusable to continue to give handouts to the big corporations that have created this climate emergency.

Summary:

SHARE calls on the legislature to include the Renewable Capitol Act in the final FY2025/2026 budget along with a \$150 million appropriation. New York must commit to meeting its climate goals with urgent and bold action which includes adequate funding to help New Yorkers transition off fossil fuels. Anything less will doom the next generation to an uncertain future.