



Sheridan Hollow Alliance for Renewable Energy

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Testimony before the 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)

January 26, 2026

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 emitting fracked gas plant in Sheridan Hollow, an environmental justice neighborhood a few blocks from 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 inclusion of the Renewable Capitol Act (A3466 Romero / S4842 Fahy) in the Article VII language in the 2026-2027 state budget.** The act mandates that the Capitol Complex be transitioned to renewable energy. We also ask for **an initial appropriation of \$150 million this year for completion of the planning and the construction costs for a thermal energy network** as identified by the May 2024 Empire State Plaza Energy Infrastructure Master Plan (also known as the "Ramboll study").
- **\$50 million in funding for district geothermal in Sheridan Hollow.** Thanks to a NYSERDA grant, plans have been made to transition several residential blocks in that neighborhood to geothermal energy. Unfortunately, the project has been on hold due to the lack of funds.

The Sheridan Hollow project is in a designated Disadvantaged Community (DAC) under the 2019 Climate Law (the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act or the CLCPA), and therefore must be prioritized for available climate funding, including funding earmarked for transitioning state facilities to renewable energy. This includes the Sustainable Future Fund created by the legislature in the 2025-26 state budget. (The Climate Law provides that 35% of energy and climate funding shall benefit DACs, with a target of 40%).

How long do we have to wait?

Sheridan Hollow is a low income, people of color neighborhood near the Capitol that has been polluted for over 100 years from the burning of coal, oil, garbage and gas to heat the Capitol and Empire State Plaza. Residents of Sheridan Hollow and the nearby Arbor Hill neighborhood have up to three times the expected rate of respiratory cancer.

It's time to shut down the Sheridan Hollow Steam Plant! Stop polluting Sheridan Hollow and stop releasing greenhouse gas emissions that are destroying our climate.

A timeline of delay

- In 2017, NYPA proposed a new fracked gas power plant in Sheridan Hollow. SHARE opposed the plant and called for the transition of the Capitol and Empire State Plaza to renewables.
- In 2019, the legislature rejected NYPA's proposal and reallocated the \$88 million allocated for the plant to be directed toward renewable energy projects. NYPA used some of the funds to improve lighting and switched one of the chillers from gas to electric. Seven years later, \$21 million remains unspent.
- In 2020, the Office of General Services (OGS) commissioned a study to develop an "Energy Master Plan" for the Empire State Plaza. OGS and NYPA didn't consult SHARE or other community stakeholders about what should be in the study and ignored our FOIL requests for more information.
- In 2024, the Ramboll study was finally released. The study called for a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions over ten years (by 2035), less than the 40% emission reductions that the Climate Law requires by 2030. A central feature of the study involved moving the Health Department's Wadsworth Lab out of the Corning Tower to the state's Harriman Campus in Albany. It is unclear from the study whether and to what extent this move will impact on overall greenhouse gas emissions in New York State as a whole.
- In ten to fifteen years, during "Phase 3.2" of the Ramboll Study, the Study recommended an expenditure of \$150 million for a thermal energy network which may, or may not be fully renewable (i.e., the Study does not say). This is 17 years after SHARE called for a renewable Capitol and Empire State Plaza.

The legislature appropriated \$30 million in the 2023-24 state budget to establish decarbonization action plans for fifteen of the highest-emitting state-owned facilities. The Capitol complex is one of the top three emitters. NYPA is just now developing plans for the studies that are required to be completed by the end of this month. We call on NYPA and the governor to put the Capitol and Empire State Plaza Complex at the top of the list and the Legislature to support this call.

There is no reason to 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 backpedal on the mandates of the Climate Law.

New York claims to be a climate leader. However, as the timeline above shows, a task as simple as transitioning the Capitol to renewables has hit roadblock after roadblock. Commonsense solutions such as geothermal heating and cooling won't even be considered under the state's Ramboll plan until 2035, 17 years after community members first asked for the transition to renewables. Waiting another ten to fifteen additional years to get half the work done as proposed by the Ramboll study 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 State Capitol buildings with geothermal, as does St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. We must 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 Law, 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 Law goals?

New York must take bold action on climate and fully implement the Climate Law

The warming climate poses serious threats to our communities. New York must move quickly and deliberately to meet, or better yet, exceed the goals of the 2019 Climate Law. This is a climate emergency. Let's act like it!

1. **New York must fund the transition to renewables. We call for \$3 billion in new funding for the Sustainable Future Fund.** The governor has delayed the release of regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in violation of the Climate Law, as confirmed by a State Supreme Court decision last year (*Citizen Action of New York et al. vs. Department of Environmental Conservation*). The governor's delay in establishing a cap-and-invest system has deprived the state of billions of dollars in annual funding necessary to transition the state to renewables; the state has estimated that the program would have brought \$3 billion in the first year alone.

Cap-and-invest regulations must be released and implemented immediately to bring in the necessary revenue. The program must also include provisions to ensure that the revenue generated is wisely spent to further the goals of the Climate Law. It must include state mandates to meet or exceed the Climate Law's emission 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. **In addition, we must stop funding climate destruction. The Stop Climate Polluters Handout Act (A3675 / S3606)** must be included in the budget. It will eliminate 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 address the decades of pollution the state has caused to the Sheridan Hollow environmental justice community and to include the Renewable Capitol Act in the final Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget along with a \$150 million appropriation to begin the transition to geothermal at the Capitol building and Empire State Plaza. We also request \$50 million to build a district geothermal project to benefit the residents of the Sheridan Hollow neighborhood. 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.