

## ZooShare holds groundbreaking ceremony for Toronto biogas plant

By [Katie Fletcher](#) | April 21, 2016



The biogas plant will annually process 3,000 tons of zoo manure transported by truck into renewable energy. ZooShare Biogas Cooperative

ZooShare Biogas Cooperative Inc. held a formal groundbreaking ceremony this week to celebrate the start of construction on its 500 kilowatt (kW) biogas facility located adjacent to the Toronto Zoo. The plant will utilize a combination of 3,000 tons of zoo manure and 14,000 tons of local food waste from grocery stores to generate renewable power for the Ontario grid, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by the equivalent of 10,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> each year.

The nonprofit renewable energy co-op plans to break ground in June, now that it's received renewable energy approval from the Minister of Environment, all of the building permits, as well as the connection impact assessment, reserving grid capacity for the project's electricity production. The project estimates beginning operations in December 2016 or early next year.

Last March, ZooShare announced it raised \$2.2 million in community bonds from around 300 investors. Now, Daniel Bida, ZooShare executive director, said the company has raised over \$3 million from over 400 investors since the project's inception. Although the initial series of bonds closed early last year, this past December ZooShare began selling 5-percent bonds, which will be used to pay down the construction financing from the builder. Bida said since December, ZooShare has raised over \$400,000 in new bond offerings.

The recent groundbreaking ceremony was held at the plant's site—one and a half acres of Toronto Zoo's land, located at the current compost facility on the east side of Meadowvale Road. Around 80 people were in attendance of the event, primarily members and bond holders, as well as key delegates who have helped support the project's success, including the Ontario Minister of Energy Bob Chiarelli; Paul Ungerman, chair of the board for ZooShare; John Tracogna, CEO of ZooShare; Councilor Raymond Cho, chair of the Toronto Zoo Board; and Ron Seftel, CEO of the project's education sponsor Bullfrog Power.

"This is a significant milestone for this project," Ungerman said. "Our mandate is to demonstrate that waste is a valuable resource and to educate students and the general public about the environmental benefits of biogas."

Due to the project's close proximity to the Toronto Zoo, which welcomes over a million visitors per year, ZooShare plans on capitalizing upon this, using it as a way to show and teach others about the renewable energy plant.

Bida said in addition to the GHG reduction, the plant is meant to serve as a valuable showpiece and a high-profile project. "What we are really hoping to do is inspire other projects and more action, similar to what we've done as a community," Bida said. "We can have the school groups that visit the zoo on a regular basis for education about animals come to our site and learn about what happens to the animals food after it's been digested, and also learn about the value of organic waste; it's not a waste, but a resource."

An in-classroom workshop, co-designed and delivered by TREC Education, is offered to seventh grade students around the greater Toronto area, and ZooShare will begin to offer regular tours of the biogas plant once it is operational. “This innovative biogas project is a great example of the types of initiatives that need to be developed if we want to mitigate the impacts of climate change,” Seftel with Bullfrog Power said. “On behalf of our customers, we are proud to be one of the founding investors and the project’s education sponsor.”

Bida said his primary hope is that the project can be utilized as an up-close look at how valuable waste is. He added that hopefully, for visitors, this will not only “change their behavior at home and at work, but also draw attention to the technology and its power beyond energy generation to make an impact on our society.”

Bida mentioned Ontario is moving ahead with cap and trade legislation, and has joined the Western Climate Initiative, which also includes the province of Quebec and the state of California amongst others. “The province is aggressively looking to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions,” he said.

At the formal ceremony, Minister Chiarelli stated ZooShare’s “work is strengthening Ontario’s clean energy system by diverting waste, reducing emissions and helping fight climate change. Innovations like this one set a standard for the future of Ontario’s clean, affordable and reliable electricity grid.”

Bida recognizes, due to the smaller scale of this project, they’re not going to move the clean energy needle significantly from just this project, but, due to the young biogas industry in the province, its expected biogas will play a more significant role in Ontario’s climate change objectives in the future.

“We’ve been working for a long time to get over this hump and to be here now is awesome—it felt kind of surreal to have that event,” Bida said following the groundbreaking ceremony. “All of our members, investors, project partners, everybody are extremely pleased and excited that we are ready to start construction and everyone is really looking forward to the plant starting operations.”

