

Oswego's Big Machine

The New York Energy Alliance recently posted an [article](#) on Facebook about the Oswego Harbor Power Plant.

OSWEGO HARBOR · OSWEGO STEAM STATION UNITS 5 AND 6, 1975–1980

Oswego's Big Machine.

1,804 MW, ON CALL WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS



Post-Standard, April 20, 1973: Ben Green, who built the original 1938 station, "looks at a giant new generating unit which dwarfs the plant he built."

— 1,804 megawatts.

Two units of 902 MW each: "the two largest single electric generators in upstate New York" when Unit 6 came on in 1980.

— Runs on what's in the tanks.

No. 6 fuel oil, stored on site by the lake. Unit 6 can burn gas, but only at 180 MW. The full 1,804 needs the tanks.

— It ended coal in Oswego.

Built 1970–75 to replace coal with oil. Its 700-foot stack, New York's tallest, replaced four stacks and the coal trains through downtown.

— Half the city's tax base.

Through the 1990s, Units 5 and 6 carried about half of Oswego's property tax rolls.

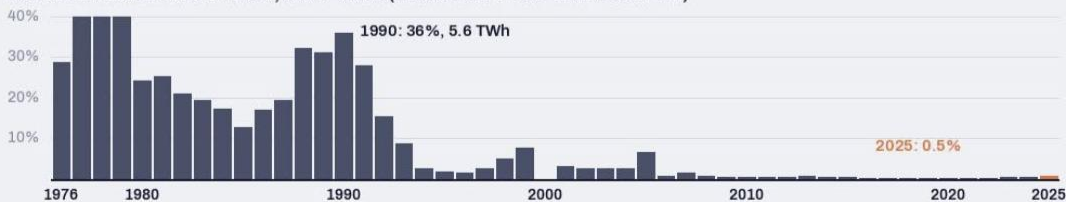
— Runs just a few days a year.

84 GWh in 2025, nearly all of it in a few summer heat waves. The rest of the year it waits.

— Why it's still here.

No battery can do this job: every grid battery in New York together holds about 0.6 GWh. NYISO pays the plant to stay ready.

CAPACITY FACTOR BY YEAR, 1976–2025 (SHARE OF FULL-TIME OUTPUT)



Net generation (EIA-759 1976–2000; EIA-906/920/923 2001–2025) against 902 MW for 1976–79, when Unit 5 ran alone, and 1,804 MW from 1980. Output of the four small 1938 units is included until they were retired in the 1990s.

SRC: SYRACUSE POST-STANDARD, JULY 23, 1970; AUG. 2, 1972; APRIL 20, 1973 · OSWEGO PALLADIUM-TIMES, MARCH 1980, MARCH 1993, MARCH 1996 (FULTONHISTORY.COM)
EIA-960 2024 (UNITS 5/6, 901.8 MW EACH; UNIT 6 GAS CAPABILITY 180 MW; NY OPERABLE BATTERY STORAGE 690 MWh) · EIA-923 2025 (84,385 MWh)



**NEW YORK
ENERGY ALLIANCE**

Facebook Text

On the Oswego waterfront, next to the SUNY campus sit the two largest single generators ever built in upstate New York: Oswego Steam Station Units 5 and 6, 902 megawatts each, 1,804 together. They burn No. 6 fuel oil out of a tank farm by the lake. No pipeline, no wind, no sun.

Most of the year, it sits idle. In 2025 the station ran at half a percent of its capacity, 84 gigawatt-hours, nearly all of it in a few summer heat waves. Every grid battery in New York put together holds about 0.6 gigawatt-hours. That is why a fifty-year-old oil plant is still standing, and why the grid operator pays it to wait; it can run for days at a time, whereas batteries can only run for four hours. Here is how Oswego got it.

Niagara Mohawk announced the project in July 1970: \$150 million to triple the station, convert the 1938 units from coal to oil, and put up "a single smoke stack, more than twice the height of one of the existing four." It would mean "the end of the long coal trains that snared traffic in Downtown Oswego." When the chimney topped out in 1972 it was the tallest in New York State, 700 feet high and 60 feet across at the base.

Everything about the job was oversized. In June 1973, a 930,000-pound generator stator came in by rail from Pittsburgh on a special 90-foot car and was lifted 40 feet into what the Post-Standard called the "cathedral-sized turbine hall." The lift took three and a half hours, "a maneuver done so slowly and carefully that the eye could barely detect its movement."

The photograph is from that April. The man in the hat is Ben Green of East 6th Street, the key man in the design and construction of the original 1938 coal station. The paper caught him looking at the unit that was replacing it. "The past, present and future of Oswego power are linked in this photograph," the caption said.

