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2007 Questionnaire for Local Candidates

OVERVIEW

The science on climate change is in: Global warming is happening, and the enormity of the problem requires action at every level of government. Comprehensive solutions for climate change exist, but the years of refusal at the federal level have left the U.S. government behind the curve. Because of this, the real innovation on climate change in this country is happening at the local level. It's the mayors, county executives, and town supervisors in New York who can lead the way on climate change.

By “thinking globally and acting locally,” the New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV) is calling upon all candidates for local office to put the issue of climate change at heart of their campaign. Our sister organization, the New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (NYLCVEF) has compiled a list of actions state and local governments can take to address this important issue with examples of what's been either done or proposed elsewhere in New York State.

Before responding to the questions on this questionnaire, we recommend you review this document.

PROCESS


After receipt of the questionnaire, you will be invited to participate in a formal interview with our local chapter board. The interview will provide you with an opportunity to present your credentials and vision for combating climate change on the local level, elaborate on your questionnaire responses, and respond to questions.

The completed questionnaire and interview are mandatory for endorsement consideration.

NYLCV will endorse and work to elect candidates who can demonstrate a willingness and capacity to advance a comprehensive climate action agenda for their municipality.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

 Please submit questionnaire responses via email to: politics@nylcv.org

 Questions or extension requests may be directed to:
Joshua Klainberg, Political Director (jklainberg@nylcv.org)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please provide us with the following information:

Candidate Name: *Thomas J. Abinanti*

District #: *12*

PERSONAL INITIATIVES

1. What have been your most significant achievements to date on environmental issues?

- 1. Created Healthy Air Task Force of environmental/health conscious advocacy groups to document pollution sources and to develop a plan to reduce local pollution; drafted and sponsored clean air legislation to implement the plan; led Westchester County Board of Legislators to pass landmark clean air legislation to reduce emission of pollutants from diesel fuel-powered motor vehicles doing County work (owned by County or County contractors); led Westchester County Board of Legislators to pass legislation banning idling of diesel fuel-powered motor vehicles for more than three minutes anywhere in Westchester County.*
- 2. Drafted, cosponsored and advocated for Clean Indoor Air Act which banned smoking in all workplaces.*
- 3. Led Westchester County Board of Legislators to pass legislation setting air pollution standards for leaf-blowers used by licensed landscapers.*
- 4. Requiring private well testing on transfer for single-family homes or periodically for multi-family dwellings.*
- 5. Outspoken leader in fight to close Indian Point nuclear power plants. Drafted and introduced the first resolution before the Westchester County Board of Legislators declaring the evacuation plan ineffective and calling for the immediate closing of the plants. Conducted the first hearings in Westchester revealing ineffectiveness of evacuation plan (12/13/01). Led Board to passage of resolutions urging the NRC to hold hearings in Westchester on proposed re-licensing and supporting new federal legislation to require that new- license criteria apply to renewals.*
- 6. Led the 2 1/2- year effort and sponsored Westchester's law reforming Westchester's Trash Hauling industry. The law is designed to drive organized crime out of the garbage industry: an environmental as well as a law-enforcement and financial issue since the mob-related firms usually avoided the costs of proper hazardous waste disposal by mixing it with regular waste.*

7. *Successfully lobbied and voted for County participation in purchase of following as public open space/parkland: Taxter Ridge in Greenburgh; Westwood in Irvington; Glenville Woods in Greenburgh; Unification Church property (nr.Lyndhurst) in Tarrytown; Gaisman Estate in Hartsdale; Hillside Woods in Hastings.*
8. *Led effort for County participation in clean-up of David's Island; working for and publicly supports purchase of David's Island as dedicated parkland.*
9. *Sponsored and led Board of Legislators to unanimously approve a new law requiring the County to offer municipalities the right of first refusal to surplus county land (for \$1.00 if to be used for parkland) before the land may be sold for development.*
10. *Voted to purchase land critical to maintaining the purity of our water supply and needed open space including Eagle River, Jay property. Pocantico Lakes, Bald Mountain, Houlihan property and North-South County Trailways.*
11. *Voted to designate various properties owned by the County as passive parkland including: Marshlands Conservancy and Sochurek property.*
12. *Advocated and voted for Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan (including establishment of district and addition of parcels around the count) which preserves farmland and the county's pastoral landscapes from threatened development.*
13. *Voted for agreement with the airlines which establishes permanent restrictions to safeguard no-expansion policy at the Westchester County Airport – limiting the number of commercial passengers and flights.*
14. *Sponsored a watershed protection resolution supporting strong New York City watershed regulations which led to passage of Westchester County Board Resolution affirming the need for watershed protection.*
15. *Sponsored and led Board of Legislators to unanimously approve a Resolution opposing High Occupancy Vehicle lanes (HOV) on Cross Westchester Expressway (I-287).*
16. *Initiated change of Board rules to require environmental committee review of all SEQA resolutions.*
17. *Sponsored Board Resolution (passed unanimously) endorsing New York State designation of Tappan Zee East Scenic District.*

