

# The HIGHLANDS Current



Backdoor Pizza Page 18

JUNE 27, 2025

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**CHILLIN'** — Cold Spring held its annual Community Day at Dockside Park on June 21, the first day of summer, and the hot, humid weather lived up to the forecast. Kids played it cool, romping in jump castles, climbing up and sliding down inflatable slides, and painting stones. For more photos, see [highlandscurrent.org](https://highlandscurrent.org). Photo by Ross Corsair



Nat Prentice Ned Rauch

## Prentice, Rauch Win Democratic Lines for Town Board

*Cheah will appear on November ballot as independent; Maasik out*

By Chip Rowe

Nat Prentice and Ned Rauch won the two Democratic lines on Tuesday (June 24) for the Philipstown Town Board, setting up a three-way race in the fall.

Rauch, who was endorsed by the Philipstown Democratic Committee, will appear on the Democratic and independent Philipstown Focus lines. He edged John Maasik by 24 votes for the Democratic line.

Ben Cheah, the other candidate endorsed by the Democratic Committee, also will appear on the November ballot on the Philipstown Focus line. Cheah and Rauch

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## ICE Conducts Raid in Beacon

*City says it was not notified or involved*

By Jeff Simms

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers raided a residence on North Elm Street in Beacon on the morning of June 20, according to a statement issued by Mayor Lee Kyriacou.

City officials said they do not know who ICE detained. It is unclear whether a judicial warrant was presented or the nature of any charges. ICE did not respond to a request from *The Current* for information.

"I want to make clear that at no time leading up to this incident did city staff, including our Police Department, have any notice of or involvement in ICE operations," Kyriacou said. "As a city, we remain committed to our safe, inclusive community policy, to preserving rights enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and to avoiding any policies which engender fear among law-abiding families."

The mayor said his office had been informed about the raid by residents and that Police Chief Tom Figlia confirmed with the Federal Bureau of Investigation that an ICE operation had occurred.

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Beyond the Grid

## PEAK POWER

By Brian PJ Cronin

Who's to blame for these skyrocketing electricity bills? The causes are many: aging infrastructure, economic uncertainty, tariffs, wars, red tape, the failure to build enough renewable energy, inefficient construction, rising demand, the responsibility of investor-owned utilities to generate profits for shareholders and rapidly changing climates, both atmospheric and political.

Over the next few weeks, we'll examine some of these causes and innovative solutions being proposed. But to understand utility prices, you first must understand how the largest machine in the world works — one so ubiquitous that although we use it every minute of every day, we hardly notice it.

New York's power grid consists of 11,000 miles of transmission lines that can supply up to 41,000 megawatts of electricity. The problem is that the grid is losing power faster than it can be replaced. Fossil-fuel plants are aging out of service. Since 2019, New York has added 2,274 megawatts while

deactivating 4,315 megawatts.

"It's an old system," said Rich Dewey, president of the New York Independent System Operator (NYISO), the nonprofit tasked with running the grid, on an episode of its podcast, *Power Trends*. "The expectation that it's going to continue to perform at the same high level that it has, say, for the last couple of decades, is just not reasonable. We're going to need to replace those megawatts" to maintain a reliable transmission system.

The state has undertaken several initiatives to boost the energy flowing through the grid. Six years ago, the state Legislature passed an ambitious law that stipulates that New York must be powered by 70 percent renewable energy by 2030 and 100 percent zero-emission electricity by 2040. Last year, 48 percent of the energy produced by the state was zero-emission; nearly all that energy is produced upstate, where solar and hydropower are abundant.

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The \$6 billion Champlain Hudson Power Express, which will carry 1,250 megawatts of renewable energy from Quebec to New York City, and passes by the Highlands buried beneath the Hudson River, is expected to go online in 2026. This week, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced her intention, citing the Build Public Renewables Act of 2023, to construct nuclear plants that will produce at least 1 gigawatt.

The site or sites for those plants are expected to be in less-populated areas upstate or in western New York, which would make them subject to the same problem that prevents solar and hydropower from reaching downstate, including the Highlands: a bottleneck where the upstate and downstate grids meet.

## The \$2 billion question

If Jeffrey Seidman, a Vassar College professor, sounds philosophical when discussing climate change, it's to be expected. Seidman is an associate professor of philosophy.



Seidman

A few years ago, he began having second thoughts about his chosen field of study. "Watching the world visibly burning, I began to doubt that continuing to teach philosophy was morally defensible at this moment," he said.

A career change seemed out of the question — Seidman had just turned 50 — but Vassar's Environmental Studies department is interdisciplinary. So he developed a class called Climate Solutions & Climate Careers.

Lately, he has been taking his lectures outside the classroom to clear up misinformation for lawmakers. Renewable energy faces strong headwinds these days, as President Donald Trump's executive orders and proposed legislation demonstrate that he intends to make it more difficult to build wind and solar projects. Before relenting, the federal government briefly halted an offshore wind project that was under construction off Long Island.

At a June 3 meeting of Dutchess County mayors and supervisors, Seidman explained the potential of battery energy storage systems (BESS) to facilitate the transfer of renewable energy from upstate to the Hudson Valley. Jennifer Manierre of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) discussed how the state can help municipalities quickly and safely site renewable energy projects. And Paul Rogers spoke about his experiences at the New York City Fire Department, where he was tasked with



A battery storage unit in Warwick that supplies Orange & Rockland Utilities customers caught fire in 2023.

Photo by Scott Rausenberger

helping the city develop fire codes for BESS within dense urban environments.

Al Torreggiani, the supervisor for the Town of Hyde Park, was unimpressed. "Where are you going to come in and save me money?" he said. "Because everything you're talking about is going to cost me money."

At the same time, municipalities are enacting moratoriums on renewables. Last year, Carmel and Putnam Valley passed moratoriums on battery energy storage systems and other projects. In some cases, doubts are fueled by conspiracy theories that wind and solar cause cancer (they don't). In others, the resistance is for aesthetic reasons.

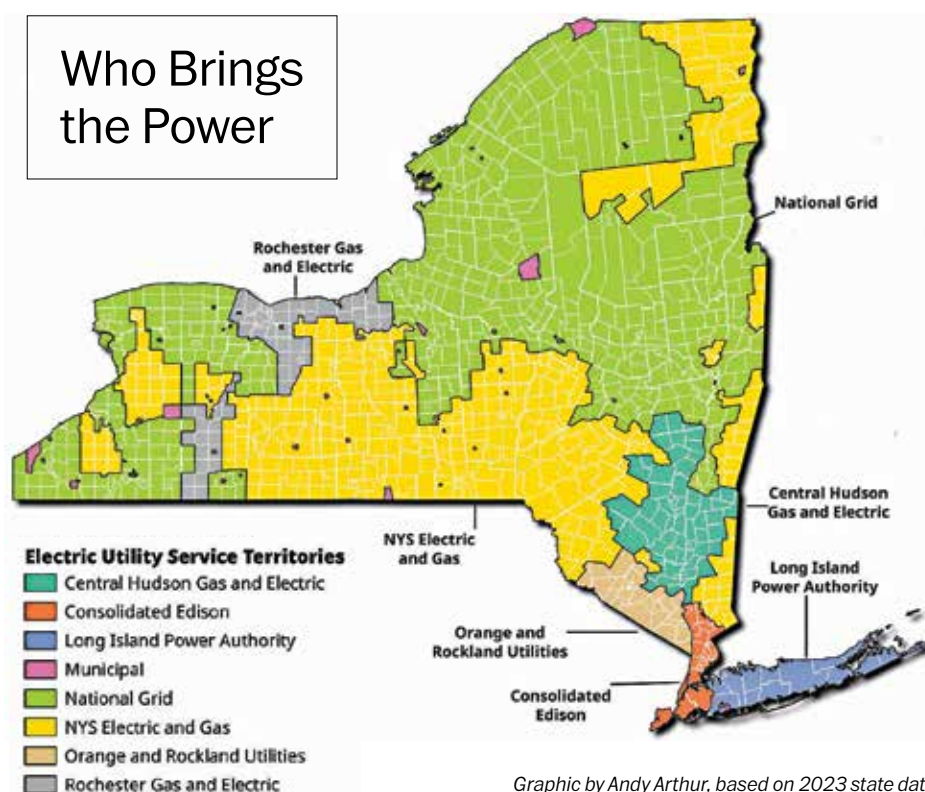
Battery energy storage systems are needed because solar and wind power suffer from being, to use the industry term, "intermittent." Fossil fuels may be dirty, expensive and subject to the whims of war, but you can burn them whenever you want. Although the infrastructure costs of solar energy have dropped by 90 percent over the last decade, we have not yet figured out how to keep the sun from dipping below the horizon. Batteries store the excess power collected from solar panels and wind turbines for use when the sun isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing.

"As prices [of battery units] have plummeted, it's made deploying them at the scale where they can support the whole electrical grid more and more feasible," Seidman said.

The downside is that they can catch fire. In 2023, three BESS units in New York caught fire, including one in Orange County. The state says no hazardous chemicals were released.

Seidman thinks that the risks and dangers have been overblown. During his talk on June 3, he explained how battery units are becoming safer and more affordable. Like solar, battery costs have come down 90 percent over the past decade. He noted that 15 years ago, cellphones caught fire.

## Who Brings the Power



Graphic by Andy Arthur, based on 2023 state data

"The reason you don't read those stories is because we have gotten so much better at making these things," he said. "Even though billions of people carry them in their pockets, they don't catch fire." Likewise, the batteries that power electric vehicles have also gotten safer. According to the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, a gas-powered vehicle is 60 times more likely to catch fire than an electric one.

Paul Rogers, the former FDNY lieutenant who spoke at the June 3 meeting, explained the increasingly rigorous safety testing that battery storage units undergo, including making sure that if one battery catches fire, it doesn't spread. Several firefighters attended the meeting to hear about training programs for fighting BESS fires (water isn't effective) and to develop site-specific

emergency plans.

In the Hudson Valley, there's not as much open, available and affordable space for wind and solar projects. But with battery storage units, the downstate grid could receive the ample renewable energy from upstate to replace closer but more expensive and dirtier fossil-fuel plants. With battery units in place, renewable energy could be sent downstate at night, when transmission rates are cheaper and the grid is less crowded.

That is one answer to the "Where are you going to save me money?" question: Renewable energy sent to battery storage units could lower the "supply charges" section of electricity bills. In addition, with battery storage units, utilities don't have to spend

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as much on substations and transmission lines, costs passed on as “delivery charges” on customer bills. A recent NYSEDA study showed that putting 6 gigawatts of battery power in New York by 2030 would save rate-payers across the state \$2 billion.

At no point in Seidman’s talk did he mention climate change or the state climate laws. That’s intentional. Seidman said it’s easier to explain the benefits of the transition to renewable energy by focusing on less pollution and lower bills, which everyone wants. Some elected officials at the meeting discussed using BESS moratoriums to collaborate with the state on creating guidelines, rather than rejecting the technology outright.

What if your house was the battery?

Imagine you own a department store with an oversized parking lot that is full only one day of the year: Black Friday. As it happens, there’s another lot next door that’s always empty, including on Black Friday.

You ask your neighbor if, on Black Friday, your customers can use his parking lot. Sure, he says, for \$1,000 per car. He says he needs that much to pay his property taxes, since the lot is otherwise empty.

Sounds ridiculous? In a nutshell, that’s how the electrical grid works. For 360 days of the year, the grid has enough power. However, on peak days — such as during this week’s heat wave — it requires more. So, operators turn to “peaker” plants, such as Danskammer, located on the Hudson River north of Newburgh.

Because these fossil-fuel plants operate only a few days a year, they charge exorbitant rates to cover their operating expenses. That drives up costs across the grid. For example, on Tuesday (June 24) at 5:51 p.m., with the peaker plants running, the price per megawatt in the Hudson Valley was \$2,886. A month earlier, on a mild May afternoon, the price was \$26.

These plants release copious amounts of pollution on days when air quality, because of the heat, is already poor. In addition, they tend to be built in low-income neighborhoods.

What if, on Black Friday, instead of paying an exorbitant rate to rent your neighbor’s lot, you coordinated with customers so they didn’t all show up at 6 a.m. when the doors opened? If they did that, you could lower your prices even more.

That’s the concept behind virtual power plants. Electricity customers join a program in which a smart meter in their home or business distributes energy, so that everyone is not using the grid at once. That allows operators to “reduce the peak and those extraordinarily high costs,” said Seidman. Like battery storage, it’s a way of getting more power from the grid without having to build costly substations and transmission lines.

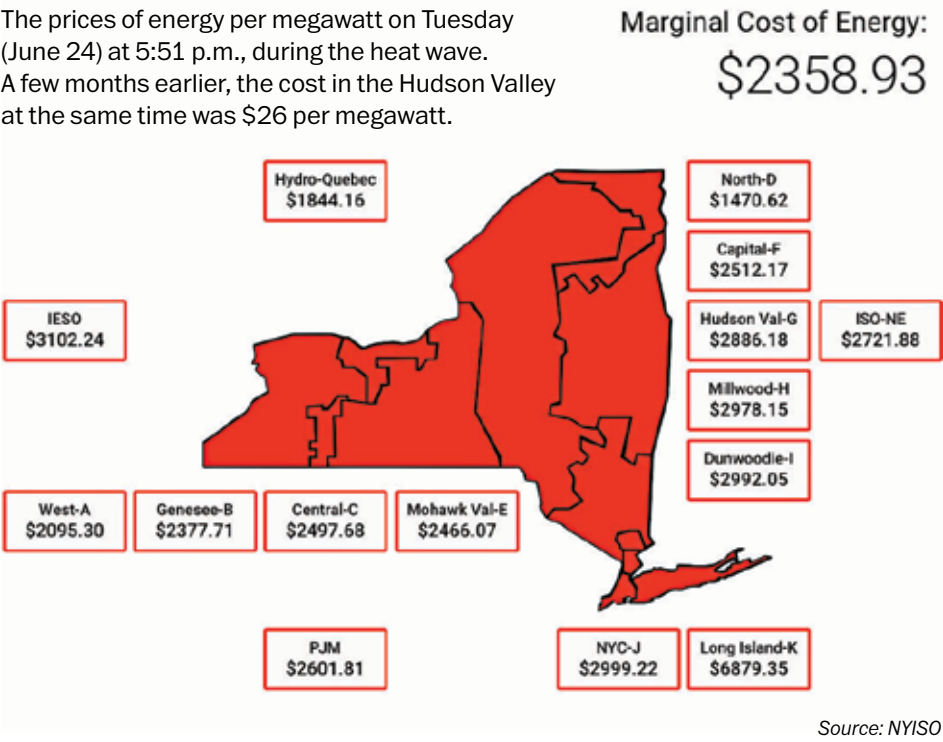
Many people with EVs plug their cars in when they return home for the day, so they will be charged in the morning. With a virtual power plant, a utility can spread

## Grid Basics

The U.S. electric grid dates to 1882, when Thomas Edison opened the first power plant at the Pearl Street Station in lower Manhattan. Today, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, plants that burn coal, oil or natural gas create 59 percent of the nation’s energy, nuclear plants account for 18 percent and renewables 23 percent.

To transport electricity over long distances, utilities use high-voltage lines. When the power reaches local substations, it is converted to a lower wattage to be sent to homes and businesses. The national grid includes 11,000 plants, 3,000 utilities and 2 million miles of power lines. Due to the substantial costs of infrastructure, most utilities are granted local monopolies but are heavily regulated.

This map, created in 2022 by Andy Arthur from public data, shows the major power lines that move electricity through New York.



out the charging of cars, saving it for the middle of the night, when power is cheaper and the load is lighter. The same can be done with water heaters — after your morning shower, you don’t need your water to be hot again immediately.

Homes equipped with solar panels and battery storage can create their own peaker plant. When the grid needs more power, it draws from the battery unit instead of relying on a more expensive fossil-fuel plant.

“We call it a virtual power plant because we’re calling on all these smaller batteries to give us the power of a much larger system,” said Christian Woods of Orange & Rockland Utilities, which operates across the Hudson River. “It’s not a big eyesore installation that takes up a lot of space. It’s diluted across the system.”

During this week’s heat dome, customers participating in the Orange & Rockland virtual power plant fully charged their batteries thanks to ample sunshine. At night, O&R

drew from those batteries and dispatched about 1.6 megawatts into the grid. On a day when the grid statewide was carrying more than 30,000 megawatts, 1.6 MW might not seem worth the trouble. However, that came from just 346 of the 300,000 homes O&R services in the two counties.

Orange & Rockland launched the program in 2015, when New York State offered funding to utilities that developed methods that cleaned up the grid while lowering costs for customers. Virtual power plants were moving from theory to practice in California and Texas, where they are credited with eliminating many of the rolling brownouts and blackouts that plagued the states due to insufficient power.

After receiving funding from the state, O&R developed a system in which new customers of Sunrun, a rooftop solar installation company, received a free battery storage unit if they agreed to allow the utility to draw from it during peak periods. If

there’s an “outflow,” the customer receives a bill credit.

Solar systems are designed to provide up to 110 percent of a home’s annual usage, Woods said. There are seasonal fluctuations in energy usage, “but once you go through a full year, you’ve built up enough credits that you don’t need to buy energy from us,” he said.

Woods called it a win-win-win situation: Sunrun got new customers, O&C didn’t have to build substations and rate-payers got a free battery and lower bills. He said the most challenging part about implementing the program was convincing customers it wasn’t a scam.

Not everyone was eligible for the program: It was only for new customers who had roofs that could support solar panels and got enough sunlight, and who had garages with room for a battery. But Woods said the pilot program provides valuable data. “We’re seeing how much energy is being released through these systems and trying to extrapolate from that,” he said. “What if we had one in every 10 homes? In every five homes? We can take that data to our regulator and say, ‘This is what we’re looking to spend, and this is the benefit.’ This can defer the need to build out traditional infrastructure.”

Together, battery storage and virtual plants could be the solution to preparing the grid for the renewable energy era without raising rates. For that to happen, the state and utilities will need to develop plans that benefit a broader range of people. Even as the mayors and supervisors in Dutchess County warmed up to the idea, there was still skepticism.

“Does Central Hudson have to be involved with any of this?” asked Torreggiani, the Hyde Park supervisor, pointing to photos of battery storage units that Seidman had projected on a screen. “Because they’ll just jack the shit out of the price.”



# The HIGHLANDS Current



JULY 4, 2025

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## Beacon To Newburgh Ferry Scuttled

*Low ridership, cost drive MTA decision*

By Jeff Simms

Commuter ferry service between Newburgh and Beacon will not return after being suspended since January, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority said last week.

NY Waterway has operated the Beacon-to-Newburgh ferry under contract with

the MTA since 2005, but the company in March announced that its weekday rush-hour service was discontinued indefinitely due to damage at the Beacon dock.

