



Tishman Environment  
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# Grant Winner Stephen Metts on New York State's Freight Energy Future

*Stephen Metts, part-time faculty at the Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy, is developing an online mapping platform and database for citizen activism with a faculty grant from the Tishman Center. Learn more about his project, New York's energy*

*future, and its implications in the new Presidential Administration in his own words.*

As a recipient of the [2016 Tishman Center faculty awards for a project entitled Mobilizing Maps for Sustainable Communities](#), I have worked with a team of students from across The New School in partnership with [The Delaware Riverkeeper Network \(DRN\)](#) to develop an online mapping platform and database for citizen activism. The principle goal of this project is to enable local citizens to document environmental threats from proposed [Shale Gas](#) aka 'Fracked Gas' pipeline projects BEFORE they are permitted by regulatory agencies. By allowing online access to the alignment of a proposed project, advocates can take a tablet or smartphone into the field, find their location relative to a proposed pipeline, and accurately map environmental resources that are threatened by a proposed pipeline.

By enabling local residents and advocates with tailored and effective technology tools, we greatly increase the number and effectiveness of documented, factual environmental impacts that the fossil fuel industry would much rather remain hidden and uncontested. In order to understand why this kind of actionable technology is so

necessary, it is worth looking at the larger crisis we face, both locally and nationally.

The incoming Trump administration is clearly dead-set on advancing policies that may produce short-term economic benefits but will ultimately result in catastrophic long-term, irreversible environmental destruction. Behind Donald Trump's marketing of [Big Oil & Gas as national policy](#), are actual tools of destruction: cabinet picks for Secretary of State, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy- Rex Tillerson, Scott Pruitt and Rick Perry, respectively. The intent is clearly defined: fossil fuel development at all costs, while trashing any progressive climate-related policy found languishing on the floors of severely diminished federal agencies.


Against this alarming national backdrop is an equally consequential drama--New York state energy policy. Its most recent incarnation is the [New York State Energy Plan 2015](#) which features 3 critical benchmarks to be achieved by 2030 (13 years away) :

- 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels
- 50% of energy generation from renewable energy sources

- 600 trillion Btu increase in statewide energy efficiency

 Pipeline Forest Cut | Millennium

Pipeline - 244 miles across NYS  
Southern Tier | Photo Credit: Noah  
Kalina

 CPV Power Plant in Early Phases of  
Construction- August 2016 | Drone  
Imagery

Without exception, these are extremely aggressive goals, and New Yorkers would be right to believe they are achievable. New York State indeed trends progressive across a myriad of issues and its well known Governor Andrew Cuomo continues to maintain the state moratorium on specific shale gas drilling operations known as fracking. Further, the closure of the Indian Point Nuclear Plant, north of midtown approximately 36 miles, was just announced to the great relief of NYS environmental advocates rightly distraught over the prospect of a complete plant failure due either to excessive age; or more shocking, the siting of the [AIM project](#)- a fracked gas pipeline installed this past year a mere 105 feet from vital facilities. Just this past week, as part of the Governor's state tour, plans were unveiled to support the Long Island Power Authority proposed [90-](#)

[megawatt offshore wind project](#) 30 miles southeast of Montauk. In the New York State Senate, a groundbreaking bill known as the [NYS Climate and Community Protection Act](#) was enacted with bipartisan support this past summer. Lurking behind the appearance of progress towards a safe and renewable future, however, are fossil fuel interests whose sole purpose is to ensure the state remain fully reliant on non-renewable energy sources. In our region, this is known as 'fracking' -- gas extracted from the Marcellus Shale located in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. This continued fossil-fuel reliance manifests itself in drilling operations that border the state; massive delivery pipelines that bisect and deaden high-value forests and sensitive wetland ecosystems; compressor and metering stations that sicken local communities and wildlife habitats; and finally terminate in gas-fired power plants that have become the de rigueur 'alternative' to coal-fired plants.

Within several short years, New York State has undergone a massive increase in both the [number and extent of fracked gas infrastructure projects](#) that many opposition advocates as well as industry insiders deem clear evidence of '[overbuild](#)'. Insidiously, these projects often occur in predominantly rural,

low-density areas of the state and thus remain largely out-of-sight, their impacts on local environments, local air and water quality, as well as increasing rates of [greenhouse gas emissions \(GHG\)](#) borne by the very [‘sacrifice zones’](#) that now ‘host’ their operations. When the public finally gets wind of fracked gas infrastructure it usually occurs via an [explosion](#), bungled permitting as was the case with the [DAPL project at Standing Rock](#), or political corruption scandals. New Yorkers will get their share of the [‘Percoco Scandal’] starting March 1, 2017 involving the Competitive Power Ventures (CPV) valley energy center in Orange County, NY currently under construction. In this scandal, close aides to the Cuomo administration allegedly colluded with, and were bribed by, CPV officials seeking necessary permitting and preferential agreements. While the tenacious hold of Big Oil & Gas over public interests will only increase during the Trump administration, opposition strategies and tactics are beginning to emerge, take hold and become increasingly effective. Recently the [Standing Rock protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline](#) produced significant resistance that has had spillover effects for local pipeline battles, while raising national and global awareness regarding native lands and

indigenous peoples; human rights for air and water quality; GHG emissions and eminent domain. Fossil fuel interests increasingly recognize public engagement as a significant threat that slows pipeline approval, and in some instances, stops projects outright.

By supporting cross-divisional, participatory design research projects, I believe The New School is uniquely posed to be a leader in emerging public deliberation for New York State's energy future. Not only has the University made significant strides to support renewables and conservation at the facility level, but both the Schools of Public Engagement, Parsons School of Design and TEDC possess 'deep benches' of academic research, critical design and curriculum vital to energy issues. Michelle DePass, Dean of the School of Public Engagement, is advancing the work of environmental justice and climate issues within New York's energy future.

Despite the decade-long development of fracked gas infrastructures, there has been no mobile platform designed specifically and exclusively to empower local communities to map their interests and local environments against industry priorities. We are grateful to the Tishman Center for the seed

funding for this project. Our next phase in this project will be the public dissemination and testing of this mobile technology, and will further seek new partnerships with students and faculty across The New School. Anyone interested to learn more about the project, or become involved, is encouraged to contact me at [mettss@newschool.edu](mailto:mettss@newschool.edu).



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