18. *Sponsored Westchester Point of Sale notification Law requiring retail stores to post information about products which they sell which could damage our environment if not handled properly.*
19. *Voted for County Pesticide Neighbor Notification Law and Pesticide Reduction Law.*
20. *Strongly objected to County spraying pesticide- by air and then truck – against West Nile infected mosquitoes; strongly advocated for preventive (larvacides) that County has since adopted.*
21. *Voted to preserve Rory O’Moore Park (Yonkers) and against authorizing development.*
22. *Voted against Negative Declaration of G.E. Hangar at Westchester County Airport.*
23. *Voted to define an Open Space Policy for Westchester County Government.*
24. *Voted for inclusion of \$\$\$ multi-million County land-purchase fund.*

2. Please outline your environmental priorities, should you be elected.

PRESERVING THE ENVIRONMENT IS MY FIRST PRIORITY. As Chair of the Board of Legislators Committee on the Environment, I will continue to work to protect Westchester’s environment by promoting measures to protect against air and water pollution and environmentally destructive land use policies. I will continue to promote "smart growth" legislation, encouraging proper land use planning and increasing the amount of dedicated parkland through formal dedication of currently publicly-owned parcels and acquisition of additional parcels of open space.

I will also continue to work to:

- a. ***Healthy Air Legislation: pass my legislation to prohibit the sale in the County of home heating oil which does not meet ultra-low sulfur standards; improve air quality (through improved mass transit and better traffic management);***
- b. ***Clean Water Legislation: promote additional legislation to preserve drinking water quality through Watershed protection, legislation to regulate individual septic systems and other sources of ground water pollution and dispensing “east of hudson funds” for clean water purposes;***
- c. ***Storm Water Flooding: pass my legislation to establish a County-wide storm water drainage district;***

- d. *Protect Westchester's greenery: pass my legislation to regulate utility tree-trimming;*
- e. *Energy Conservation: pass my legislation to require "green" buildings;*
- f. *Close Indian Point nuclear power plants to protect the environment of the region from a potential environmental disaster;*
- g. *Upgrade water quality of Hudson River and Long Island Sound.*
- h. *Improve management of solid waste disposal (through decreasing amount of waste generated, encouraging recycling and more attention to hazardous chemicals).*

COMMITTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE PRINCIPLES

1. Will you join the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) campaign by introducing and passing a resolution pledging to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from local government operations and throughout your municipality? **YES**
2. Will you enter your municipality into the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, whereby you would commit to take following three actions: **YES**
 - Strive to meet or beat the Kyoto Protocol targets through actions ranging from anti-sprawl land-use policies to urban forest restoration projects to public information campaigns?
 - Urge state government, and the federal government, to enact policies and programs to meet or beat the greenhouse gas emission reduction target suggested for the United States in the Kyoto Protocol -- 7% reduction from 1990 levels by 2012?
 - Urge the U.S. Congress to pass the bipartisan greenhouse gas reduction legislation, which would establish a national emission trading system?

NOTE: WHILE AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES 2007 ANNUAL MEETING IN VIRGINIA, I COMMITTED TO WORK TO CAUSE WESTCHESTER COUNTY TO JOIN A NEW COUNTY CLIMATE PROTECTION EFFORT.

LEADERSHIP

Based on what's been either done or proposed by other local governments in New York State (see the NYLCVEF fact sheet at www.nylcvef.org/localgov), ideas from outside of the state or your own original ideas, please outline your plans to address the following areas:

1. Air Quality

I have proposed a Healthy Air Legislation package. As noted above, two laws have been passed. I will continue to seek passage of the third proposal to prohibit the sale in the County of home heating oil which does not meet ultra-low sulfur standards. I will continue to work to improve air quality (through improved mass transit and better traffic management).

2. Energy Efficiency – 3. Green Building Development

I will work to pass my legislation to require that all future County construction meet “green” building standards and that all renovations to existing building meet “green” standards. I will work to pass my legislation to provide sales tax incentives for the use of solar roofs.

4. