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Letter: Build a solar park at Huntley plant site

Build a solar park at Huntley plant site

The closing of the Tonawanda Huntley plant ends an era of coal-fired power generation in Erie County. In addition to removing a significant source of carbon dioxide emissions, it also removes the largest polluter in the county (as measured by the Environmental Protection Agency). Removing airborne chemical emissions of hydrogen fluoride and hydrochloric acid can only serve to improve the health of residents of the Sheridan Park neighborhood, an area singled out as having increased cancer rates.

The health of the Tonawanda government and school budgets is less sure. The recent state budget provides for local help to offset tax losses from the closing of power generation facilities. These funds will cushion the blow for five years. However, a longer-term solution is needed to replace the tax revenues. The Huntley site may be part of that solution, if we follow a lead from our Canadian neighbors.

Nanticoke, Ontario, is about a 1½-hour drive from Buffalo. It also was the site of one of the largest coal-fired power generation facilities in North America. In 2013, it was closed as part of the province's effort to remove coal from its energy mix. In March, a permit was granted for construction of a solar park on the site, using former coal storage areas for power generation.

The parallels with Huntley and Nanticoke are obvious. Building a solar park on the site makes use of existing connection to the electric grid, saving both time and money for any potential project. Western New York has experience using brownfield sites for renewable energy, with wind generation (and soon to be solar) on the old Bethlehem Steel site in Lackawanna. Solar power generation at Huntley would bring health to the town's government and residents, creating tax revenues with zero carbon or chemical emissions.

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