On June 23, Evan Zucarelli, the MTA's acting senior vice president of operations, said during a Metro-North committee meeting that the initial suspension of service was triggered by "typical river icing." However, subsequent assessments "revealed signifi-

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**AMAZING COLORS** — The monthly family science night at Desmond-Fish Library on June 24 celebrated the science of color by allowing children and their families to participate in three experiments demonstrating how people see, shape and create hues.

Photo by Ross Corsair

### Reporter's Notebook

## The Highlands Current Turns 15

*A lot has changed since July 4, 2010*

By Michael Turton

Time is a quirky thing, and our perception of it can be puzzling at times. There are moments when it feels not long ago that I hitchhiked to Montreal as a teenager, even though the calendar confirms that 56 years have passed.

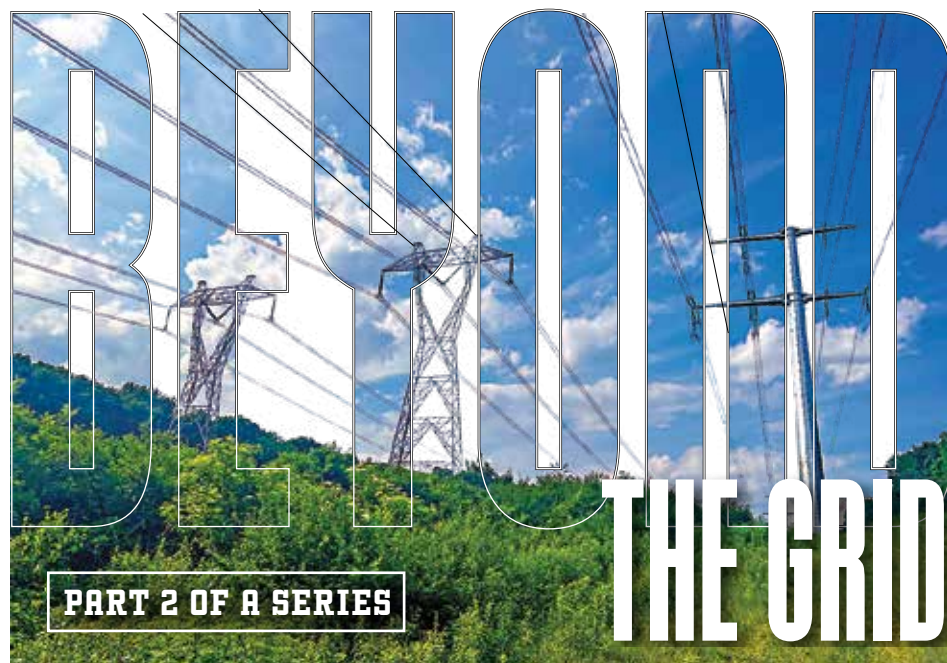
Yet when I think of something as recent as June 2010, when Gordon Stewart approached me in the Foundry Cafe in Cold Spring and asked me to join his yet-to-be-

launched local news outlet as a reporter, it sometimes feels like the distant past. For the record, I was thrilled that he asked.

I had been reporting for the *Putnam County News & Recorder*, the local weekly established more than a century and a half ago. I loved the idea of contributing to something completely new, but had no idea I'd be joined by Alison Rooney, Liz Schevtchuk Armstrong, Michael Mell and Kevin Foley, colleagues at the *PCNR*.

I also had no idea that Gordon Stewart had been President Jimmy Carter's speechwriter. In our early story meetings Gordon would sometimes digress, captivating us

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Beyond the Grid

## COST OVERLOAD

By Leonard Sparks

Their comments range from angry to anguished, some typed in all caps and punctuated with exclamation points.

An 80-year-old retiree who said his charges from Central Hudson are outpacing last year's 2.5 percent increase in his Social Security check is among the 182 people submitting comments in response to the utility's latest request to increase the rates it charges to deliver electricity to homes and businesses.

A single mother who said she lived with two children in a 700-square-foot house while earning \$1,400 a month bemoaned the surge in her monthly bill from \$100 to more than \$200. "If the rates keep going up, I will have to freeze to death together with my teenage sons," she wrote.

For the homeowners, renters and business owners who have been railing against Central Hudson's rising costs online and in public hearings before the state Public Service Commission, the frustration goes beyond the company's latest request to raise rates. Its pending three-year plan is lower than the company's original request but would still add \$18 per month during that period to the

average customer's bill.

Those customers, along with residents served by New York state's other utility companies, are paying the most in at least 25 years for electricity, according to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. Utility bills statewide averaged 25 cents per kilowatt-hour in March, compared to 19 cents in March 2015. Nationwide, energy bills are forecast to continue rising through next year, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

"It's unbearable for customers," said Assembly Member Jonathan Jacobson, a Democrat whose district includes Beacon and other areas served by Central Hudson. "We get complaints all the time about their costs and their service."

Customers face costs on two fronts: the rate utilities bill for electricity supply, whose prices from power producers are determined through competitive bidding overseen by the New York Independent System Operator, the state's grid operator; and the separate delivery rate utilities charge

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# Extreme Weather Powers Demand

Cooling, heating rises as aid disappears

The spikes in energy bills come as Americans feel the increasing effects of climate change, including more frequent “heat dome” events like the Highlands experienced last week when temperatures reached into the high 90s.

Those events spur even greater electricity usage as residents crank up air conditioners and fans to sustain themselves.

Don’t expect a trade-off from warmer winters, however. Climate change is also manipulating the polar jet stream, pulling colder air from Canada south in the winter. This past winter, those polar-vortex events allowed freezing temperatures to blanket the Highlands, adding higher heating bills to the higher cooling costs residents faced during the summer.

These bills aren’t just a source of frustration and anxiety anymore. They’re literally a matter of life and death. Between 1999 and 2023, 21,518 deaths recorded in the U.S. were attributed to heat as the underlying or a contributing factor, according to a study published in Aug. 2024 in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The total number of deaths nationwide doubled from 1,069 in 1999 to 2,325 in 2023, according to the study. In New York state, extreme heat is the leading cause of weather-related deaths, said the state Department of Environmental Conservation in a report published in June 2024.

Shortly after taking office, the Trump administration fired the entire federal staff responsible for the Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps more than 6 million families avoid utility shut-offs. A representative from New York’s Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance said that the state had already received its LIHEAP funding for the year, but next year is in doubt.

Part of this year’s funding is going toward the state’s Cooling Assistance Program, which will help approximately 18,000 households purchase either an air conditioner or a fan. The application window for the program is closed, but New Yorkers who suffer from asthma may still be eligible. See <https://dub.sh/cooling-help> for more information.



to fund operations and maintenance, and reward shareholders.

Although supply prices are volatile, spending to produce electricity fell 24 percent from 2003 to 2023, mainly due to lower fuel costs, according to the EIA. Further relief could come from New York State’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which sets energy goals of 70 percent renewables by 2030 and 100 percent by 2040. The costs for solar and wind power have plummeted, making them competitive with power produced by natural gas and other fossil fuels.

Less certain is any relief from the fixed rate utilities charge for delivering electricity. Those rates are approved by the state Public Service Commission (PSC), which says its mandate is not solely protecting customers, but also ensuring utilities have enough revenue to keep their systems operating.

Spending on transmission systems more than tripled nationally between 2003 and 2023, according to the EIA. Central Hudson’s delivery rate for residential customers has more than doubled since 2013 — from 5 cents per kilowatt-hour to nearly 13 cents — since 2013. Customers now routinely pay more for electricity delivery than for supply.

“We need to support the ratepayer because this has been very challenging for them,” said state Sen. Rob Rolison, a Republican whose district includes Beacon and Philipstown. “No one’s told me that rates are not going to continue to increase.”

## A faulty prediction

Falling costs were predicted in the late-1990s when New York State, under then-Gov. George Pataki, a Garrison resident, began deregulating the state’s utilities, who not only owned the transmission and distribution lines that carried electricity to homes and businesses, but also the facilities that generated power.

Breaking up those monopolies fell to the PSC. Established in June 1907 to replace New York’s Railroad Commission and its Commission on Gas and Electricity with a single regulator, the seven-member commission’s primary mission is “to ensure affordable, safe, secure and reliable” service by utility companies “at just and reasonable rates” for residents and businesses, while protecting the environment.

Undergirding its deregulation effort was the idea that open competition from independent power companies would beget lower prices for customers. A new system emerged, with utilities having to sell their power plants, NYISO procuring energy for them at “spot market” prices and custom-

ers able to choose to get supply from state-approved “energy service companies” (ESCOs), instead of their utility.

As part of the restructuring, Central Hudson divested from two power plants in the Town of Newburgh: the 500-megawatt Danskammer, which it owned outright, and the 1,200-megawatt Roseton power plant, which it co-owned with Con Edison and the Niagara Mohawk Power Corp.

Within the first few years of the new system, delivery costs were falling but supply rates were increasing, according to a 2002 report from the Public Utility Law Project. Founded in 1981, PULP is a consumer-advocacy organization that represents ratepayers when the PSC reviews requests from utilities to raise prices.

“At best, customer rates have been frozen at what were relatively high levels even during a period of relatively low fuel costs,” PULP said in its report. “At worst, rates increased dramatically.”

## Independent and dependent

Today, New York has “the most energy-efficient state economy in the nation” and consumes less energy per capita than all states but Rhode Island, according to the Energy Information Administration. But the state also imports 85 percent of the energy it needs, according to the EIA. As of March, the average cost of residential electricity, 25 cents per kilowatt-hour, stood as the eighth-highest among states and well above the national average of 17 cents.