Then the oil embargo hit. Niagara Mohawk ran short of money in 1974, cut a thousand construction jobs, and stopped work on Unit 6 on January 1, 1975. Unit 5 went into service that year. Unit 6 waited, started again, and made its first power in 1979, with Rochester Gas & Electric taking a quarter share. By spring 1980 the company could say the station held "the two largest single electric generators in upstate New York," running on oil hauled in by rail from Canada so it would not depend on OPEC tankers.

For a decade it was Oswego's workhorse and its bank. In 1990 the two units made 5.6 terawatt-hours, more than the Nine Mile Point reactors next door made that year. Through the 1990s they carried about half of the city's property tax base. Then came cheap gas and the Sithe Independence plant down the shore. In 1992 Niagara Mohawk shut down Unit 5. By 1996 the Palladium-Times wrote that "today, it's an event when steam is seen billowing from the tall towers," and the company was taking bids to tear down the old 1938 units.

Nobody tore down 5 and 6. Niagara Mohawk sold them to NRG when the state deregulated. NRG sold them in 2021 to a fund run by ArcLight, a Boston private-equity firm, in a deal the Public Service Commission approved without further review. In March 2022 a corroded transfer line at the plant put thousands of gallons of oil into Oswego Harbor.

And now the plant is changing hands again. In May, DigitalBridge, a data-center investment firm, agreed to buy ArcLight for up to \$1.05 billion. On October 1, SoftBank of Japan completed its purchase of

DigitalBridge. Its chairman says AI needs "more compute, connectivity, power." DigitalBridge's chief executive says "AI is rewiring the global power equation." ArcLight's managing partner says "power has become the critical bottleneck for digital infrastructure buildout."

Their petition to the PSC, filed in June, promises "status quo operations." It argues for approval by quoting the grid operator's warning that retirements "continue to outpace new generation," and the importance of keeping "critical dispatchable capability." No one has filed a plan for the site beyond a 25-megawatt solar farm on the old oil terminal.

So here is where Oswego's big machine stands. The state's climate law says it has to be gone by 2040.

No one has filed to retire it. The grid operator leans on it. And its next owners are buying it because AI needs power. 99% of the plant's capacity is unused, and AI is the only source of investment that will keep it available for those critical cold and heat waves.

Ben Green's coal plant is gone. The one that dwarfed it is fifty years old, and a few evenings a year, it is the reason the lights stay on.

Comments at 4:48 PM on 10/18/2026

Justin Fedder ([Comment Response 1](#))

And im sure that building is the reason this area has a higher rate of lung cancers and breathing problems compared to all the areas around us.

I mean, what would you expect when you have a heavy oil burning power station right in the middle of a city....

Philip Wilcox ([Comment Response 2](#))

Having worked many a storm on power restoration - I don't recall any customer worrying about what fuel would bring their lights back on, only that their home was rapidly deteriorating into a cave absent electricity. NY has had 7 years to advance the CLCPA objectives and is failing miserably to provide for cost-effective and reliable electric service via renewables. Continue that journey - amended to emphasize "cost-effective and reliable", but do not abandon fossil fuels - primarily natural gas, unless and until the renewables can be counted on without bankrupting NY. Steady wins the race, not arbitrary dates in an ill-advised piece of energy policy legislation.

- Reply

Yizidabah Shizidaboh ([Comment Response 3](#))

Philip Wilcox I agree, also wonder why it wasn't or isn't converted to natural gas, but could take a wild guess, NY won't approve the infrastructure to bring NG to the plant.

New York Energy Alliance ([Comment Response 4](#))

Yizidabah Shizidaboh it would be branded as "fossil fuel infrastructure" and fought, even though it would displace older, dirtier peaker and literally clean the air.

The old peaker to CCGT path hasn't been tested in a few years, though. That might be what happens when the data center moratorium goes away and the new owners of these old plants start proposing new plans. The headroom is there and it's already developed land. The grid would have more available power than it did before. It'll be interesting for sure.

David Mohre Jr.

Yizidabah Shizidaboh when I worked at Indian Point in the 1990's, the battles to not continue expansion of natural gas pipelines was already in full force.

The region NG providers were already not approving expansions of service because the pipelines were at maximum capacity.

When efforts were made to add a second pipeline along the Algonquin NG pipeline right-of-way (which was the original plan) that was blocked.

The only explanation is this energy restriction was the political long-term plan.

Philip Wilcox

Yizidabah Shizidaboh New permits likely prohibited, which is why the CLCPA must be amended. Takes time to build new electric generation and time is running short. Most likely - policy will likely change while under the duress of price spikes and/or extended outages.

Yizidabah Shizidaboh

Yes my point exactly. NY and their green advocate groups and non profits are behind pushing NY politicians to block the infrastructure that can create more affordable NG to the entire state. The whole label "Fossil fuel" is false just "Global warming" was rebranded to "Climate change" when the global warming would always fit their narrative. NY's effect on global environment impact is basically so minuscule countries like India will basically make NY's effort mean nothing other than costing tax payers crazy money in utility bills, and taxes.

