



It Was Slated to be a Natural Gas Terminal, Then Environmentalists Raised their Voices

Illustration by Gary Martin.



PETER RUGH Aug 9, 2019



Everything appeared to have been worked out.



A \$25,000 donation had been made to Gov. Andrew Cuomo's re-election campaign by Liberty Natural Gas, a mysterious company owned by a Toronto-based investment group with a bank account in the Cayman Islands. The



would keep an open mind when it came to Liberty's blueprints. The Army Corps of Engineers had already signed off. The plans seemed simple enough. Tank ships would pull up about 20 miles off the shore of Long Island, millions of cubic feet worth of liquified natural gas in their hull. The cargo would be heated aboard the tankers upon arrival and returned to a gaseous state, pumped into a pair of pipelines.

Four hundred million cubic feet of decompressed natural gas a day were slated to pour into Long Beach, near the mouth of Lower New York Bay. That didn't happen. Instead, those same waters will soon be home to the largest offshore wind farm in the United States. How does something like this occur? How did we go from a liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal to wind turbines? Hard freaking work, says Kim Fraczek, head of the environmental group Sane Energy Project.

Citing concerns over climate change and the risk another superstorm like Sandy would pose to the terminal, Sane and a coalition of other environmental groups "organized pretty much all New York City and Long Island communities to push their elected officials to tell Gov. Cuomo why this is dangerous for our region," Fraczek said.

Sane and its partners started a "Wind Not LNG" campaign.

"Because we had a positive, alternative vision, that helped gather more support," said Fraczek. "It gave people a Point B to work toward.



groups rallying in defense of Long Island's coast concluded on July 19, when Gov. Cuomo sat down at a desk in Albany and signed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

Passed by the Democrat-controlled state legislature in June, the bill sets stringent targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing New York's use of green energy. To help meet the goals set in the measure, Cuomo announced that the state had signed contracts for the construction of two wind farms that will eventually provide enough electricity to power more than a million homes.

"It's one thing to say, 'We're going to support these emissions reduction targets,' but if you don't have a path to get there it's useless," said Shay O'Reilly of the Sierra Club. "In this case, they actually set into law that the state is going to support 9,000 megawatts of offshore wind development by 2035. That is a legal target in the bill that has now become law."

The 1,696-megawatt wind farms, one plugging into the city, the other into Long Island, "get us a significant chunk of the way there," Shay said.

The deal — reached with the Nordic firms Ørsted and Equinor, respectively — is the largest procurement of renewable energy in U.S. history. The twin projects, which push New York toward the CLCPA's ultimate goal of eliminating its greenhouse gas emissions entirely by 2050 — the strongest target yet set by any state — are expected to create 1,600 jobs and to generate \$3.2 billion in economic



development and education.

Equinor is currently considering opening a turbine manufacturing plant at the South Brooklyn Marine Terminal in Sunset Park, an area the environmental justice group UPROSE has long fought to transform into a hub for green industry against a tide of gentrification. A company spokesperson told *Crain's* the hundreds of jobs Equinor plans to create “will ensure manufacturing and maritime uses will be in New York City for decades to come.”

Each wind turbine blade will stretch over a 165 feet long and must be transported to the wind farm via water since they are too heavy for concrete roads to bear. Nonetheless, given their location about 30 miles off the coast, the turbines won't have much of a visual impact on the horizon from the shore.

“There's a slight chance that on the clearest of days, if you have really good eyesight, when you look out you'll see something that looks like the tip of a pin,” said O'Reilly, adding that state officials took into account migratory patterns of wildlife when selecting the site, so as to have a minimal environmental impact.

Though Al Gore sat by Cuomo's side when the project was announced and the CLCPA signed, that is the extent of the vice president turned celebrity climate champion's involvement in either achievement. It is activists like Shay and Fraczek who made it all happen.

As for next steps for New York's climate movement, Sane is working to halt Con Ed rate hikes, warning that the utility wants to overcharge consumers in order to beef up its fossil fuel infrastructure. Meanwhile, the Sierra Club is sounding



by importing Canadian hydroelectric power. Shay and others warn the dam and transmission-line construction would offset any progress made toward cutting emissions. Environmentalists want more of the kinds of projects underway off the coast of Long Island that put people to work locally and address the planetary emergency of climate change.



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