Demand is expected to increase as part of the state’s transition away from fossil fuels. Beginning next year, electric appliances and heating systems will be required in new residential buildings up to seven stories, and for new large commercial structures. The mandate expands to all new buildings in 2029.

New York is also encouraging people to replace older gas-powered appliances and heating systems with electric ones, and the expansion of personal and public chargers for electric vehicles will contribute to heightened demand for electricity.

Climate change is also fueling hotter days and a greater use of air conditioning. On both June 24 and 25, Gov. Kathy Hochul urged residents downstate and in New York City to conserve energy during a heat wave because the grid approached peak capacity.

It is a grid still dependent on volatile fossil fuel prices. Electricity supplied through Central Hudson averaged 8.3 cents per kilowatt-hour each month in 2024 compared to 5.1 cents per kilowatt-hour in 2020, but had fallen from 2022, when the utility’s prices averaged 11.2 cents. Through June 11, the price has averaged 9.8 cents.

## Delivery rates soar

While supply costs ebb and flow, the charges for delivery ascend. Those costs include a flat-rate service charge (\$21.50 per month for Central Hudson customers), a state-mandated “system benefits charge” to fund assistance for low-income users,



A Central Hudson crew works on a power line on Main Street in Cold Spring.  
Photo by L. Sparks

## Central Hudson Monthly Residential Electric Bills

	Delivery	Supply	Surcharges	Total
2015	\$56.06	\$46.02	\$5.98	\$108.06
2016	\$59.03	\$38.34	\$5.69	\$103.06
2017	\$59.83	\$37.16	\$6.13	\$103.12
2018	\$67.95	\$42.60	\$4.90	\$115.45
2019	\$67.46	\$32.90	\$3.69	\$104.05
2020	\$73.55	\$31.19	\$3.88	\$108.62
2021	\$72.95	\$41.12	\$3.99	\$118.06
2022	\$77.24	\$70.88	\$3.90	\$152.02
2023	\$85.73	\$58.46	\$3.94	\$148.13
2024	\$98.50	\$49.07	\$5.31	\$152.88

Source: Central Hudson average based on 600 kilowatt-hour usage

energy-efficiency programs and other initiatives, along with other surcharges.

But most of the cost for delivering electricity comes from the rate Central Hudson and other utilities charge for each kilowatt-hour of usage. Between 2015 and 2024, a Central Hudson customer using 600 kilowatt-hours of energy monthly has seen their cost for delivery rise from \$56 to \$99.

The PSC and its Department of Public Service staff have staked out a middle position in negotiations over rate requests. Its members routinely approve a lower rate hike than initially requested by the utilities, but the result still leaves customers paying more.

Central Hudson, in its current proposal, initially requested a one-year rate increase for electricity that would yield \$47.2 million in new revenue. Under a compromise three-year proposal reached with the Department of Public Service (the PSC’s staff arm) and other parties, the company would raise \$95.8 million in additional electricity revenues from July 1 to June 30, 2028. The proposal also raises rates for the 90,000 customers who receive gas service from Central Hudson.

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James Denn, a spokesman for the PSC, said the compromise is a “balanced proposed settlement that serves the public’s interests by limiting Central Hudson’s expenses to those necessary for providing safe and reliable service.”

More than half the revenue (55 percent) from the delivery hikes will fund replacements for “aging and obsolete” infrastructure and 48 percent of the gas revenue will be used “to remove certain pipes that are more prone to leaks, gas distribution improvements and transmission gas line maintenance,” said Denn.

“The joint proposal will now be issued for public comment,” he said. “The PSC will consider the joint proposal, along with the comments, when it comes time for a decision.”

Joe Jenkins, Central Hudson’s director of media relations, said that replacing aging infrastructure and upgrading the company’s distribution system in response to the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act are the main drivers of the rate increases. To accommodate the new energy generated by renewable sources such as solar and wind, the utility is rebuilding transmission lines, upgrading substations and replacing circuitry,” he said.

In June 2024, Central Hudson began soliciting bids for energy storage projects totaling at least 10 megawatts combined, with the preferred location at its substation in Saugerties. It is also using funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law signed by former President Joe Biden to upgrade its Dashville Hydroelectric facility in Ulster County. The company owns two other hydroelectric facilities in Ulster: High Falls and Sturgeon Pool.

Central Hudson is also finishing the replacement of 23.6 miles of lines between Kingston in Ulster County and North Catskill in Greene County. Budgeted at \$34 million, the project will boost the capacity of the lines from 69,000 volts to 115,000.

Along with rebuilding transmission lines, the company plans to upgrade substations and replace circuitry as it focuses on projects that will “maintain reliability and unlock additional capacity on our system,” said Jenkins. The cost, about \$37 million per year, will allow Central Hudson to distribute an additional 500 megawatts of electricity, he said.

“It will also provide some of the headroom needed to help us transition building heating and transportation away from their traditional fossil fuels and onto the electric grid,” said Jenkins.

**Growing arrears**

But it comes at a cost. As rates have increased, so have the number of people with arrears greater than 60 days. More than 55,000 of Central Hudson’s residential customers (20 percent) had \$134 million in charges older than two months in December 2024, a significant increase from the 21,493 (8 percent of customers) owing \$8.7 million reported in December 2019, according to state Department of Public Service data.

At the same time, more than twice as many

Your Bill Explained

- Electric Delivery Charges:** Central Hudson’s costs for delivering electricity to homes and businesses, operating and maintaining power lines and its infrastructure, and for customer services.
- a. **Basic Service Charge:** Maintenance of electric lines, meter reading and other costs.
- b. **Delivery Service Charge:** The cost to deliver electricity to customers, whether purchased from Central Hudson or another supplier.
- c. **Merchant Function Charge (MFC):** The cost incurred when independent marketers bill through Central Hudson’s system. Customers receiving a separate bill avoid this charge.
- d. **Transition Adjustment:** Recovers revenues lost when customers purchase energy from independent suppliers.
- e. **System Benefits Charge (SBC):** State-mandated charge to fund energy-efficiency programs, assistance for low-income customers, energy research and development and other initiatives.
- f. **Revenue Decoupling Mechanism (RDM):** Intended to minimize the impact to Central Hudson resulting from reduced energy consumption as efficiency programs are implemented.
- g. **Total Delivery Charges:** The total cost to deliver electricity.

- Electricity Supply Charges:** Central Hudson’s costs for electricity purchased on behalf of its customers on the wholesale market. Central Hudson does not mark up supply charges.
1. **Miscellaneous Charges:** Credits and charges related to transactions with the state’s grid operator, or for other programs.
2. **Market Price:** The average wholesale price of all energy needed to supply customers.
3. **Market Price Adjustment:** An adjustment, up or down, of the previous month’s market price to reflect differences caused by the timing of billing and collection.

customers were repaying Central Hudson in installments at the end of last year and fewer were receiving termination notices.

When the pandemic shutdown began in March 2020, Central Hudson stopped suspending service and assessing late fees, keeping the policy in place until the fall of 2024, said Jenkins. The amount of uncollected payments grew during the pause, he said, so the company “is actively working with customers to help them bring their accounts into good standing” through financial-assis-

**Electric Service Charges 282 kWh at a cost of \$63.40**  
Average Daily Cost for Electric \$2.1862

**Amount of Electricity Used**

Aug 07, 2019	Present Reading (actual)	12870
Jul 09, 2019	Previous Reading (estimated)	12588

**Electricity Used (kWh)** 282

**Cost for Electricity Used (for 1.0 months)**

**ENERGY DELIVERY CHARGES:**

a	Basic Service Charge	1.0 Mos @	20.00	20.00
	Delivery Svc Chg	282 kWh @	0.08349	23.54
c	MFC Admin Chg	282 kWh @	0.00183	0.52
	Transition Adj	282 kWh @	0.00018	0.05
	Bill Credit	282 kWh @	-0.00307	-0.87
e	SBC/RPS Chgs	282 kWh @	0.00599	1.69
	Misc. Charges	282 kWh @	0.00379	1.07
	RDM Chg	282 kWh @	-0.00294	-0.83
g	<b>Total Delivery Chrgs</b>			<b>45.17</b>

**ENERGY SUPPLY CHARGES:**  
(You may choose another supplier for this part of your service)

	MFC Supply Chg	282 kWh @	0.00330	0.93
	Market Price	282 kWh @	0.05113	14.42
3	Market Price Adj	282 kWh @	0.00449	1.27
	<b>Total Supply Chrgs</b>			<b>16.62</b>
*	<b>NYS &amp; Local Taxes</b>			<b>1.61</b>
	<b>TOTAL ELECTRICITY COST</b>			<b>\$63.40</b>

# — For this billing period, the average cost of energy we purchased for you was \$0.05892 per kWh (excluding taxes). You can use this number to compare our price to other suppliers' prices.

tance and repayment programs, he said.

New York’s utilities are also being pushed to expand their outreach to low-income customers who may be eligible for their energy affordability programs, which provides credits that lower monthly bills to people receiving benefits through a number of programs, such as Home Energy Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (aka food stamps), Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income.

The Public Utility Law Project estimates that as many as 1.1 million people are eligible for the discount but not enrolled. Central Hudson had 13,598 customers enrolled in its EAP program as of April 30, and is promising as part of its pending rate hike to increase enrollment to 15,500.

Relief from Renewables

Some ratepayers may eventually see relief from the CLCPA. Primarily undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of fossil fuels, the shift toward solar and wind power could lead to lower supply prices.