Yizidabah Shizidaboh

A massive data center is being built on the site of the former AES Somerset plant. AES researched converting to NG but again, no supply was up there and it would've needed the infrastructure to convert it. NY is against it. Labeling it fossil fuel isn't accurate as well because oil and gas is technically below the level of so called fossil levels in the earth. The generating plant running up by the Aluminum plant is a NG fired plant. I work for a service contractor that has bid or done work at various power plants and cogens for decades. We took a big hit when Somerset was closed.

David Haarman (Comment Response 5)

Philip, I don't think anyone can make a coherent argument that it is renewables that are bankrupting New York.

Your assessment that John/Joan Q. Consumer is concerned with one thing; electricity at the point of use. Spot on!

Ironically, our system is set up to allow the consumer to select their electric provider, but not who delivers it. The consumption side is the single most controllable component of the electric bill. Consumers control how much they use, and who provides it. They have no choice who delivers it, for me that amounts to 40% of my bill.

(Comment Response 6)

Then there is the tariffs when we import this from Canada.

(Comment Response 7)

It is bewildering to me that the loss of farmland is even considered. New York ranks in the lower 50% in agriculture output at 27th in the US. Not to mention, the reduced tax revenue, subsidies, and the fact that <10% of cropland is prime farmland. This is a separate issue altogether.

Zero emissions>pollution generating. Reliable generation>intermittent.

I would propose that communities that host zero emissions solutions receive a tax credit or better yet a deduction on their delivery charges on their electric bill for hosting it.

- Reply

Randy Ryder

Philip Wilcox renewable will NEVER be baseload generation.

- Reply

Philip Wilcox

Perhaps bankruptcy might be an extreme prognostication, but left un-amended, the CLCPA will continue to sky-rocket energy costs.

- Reply

Philip Wilcox (Comment Response 8)

Randy Ryder The CLCPA theorists claim that battery storage will be the panacea, but both the costs and proven reliability at utility scale is sketchy at best. So if you rely on batteries and have an extended outage that does not provide voltage support beyond the 24 hour or so battery capability will be a disaster. Zero carbon nuclear in an amount necessary to compliment intermittent wind and solar is decades away.

Yizidabah Shizidaboh

i see the old oil terminal is gone that was south of the city
never realize it was capable of that kind of output

- Reply

New York Energy Alliance

Author

Yizidabah Shizidaboh it's so good

Walter Stahl

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Interesting story

Andy Arthur [\[Comment Response 9\]](#)

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My guess is it doesn't run much due to Acid Rain trading system, expensive to run due to the need to purchase sulfur dioxide credits to pollute. Isn't the tall stack to distribute the sulfur high into the atmosphere to maximize dispersion? And oil is expensive these days

Ivan Prock

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Are you actually celebrating the existence of a plant which burns a fossil fuel? Are you unfamiliar with the climate crisis?

- [Reply \[Comment Response 10\]](#)

New York Energy Alliance

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Author

Ivan Prock If this plant didn't exist, far more people would die from the climate. Hot days with no AC, cold nights with no heat kill people. This plant is a beast.

- [Reply](#)
Ivan Prock

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New York Energy Alliance: The plant's history and current existence are contributing factors to the worsening of the climate crisis. Right, so we need to be aggressively deploying non-CO2-emitting sources of electricity generation, which include solar and wind power. The plant is a relic from the past when people didn't care about the climate.

Michael Gibson

by author

I work next door at SUNY Oswego. You can tell when the East Coast is very hot or very cold because we can see smoke driving into work in the morning. That plant made the Oswego City School District one of the richest in the State back in the 70's and 80's. Not so much any more.

Richard Perkins

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Ivan Prock That seems overly critical. While the transition to solar/wind/nuclear is clearly important for climate, we can still acknowledge the historical facilities that provide needed reserve electricity for our people - powering lighting, hospitals, industry, and homes.

- [Reply](#)
Ivan Prock [\[Comment Response 11\]](#)

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Richard Perkins: It's as overly critical as New York Energy Alliance's post is overly fawning. We can acknowledge historical facilities while still acknowledging the damage that they caused and continue to cause to the climate.

Reserve electricity can be acquired from a number of sources including grid-scale and residential batteries, and improved grid interties to neighboring jurisdictions.

- [Reply](#)

John J Ferlito

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Ivan Prock Love that Plant!!!

- [Reply](#)
Catskill Weather

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Ivan Prock the lie is that we are transitioning to a world without fossil fuels. Humanity is actually on a quest to utilize all energy sources in order to maintain and build the future.

- **Reply**

Ivan Prock [\[Comment Response 12\]](#)

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Catskill Weather: There is absolutely no lie since the majority of all new electricity power generation, worldwide, has come from solar and wind power. Humanity is actually on a quest to transition to avoiding the use of fossil fuel sources. Do better research before commenting further.

Yizidabah Shizidaboh

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Good post

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