Driven by such factors as economies of scale, global supply chains and advances in technology, the average cost of solar power dropped by over 90 percent between 2010 and 2023, and for onshore and offshore wind by 73 percent and 65 percent, respectively, said Gang He, an energy policy expert from CUNY Baruch College.

Building and maintaining renewable systems has become so much cheaper that the costs for power plants relying on natural gas and other fossil fuels is projected to be higher, according to a 2023 report from the Energy

Information Administration that studied projects expected to come online by 2028.

“Solar is the lowest cost electricity source in the world,” said Noah Ginsburg, executive director of the New York Solar Energy Industries Association.

Although solar power derived from utility-scale facilities — those capable of generating more than 5 megawatts — have the lowest-cost, they require large pieces of land. Most of the state’s solar capacity, 93 percent, is through “distributed” projects — private rooftop systems and commercial-scale solar farms whose power can be purchased by homeowners and businesses.

On April 17, Central Hudson said nearly 17,400 solar systems with a capacity of 334 megawatts were connected to its grid and powering more than 27,000 homes.

Those and other projects have helped New York exceed its goal for total solar capacity a year ahead of schedule, and the state is “making rapid progress toward our expanded goal of 10 gigawatts by 2030,” said Ginsburg.

Headwinds threaten those gains, however, said Gang He. The drop in costs for installing solar and wind projects has “recently slowed, or even reversed in some cases” due to rising material and labor costs, trade restrictions and tariffs, he said. Despite the increases, renewables “remain the cheapest source of new electricity generation” in many areas of the U.S., he said.

Legislative relief

Hochul and state lawmakers are pursuing other remedies.

(Continued on Page 8)



## BEYOND THE GRID (Continued from Page 7)

In September 2024, the governor signed legislation requiring that the PSC include in public information about rate increases an explanation of why the utility is requesting higher prices and a summary of how the new revenue will be spent. In February, she called on the PSC to reject Con Edison's latest request to increase rates and directed the Department of Public Service to audit utility salaries and compensation, which it began doing in February.

An audit of Central Hudson prompted by the widespread bill problems that began when it switched to a new customer-information system concluded that the company's use of incentive pay skewed toward increasing financial performance rather than improving performance to benefit customers.

At Hochul's direction, the Department of Public Service "is scrutinizing all rate cases to prioritize affordability," said Denn.

Critics of the rate increases also accuse the utilities of inflating their rate requests with higher-than-needed returns on equity. A February report from the nonprofit RMI, which studies energy markets, estimated that 50 percent of an average ratepayer's bill covers operating costs and 16.7 percent represents profits. Central Hudson's current proposal, which the PSC has yet to vote on, includes a 9.5 percent return on equity.

"I would like to see a change in how a reasonable rate of return is calculated," said Jacobson, who introduced in April legislation that would cap profits for utility companies at 4 percent.

Legislators passed this spring a bill he introduced in the Assembly mandating that capital expenses embedded in proposed rate increases "be described by the utility, include the purpose, cost and benefits to the ratepayers" and be posted to the PSC's website. Michelle Hinchey shepherded passage in the Senate, and the bill received support from Rolison and Dana Levenberg, whose Assembly district includes Philipstown.

The goal of the legislation, which still needs to be signed by Hochul, is to be able to scrutinize whether those capital expenses are "just and reasonable and beneficial to ratepayers," said Jacobson.

"They just can't say, 'We need \$10 million for capital expenditures,'" said Jacobson. "We want them to put in exactly what each project is."

Rolison is pushing legislation mandating that the PSC hold public hearings on proposed rate increases at least 90 days before voting, and allow people attending to ask questions of the commission and the utility. While the PSC generally holds public hearings on rate proposals, state law only says the commission "shall have the power" to hold those hearings.

"It takes so much time for the PSC to do what they need to do," said Rolison. "For the ratepayer, both business and residential, this is a burden — not knowing when they're going to go up, how they're going to go up."

Some people are not waiting, instead pursuing conservation. Next week, we examine passive houses.

## Ferry Service (from Page 1)

cant damage" to the floating ferry dock the MTA attaches to Beacon's pier, "requiring long-term solutions," he said.

After reviewing ridership, which had been "steadily declining" prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the \$2.1 million annual cost of the service, the ferry will not return, Zucarelli said. An average of 62 riders used the ferry each day in 2024, down from "approaching 250" per day at its peak in 2008, said Andrew Buder, Metro-North's director of government and community relations. Ridership usually doubles over the summer, but last fall did not rebound to match its numbers from a year earlier, Buder said.

"Even with that, we don't see a drop in ridership on the [Metro-North] train correlating to the drop in ridership on the ferry," he said. "If those people are still using the train, they're just choosing to get there a different way."

Bus service costing \$1.75 per ride will continue ferrying commuters between the two cities on weekday mornings and afternoons for the rest of the year, after which it will become free. The MTA has been working with New York State to expand the frequency and coverage area of the service, Zucarelli said. When pressed by an MTA board member, he said the agency would consider implementing free bus service before 2026.

Another factor in the decision, Zucarelli said, is that Beacon is "actively developing plans to activate its dock area for tourism," while in Newburgh, where the MTA had been using a temporary dock, city officials are preparing for similar growth in 2027 with the opening of the \$14.3 million Newburgh Landing Pier.

The MTA's license to attach its ferry dock in Beacon expired June 30, and the agency notified the city that it did not intend to renew the agreement, City Administrator Chris White said.

Neal Zuckerman, a Philipstown resident who represents Putnam County on the MTA board, pushed back against the plans during the June 23 meeting. "It is counterintuitive to me that, at the same time you've mentioned that both Newburgh and Beacon are enhancing their waterfront, that we are finding that use of the waterfront is not valuable," he said.



Ferry service between Beacon and Newburgh has been shut down since January due to damage to the MTA's floating dock.

Photo by J. Simms

Zuckerman said that what's happening on the Newburgh waterfront is "shockingly nice," while Beacon is a "TOD [transit-oriented development] dream, because it was once a moribund, empty area." Then, when Dia Beacon arrived in 2003, "it created an extraordinary resurgence" in a community that, because of the MTA, was "an easy one to get to."

Whether ferry service returns or not, restricted access to the dock has hindered the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, which

would typically dock in Beacon for at least six weeks out of its April-to-November sailing season.

Clearwater has had to reschedule school sails aboard the sloop to depart from either Cold Spring or Poughkeepsie, while some fee-based sails for private groups and pay-what-you-can community sails, which draw about 45 people per outing, have been canceled, said David Toman, the organization's executive director.

"Our core — the idea of getting people out on the sloop, out on the water — provides a unique impact that you can't get otherwise," he said. "It is critically important to be in Beacon and be able to serve the community from that access point."

Steve Chanks, an art director who lives in Newburgh, often works remotely but goes into his SoHo office three or four times a month. Out of 40 neighbors who met this week to discuss the ferry closure, he said about a dozen rely on the service to get to Beacon and commute to New York City regularly.

"It's unfair to have that access cut off," he said, especially as the MTA implements congestion pricing in hopes of reducing traffic coming into New York City. While the agency has made bus service available, the 10-minute ferry "offers the residents of Newburgh and neighboring areas a fast, reliable and scenic commute to the Beacon Metro-North station that doesn't add to or suffer from traffic patterns," he said. "I would think they would want to support this."

### NOTICE

The Philipstown Planning Board will hold their regular monthly meeting on **Thursday, July 17th, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.** at the **Philipstown Town Hall, 238 Main St., Cold Spring, NY.**

If you are unable to join in person but would like to watch, the meeting will be livestreaming on [youtube.com](https://youtube.com), search for Philipstown Planning Board July 2025.

### NOTICE

#### PHILIPSTOWN ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

Public Hearing - July 14th, 2025

The Philipstown Zoning Board of Appeals for the Town of Philipstown, New York will hold a public hearing on Monday, July 14th, 2025 starting at 7:30 p.m. to hear the following appeal. The meeting will be held in person at the Philipstown Town Hall, 238 Main St., Cold Spring, NY.

**John Halebian, 47 Mill Rd., Cold Spring, NY 10516, TM#16.12-1-12**

Applicant is seeking a variance to build a 24' x 30' Garage providing a 25' front yard setback where 50' is required.

At said hearing all persons will have the right to be heard. Copies of the application, plat map, and other related materials may be seen in the Office of the Building Department, 2 Cedar Street, Cold Spring, New York or by visiting the following link on the Town of Philipstown website.

<https://sites.google.com/philipstown.com/townofphilipstown/june>

Dated June 9th, 2025

Robert Dee, Chair of the Town of Philipstown Zoning Board of Appeals

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# The HIGHLANDS Current



JULY 11, 2025

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**CELEBRATING FREEDOM** — The Greater Newburgh Symphony Orchestra, now in its 30th year, performed on July 4 on the lawn at Boscobel in Philipstown. The concert included Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9 (From The New World)*, composed in 1893 during his four-year stay in the U.S. Photo by Ross Corsair

## Surprise from the Sky

*Lost meal demolishes windshield*

**By Michael Turton**

Christine Ortiz, the owner of Oh! Designs Interiors on Stone Street in Cold Spring, was enjoying an average Monday on July 7, but there was nothing average about what happened at 4:15 p.m. as she stepped outside for a walk.

"I heard a loud crash and thought something had broken, maybe inside the pub" on the corner, she said.

(Continued on Page 6)



A falling object destroyed Christine Ortiz's windshield. Photo by Michelle Kupper

## Firehouse Under Contract

*Westchester buyer to pay \$1.8 million for Mase station*

**By Jeff Simms**

Beacon officials have entered into a contract to sell the city's decommissioned Mase Hook & Ladder fire station for \$1.8 million.

The buyer, Michael Bensimon, signed an agreement on June 24 to acquire the property at 425 Main St., including the three-story brick firehouse that has stood there since 1911.

Bensimon, who lists a Port Chester, New York, address on the agreement, made a down payment of \$180,000. According to the sale contract, which was provided to *The Current*, he has a 45-day due-diligence period during which the sale can be canceled and the down payment refunded. City Attorney Nick Ward-Willis said he expects the transaction to close by the end of August.

Bensimon and his attorney each declined to comment.

Although Dutchess County records incorrectly combine three parcels — the Memorial Building at 423 Main St., Mase at 425 Main and the adjacent municipal

(Continued on Page 6)



PART 3 OF A SERIES

Beyond the Grid

## HOME ENERGY

By Joey Asher

Glenn Rockman and his longtime partner, Darron Berquist, love many things about their 3,700-square-foot home off Route 9 in Philipstown (shown above): the quiet woods, the modern architecture, the river views.

They also love their electric bill: \$21.50 a month.

The bills could be lower, but Central Hudson requires a basic service charge to be hooked up to the grid. The one time the bill was higher, it was because they had accidentally left the air conditioning on for 10 days while on vacation. The only gas the home uses is propane in a backup generator.

This is all possible because Rockman and Berquist live in a certified Passive House, one of a growing number of ultra-efficient homes whose solar panels generate more power than the owners use.

Rockman said they are hooked up to Central Hudson only as a precaution; occasionally, on hot days, the 9-kilowatt solar panel doesn't generate enough power to cool the house. But more often, it's sending electricity to Central Hudson and using a net meter

to stockpile credits. Rockman expects to soon replace the backup generator with a whole-house battery that can store the excess production.

In Cold Spring, Chelsea Mozen said her Passive House on High Street also routinely generates no electric bill. The same is true of the Main Street office of River Architects, which specializes in passive construction.

Passive houses rely on several conservation principles, said James Hartford, who co-owns the firm. The first is airtight construction, achieved by sealing joints and penetrations such as wall outlets, plumbing and ductwork, to trap heat. Doors are often 4 inches thick, with multiple latching points and rubber gaskets that create a vault-like seal. Even nail holes are sealed with caulk. If you want to hang a picture on the wall of a Passive House, you'll need an adhesive mount.

To be certified by the Passive House Institute, a blower test must show that the air inside changes no more than 0.6 times per hour. By comparison, for homes built before 2016, the standard

(Continued on Page 8)



# Budget Buster

*Federal law could raise electricity costs*

By Brian PJ Cronin

If you're considering making your home more energy-efficient, act now.

The federal budget bill signed into law by President Donald Trump on July 4 will eliminate tax credits for solar panels, heat pumps, induction stoves, insulation and energy-efficient windows after Dec. 31. It also will eliminate, as of Sept. 30, a tax credit of up to \$7,500 for buying or leasing an electric vehicle.

The law could lead to higher util-

ity costs because it kills many industry subsidies for wind, solar and large-scale batteries, which made up more than 90 percent of the new energy added to the grid. The REPEAT Project at Princeton University estimates 30 gigawatts that would have been generated by wind and solar annually may be lost.

"Renewables are the cheapest source of new electricity generation, with or without the tax credits that the bill phases out," said Amanda Levin, director of policy analysis for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Although the cost of installing solar and batteries has fallen by 90 percent over the past decade, and wind costs have

fallen by 70 percent, the bill "will put a damper on new renewable and energy storage investment over the next decade, which is going to mean less new cheap, clean power getting added to the grid, and higher electricity prices," she predicted.

At this point, "we can't build enough new fossil plants to fill the void that might be left by killing renewables," she said. Due to supply-chain issues, there's a backlog of up to seven years for natural gas turbines, for example. Gov. Kathy Hochul has announced plans to build more nuclear power plants upstate, but that won't happen immediately: The most recent nuclear plants built in the U.S. were years behind schedule and billions of dollars over budget.

"Renewables and storage are the only resources available to be deployed today at reasonable cost," said Levin. "We won't be able to build new, unexpected, unplanned

investments in other types of non-clean energy at least until the 2030s."

The budget may mean fossil-fuel plants scheduled for retirement will need to stay open. Over the next few decades, electricity demand is expected to increase by 25 percent, primarily due to the growth of data centers.

Relief could come at the state level if New York moves forward with a "cap-and-invest" plan, said Kobi Naseck, director of programs and advocacy for NY Renew, a progressive coalition. The program was announced by Hochul in 2023; corporations that produce more pollution than allowed would pay penalties that fund the state's climate plans and rebate checks for consumers.

NY Renew forecasts that a cap-and-invest program could produce savings of up to \$2,000 a year for households earning less than \$200,000 annually.



Juhee Lee-Hartford and James Hartford inside River Architects, their energy-efficient office on Main Street in Cold Spring.

*Photo provided*



A certified Passive House in Cold Spring designed by River Architects

*Photo by Brad Dickson*



used to be seven changes an hour. Since then, the standard building code has required three changes an hour.

To remove odors and avoid carbon dioxide poisoning, passive houses use mechanical heat recovery ventilation systems, Hartford said. The systems let in outside air, but only after the outgoing air has warmed it. These heat exchange systems are up to 95 percent efficient. In addition, "the air is super clean," noted Rockman. "There's no dust."

Passive Houses also have tons of insulation. The walls are up to 2 feet thick, more than double that of most homes, and have up to four times the wall and attic insulation. Foundations have a layer of insulation between the slab and the ground. Windows have three or four panes in addition to a layer of inert gas to improve thermal performance. (Most standard homes use double-paned glass.)

With all the insulation and air tightness, passive homes don't need large heating and cooling systems, said Hartford. "We have two little heat pumps upstairs [at River Architects] that do all we need for heating and cooling. The building stays warm by itself through solar gain, people and computers."

Passive house homeowners give up certain amenities. Rockman wanted larger windows, for example, but they were too inefficient. He insisted on a fireplace, although they're discouraged. The fireplace has a glass door to maintain an airtight seal when they're not enjoying a fire. "Even burn-

*(Continued on Page 9)*



(Continued from Page 8)

ing one log can dramatically increase the inside temperature,” he said. “The house just retains so much heat.”

The Rockman-Berquist home is one of about 1,500 homes and apartment buildings nationwide certified by the Passive House Institute. New York City has almost 2,000 units in certified Passive apartment buildings.

The passive-house movement dates to the 1973 oil embargo, when energy prices skyrocketed. Engineers and architects at the University of Illinois designed a “Lo-Cal” house that consumed 60 percent less energy. A German physicist, Wolfgang Feist, refined the ideas in the 1980s and founded the Passivhaus Institute to promote low energy usage standards.

Thanks in part to the work of River Architects, Philipstown has four certified Passive Houses, including three in the Village of Cold Spring. Hartford said many more homes have been built using passive principles but haven’t gone through the rigorous and costly certification process.

“This is an ‘almost’ Passive House,” said Joe Meyer, whose 3,500-square-foot home is near the West Point Foundry Preserve in Cold Spring. He pays about \$150 to \$200 a month to Central Hudson. There is no gas bill. His electric bills are already so low that adding solar panels wouldn’t help much. That calculus could change, he said, if he were to buy an electric car.

Passive homes cost five to 10 percent more to build, without accounting for the utility savings. With economies of scale, the cost of building passive multi-family buildings is approximately the same or slightly higher than that of non-passive construction.

Michael Robinson, a Cold Spring contractor specializing in passive house construction, noted that it is well-suited for low-income housing. “You’re building apartments that have little or no utility costs,” said Robinson, who retrofitted a three-family building in Newburgh. “For people on a fixed income, it’s incredible.”

Besides the cost, Robinson said a barrier to passive building is that contractors need to learn new skills, and it takes more planning. There’s a “pain-in-the-neck factor,” said Robinson. “It takes a few more months before you start digging.”

Over the last 20 years, building codes have adopted many principles of the Passive House, including increased insulation and tighter building envelopes. In 2020, Beacon adopted the New York Stretch Building Code, which includes even stricter performance standards.

Bryan Murphy, Beacon’s building inspector, said that energy efficiency standards have increased dramatically since he started in the construction business 35 years ago. “Oh gosh, they’re tenfold better,” he said.



Roberto Muller and Mia Klubnick stand outside their high-efficiency home.

Photo by Ross Corsair

## Low-Energy, Built by Hand

*Putnam Valley couple transforms cottage*

By Joey Asher

If Roberto Muller and Mia Klubnick’s home renovation in Putnam Valley were a reality show, it might be called *Toxic Cottage*.

That’s because when they inspected the 1,000-square-foot, white clapboard structure at 30 Seifert Lane in 2021, it was filled with black mold, said Muller, a construction project manager.

Last year, after rebuilding the cabin by hand using Passive House principles — an airtight envelope with lots of insulation — Muller and Klubnick moved in.

Their electricity bills average \$150 a month. They don’t use gas or oil. The lot is too shaded for solar, so they joined a solar farm program that saves them 10 percent on their electricity supply.

The couple met in 2017 and started searching for a home during the pandemic. They had a budget of \$250,000 and wanted two or three bedrooms. That priced them out of the Highlands, and they considered the Catskills, Vermont and Maine. But Muller grew up in Cold Spring and Klubnick, a baker, grew up in Putnam Valley, so they wanted to stay local. They settled on Plan B: “Buy the worst house in the neighborhood and fix it up,” said Klubnick.

That turned out to be the clapboard cottage, owned by Judy and John Allen. It was built in 1938 as a summer retreat for Al Palermo and his cousin John Viscardi, a New York City engineer who, according to Allen family lore, worked on the Manhattan Proj-



The cottage as it appeared before Muller and Klubnick began to renovate

Photo provided

ect. The Allens raised two children in the home, including Rosie, who was born on the pull-out couch with the help of two friends, one of whom was a nurse. Rosie became Klubnick’s best friend from down the road.

In 1997, the Allens built a larger home on the 25-acre property and offered the cottage to renters or “people whose marriages were breaking up,” Judy Allen said. The last tenant, a hoarder, left the place in disrepair in 2019.

The Allens were thrilled to sell the cottage to Muller and Klubnick. Klubnick’s late mother, Maaikie Hoekstra, had been a close friend who helped found the nearby Tompkins Corners Cultural Center. “She’s my fairy godmother,” said Klubnick of Judy Allen.

Muller said the original plan wasn’t to build a high-performance house. But when they realized most of the structure was unsalvageable, they decided to pursue it. “It was ethically important for me,” said

Muller, who majored in environmental studies at Vassar and is president of Sustainable Putnam, which advocates for sustainable communities. “I wanted to walk the walk.”

With its thick walls, insulation and tight envelope, the house requires only one mini-split air-source heat pump. “It’s basically the smallest system you could possibly have,” said Muller. They have not sought Passive House certification so Muller calls it “passive-ish.”

Muller worked on the home full-time from late 2021 through early 2024. Klubnick worked on it full time for about 18 months. “I like working with my hands,” she said. They live with their dogs, Jones and Zorra, and their cats, Suzannah and Birdy. With two bedrooms, there is room for their daughter, due in October. They’ve added framing above the kitchen for more bedrooms, “if the family keeps growing,” Muller said.



The HIGHLANDS  
Current



It's Back!  
Page 3

JULY 18, 2025

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# Living Affordably in Beacon

*Dozens benefit from workforce program*

By Leonard Sparks

Denise Lahey’s roots in Beacon are decades deep.

Her grandfather, Dennis Lahey, served 62 years with the Beacon Fire Department; her father, Dennis Lahey Jr., is the assistant chief and her sister, Kari, became the city’s first full-time female firefighter in 2020.

However, those ties to the city were no match for the rental prices Lahey faced in 2019, when a relationship ended, along with half the rent for the two-bedroom unit she shared at Hudson View with her then-boyfriend and son.

There were plenty of good reasons to stay in Beacon, she said: keeping her son in the city’s schools and staying close to her family and job as a mail carrier in White Plains rather than moving farther away to

(Continued on Page 9)



**BIG GAME** — The Philipstown Little League all-star softball team made it to the championship game on July 11 against visiting Poughkeepsie and held its own against the much larger town. See Page 24.

Photo by Ross Corsair

# Cold Spring Pauses Food Trucks

*Moratorium intended to clarify regulations*

By Michael Turton

The next several months should determine how many trucks, if any, will be dishing out comfort foods in Cold Spring.

After a public hearing on July 9, the Village Board approved a six-month moratorium on licensing and operation of food trucks, both on public and private property within the village.

Events such as the Modern Makers Markets at St. Mary’s Church, which have already advertised having food trucks, will be able to host them during the moratorium.

Mayor Kathleen Foley said clear, less arbitrary and more-thorough guidelines

are needed to be fair to operators as well as residents and businesses potentially affected by food trucks.

Applications are considered under Chapter 71 of the Village Code, which deals with licensing, and which Foley said includes provisions drafted in 1931 and updated in 1992.

“It was written in a different time, largely addressing door-to-door solicitations and street peddling,” she said, adding that since the pandemic, there has been increased interest from food-truck operators, as well as from residents who would like more casual “grab-and-go” food options.

Residents who attended the public hearing, however, expressed no support for allowing food trucks, other than at special events.

(Continued on Page 7)



Beyond the Grid

# PUBLIC POWER

By Jeff Simms

Could a utility owned by the public, rather than Central Hudson, deliver lower electricity costs?

Many people believe it would, and last year, two state legislators introduced a proposal to make it happen by creating the Hudson Valley Power Authority. The bill outlines the process by which the state would create a “democratically governed” nonprofit corporation that would provide “low rates, reliable service, correct and easy to understand bills, clean energy, community benefits and environmental justice.” The goal would be to keep residential electric bills from exceeding 6 percent of household income.

It would not be the first public utility, even in New York. Along with the state-owned New York Power Authority and the Long Island Power Authority, there are at least 50 municipal utilities in New York, mostly in rural areas. For the rest of the state, the delivery of electricity is monopolized by six investor-owned utilities such as Central Hudson, which has been owned since 2013 by Fortis, a Canadian holding company. In return for their monopolies, these utilities are regulated by the Public

Service Commission, which must approve rate hikes and capital projects.

Establishing the Hudson Valley Power Authority would not only lower rates but coordinate with the state’s long-term climate goals while protecting Central Hudson’s 1,130 employees, according to the two Democratic legislators who introduced the proposal, Sen. Michelle Hinchey (whose district includes parts of Dutchess and Putnam counties) and Assembly Member Sarahana Shrestha (whose district includes the northwest corner of Dutchess). “I don’t think the role of government is to empower the private sector,” Shrestha said. “This would put public goods back in the hands of the public.”

## How it could happen

Shrestha and Hinchey’s legislation calls for the Hudson Valley Power Authority to purchase Central Hudson and take control of a system with 315,000 electric customers and 90,000 natural gas customers in parts of nine counties, including Dutchess and Putnam. If Central Hudson refused

(Continued on Page 20)





to sell, the legislation suggests authorities could use a legal process called eminent domain to compel a sale.

Tom Konrad, a chartered financial analyst who is the chair of the Marbletown Environmental Conservation Commission, is leading a plan in the Ulster County town — the Hudson Valley's first — to transition to 100 percent renewable energy. He estimates that it would cost between \$2.2 billion and \$3.6 billion to acquire Central Hudson, including its \$1.4 billion in debt.

The Hudson Valley Power Authority (HVPA) would be overseen by a nine-member board appointed by the governor and the Legislature, which would also include the business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 320, the union representing about 700 Central Hudson employees.

In addition, an independent "observatory" modeled after the Paris Water Authority and composed of elected representatives and members of academic institutions would help the board with "community participation, transparency, research and accountability," Shrestha said.

The newly formed utility would retain Central Hudson employees represented by labor unions and assume those agreements, including retirement benefits. After buying Central Hudson, the HVPA would be obligated to bargain "in good faith" with union representatives.

The bill also aligns the HVPA with the goals of the state's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, directing the utility to procure 70 percent renewable electricity by 2030 and 100 percent renewable electricity by 2040, provided the supply is available.

At least 35 percent of the benefits of clean energy and efficiency programs, such as reduced pollution through the phasing out of fossil fuel-burning plants, would be allocated to disadvantaged communities within the service area.

Shrestha doesn't expect either Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins or Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie to call for a vote until the bill has sufficient momentum to pass, which she said could take two or three years.

Konrad believes the state would realize savings because, like a municipality, a state-owned utility does not pay federal taxes. Municipal bonds would also come at a lower interest rate — a combination he says could save up to 10 percent.

But the most significant savings — and a key selling point for the proposal — would be the elimination of what Shrestha calls Central Hudson's "profit motive." Utilities don't make money on the electricity and gas they provide,



Assembly Member Sarahana Shrestha, shown here at a rally in Kingston, introduced legislation to create a Hudson Valley Power Authority.

Photo provided

but from the delivery rates. That money funds operations, capital projects and returns for shareholders. The Public Service Commission is weighing a request from Central Hudson to increase its delivery charges to provide a 9.5 percent investor return.

According to Joe Jenkins, Central Hudson's director of media relations, about half of the utility's capital expansion is covered by borrowed money (through bonds repaid by customers via delivery rates) and half by shareholders. For that reason, Konrad argues, customers are "renting the electric grid from Central Hudson. As renters, we pay Fortis for its cost of capital, plus profit on the amount of equity they put in, plus any maintenance. We have to pay for everything they pay for, plus a profit."

Konrad estimates that eliminating the need to earn a profit for shareholders could save nearly \$50 million annually. He points to data collected by the U.S. Energy Information Administration in 2022, which showed that, on average, public power customers pay 6.3 percent less than customers of investor-owned utilities.

### Opposition emerges

"Central Hudson is not for sale," says Jenkins. If New York State attempts to acquire the company through eminent domain, he predicts "a pretty costly and drawn-out legal battle."

The company's objections to the proposal are many. For one, Jenkins said, the utility contributes \$60 million in taxes annually to municipalities in its territory. "That's money that goes to fire departments, school districts, police departments," he said, cautioning that, for those municipalities, a state takeover would "throw budgeting into chaos."

Central Hudson also fears a public utility would eliminate hundreds of jobs in the natural gas sector. Jenkins noted that the bill refers to the Hudson Valley Power Authority making an agreement with a union that represents "transitioning employees from non-renewable generation facilities" before the authority completes a renewable-energy project. "We take that to mean natural gas" employees, said Jenkins.

Jerry Nappi, the director of public affairs

for Central Hudson, says the HVPA narrative suggests that "if the government just had control of Central Hudson, we could do X, Y and Z. But that ignores the fact that we are regulated very heavily by New York State."

Nappi disputes Shrestha's statement that a "perverse incentive" for profit is the company's primary motivator, and Jenkins says Central Hudson recognizes "the growing concern about the affordability of energy."

"We're committed to doing everything in our power to keep our bills as manageable for our customers as we can," said Jenkins. Instead of a takeover, collaborative dialogue with elected officials in the region "is a very important part of reaching long-term, permanent solutions to keep energy bills low," he said. "It takes a village to keep energy costs low."

In April, more than two dozen labor and business organizations, including the Orange, Ulster and Dutchess County chambers of commerce, signed a letter opposing a Hudson Valley Power Authority. The legislation, the groups said, "poses significant risks to our local economy and workforce, harms customers and communities, hinders the transition to cleaner energy and threatens the overall reliability and affordability of energy" in the Central Hudson service territory.

While HVPA advocates accuse Central Hudson of profiting from capital expansion, the labor and business groups say public power authorities lack oversight and "are not incentivized to make needed investments, potentially leading to a diminishment of reliability."

The groups cite a 2024 report from the American Public Power Association, which they say demonstrates that electric rates in New York are nearly 10 percent higher for residential customers of government-run utilities.

In Putnam, County Executive Kevin Byrne, a Republican, said he "firmly opposes" the HVPA. While its goals of cleaner energy and local control sound appealing, the financial model "relies on high upfront capital costs and long-term debt, which places significant financial risk on taxpayers," he said. "The idea that this will result in lower rates is speculative at best."

Steve Carroll, the president of IBEW



The Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant in Lewiston

AP

## The Overlooked Renewable

By Michael Turton

Wind and solar receive considerable attention, but another renewable energy source is often overlooked: hydroelectric power. It made its debut in England in 1878, lighting a single lamp, but within 20 years, the world's largest hydroelectric plant was operating at Niagara Falls.

With more than 300 plants, New York is the largest producer of hydroelectric power east of the Mississippi River and the third-largest nationally, behind Washington and California. The Robert Moses Power Plant, located just downstream from Niagara Falls in Lewiston, features 13 turbines that produce up to 2.4 million kilowatts of electricity, enough to power nearly 2 million homes.

Most of New York's hydro plants are in the northern part of the state, but smaller installations are found in the south, as well. Central Hudson operates three hydroelectric plants in Ulster County. While not Niagara Falls, the Sturgeon Pool, Dashville and High Falls plants collectively produce 23 megawatts, or 80,000 megawatt-hours of electricity, enough to serve 10,000 homes.

Other hydroelectric plants in the Mid-Hudson Valley include facilities in Beacon and Wappingers Falls in Dutchess County; Walden, Highland Falls and Salisbury Mills in Orange County; and Walkkill in Ulster County.

The New York Independent System Operator, which manages the grid, reported that in 2024, gas and oil-fueled plants produced 41 percent of New York's electricity while hydroelectric and nuclear plants contributed 21 percent each. Hydro produced 27,936 gigawatt-hours and nuclear 27,073. Wind produced five percent of the state's electricity, and solar less than 1 percent.

320, the electrical workers' union, says that by focusing their public-information campaign on customers' unhappiness with Central Hudson's widespread billing issues, Hinchey and Shrestha have tried to oversimplify the issue. He, too, believes that

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municipalities would suffer a loss of tax revenue, while the cost of transitioning to renewable energy sources will make it impossible to lower rates.

Carroll likens the impact of the state's climate goals, which call for the expansion of the electric grid and the elimination of energy derived from fossil fuels, on Central Hudson's rates to a deli that must charge more for an egg sandwich because the cost of eggs went up. "You wouldn't blame the deli," he said.

If New York State's goal is affordable energy, it should invest in generation, he said, while being "thoughtful" about climate goals and their effect on rates. "The best way to fix that is to produce your own energy, so you control the cost," Carroll said. "I'm not saying that something doesn't need to change, but the HVPA isn't the change that needs to happen. This is a small move, but it has tentacles that will affect a lot of things."

### Grassroots support

Talk to advocates for the Hudson Valley Power Authority and you'll hear almost the exact opposite.

The bill states that the HVPA will make payments in lieu of taxes to municipalities and school districts to compensate for the amount that Central Hudson pays. "When Central Hudson talks about local taxes, they are ignoring the fact that the HVPA will still be paying this money to local authorities," Konrad said. "They are trying to scare you."

Joe O'Brien-Applegate, a Beacon resident who is leading Beacon Climate Action Now's advocacy for the public authority, says the discussions he's had at events such as the city's Earth Day celebration or the Taproots Festival in the fall have been "the easiest political outreach I've ever done."

Beacon Climate Action Now is part of the Hudson Valley for Public Power coalition. O'Brien-Applegate believes residents of the region are not only deeply dissatisfied with Central Hudson, but that there's growing enthusiasm for a cleaner, more affordable approach to energy.

"Better alternatives to the status quo are out there," he said. "Things don't have to be predatory, win-or-lose, zero-sum situations. You can restructure large institutions that put the needs of the people they serve first."

Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger, a Democrat, is on board; last year, she said: "If there was ever a time to consider an alternative to the current model of utility

service, it is now." The Kingston Common Council and the Village of New Paltz Board of Trustees this year adopted resolutions in support of the HVPA. Beacon Climate Action Now says it's had conversations with the city's Conservation Advisory Committee about municipal support here.

On Thursday (July 17), Shrestha announced six town halls to be held in Dutchess and Ulster in August to discuss the proposal.

If a public power authority is established in the Hudson Valley, the American Public Power Association, which advocates for more than 2,000 municipal utilities nationwide, suggests that it invest in distribution. Most public utilities purchase power from an outside source, but reliable delivery should be the utility's only priority, says Ursula Schryver, a senior vice president. That means ensuring that wires, poles and other infrastructure are maintained and upgraded.

The utility should also invest in the community, she said, which could mean providing free electricity to municipal buildings, offering staff for safety workshops, or sharing services such as information technology or billing with other municipal utilities.

In the for-profit model, some of a utility's revenue is "being pulled away by shareholders," Schryver said. "All of it is not going back to the community."

### Next steps

If the Legislature approves the measure in two or three years, as Shrestha predicts, whoever is in the governor's office will need to be amenable to the plan. (The next election for governor is in 2026.) Advocates recognize the need for an independent study to determine the extent to which the proposal would reduce customers' bills.

Dutchess County Executive Sue Serino, a Republican, noted this week that the state has the power to hold utility companies accountable through the Public Service Commission, "yet we continue to see rate hikes approved time and time again. We need stronger oversight and real accountability now, and any new proposal should come with clear, concrete guarantees that it will truly deliver the savings and reliability people deserve."

If the legislation to create a Hudson Valley Power Authority is enacted, Shrestha expects Central Hudson will go to court. "We will win," she said. "It will just be a matter of time."

For previous installments of *Beyond the Grid*, see [highlandscurrent.org](https://highlandscurrent.org)



While visiting the Robert Moses plant near Niagara on June 23, Gov. Kathy Hochul said she would direct the NYPA to develop and construct a nuclear power plant upstate.

Photo by Darren McGee/Governor's Office

## Hochul Proposes Public Nuclear Plant

*Would produce at least 1 gigawatt of energy*

By Brian PJ Cronin

Last month, Gov. Kathy Hochul visited the Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant to announce plans for a nuclear power plant built by the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to produce at least 1 gigawatt of energy, enough to power about 1 million homes.

"To power New York's future, we need three things: reliability, affordability and sustainability," she said. "Nuclear drives all three."

"There's strong support among both Democrats and Republicans for nuclear at the federal level," said Keith Schue of the policy group Nuclear New York. "You can't really say that about anything else."

New York has been deactivating power plants faster than it has been connecting new ones. Indian Point near Peekskill was shut down in 2021; the company that ran it said it couldn't compete with cheap fracked natural gas flowing in from Pennsylvania. While the state acknowledged that the closure would mean an increased reliance on fossil fuels, it expected that reliance to be temporary as hundreds of renewable energy projects awaited approval.

But the reliance on oil and gas has continued. The pace of adding renewable sources was slowed by supply chain issues, inflation, global interest rates and tariffs from President Donald Trump's first term. Subsidies and policies for renewable energy equipment in the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act were eliminated by Trump in a budget bill enacted on July 4.

The fossil fuel industry isn't immune to the same concerns; there's a five-year wait for natural-gas turbines. However, with high-tech manufacturing plants and data centers emerging upstate — industries that require a substantial amount of power — and renewable energy sources being curtailed, nuclear power may need to play a larger role.

"Upstate New York gets 90 percent of its electricity from clean sources because of what's going on here [hydro] and nuclear facilities," said Hochul. "But we need to scale it up fast."

*Fast* is not a word associated with the nuclear industry. The country has completed two plants in 30 years: Watts Bar in Tennessee, which began construction in 1973 and became operational in 1996, and Plant Vogtle in Georgia, which broke ground in 1976 and started producing energy in 1987. (Its fourth and final reactor went online in 2024.) Both projects went considerably over budget.

There may be a role for nuclear power in New York, said Alexander Patterson of the advocacy group Public Power NY. But renewable energy is cheaper and quicker to build. In 2023, Hochul enacted the Build Public Renewables Act, which gave the NYPA the authority to bring clean energy online quickly.

Hochul has found an unlikely ally in President Trump. In May, he signed executive orders designed to quadruple the nuclear power generated by 2050 by rolling back federal safety and security regulations and increasing the allowable amount of radiation exposure. This week, *Politico* reported that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has been instructed to "rubber-stamp" any projects the Trump administration submits.

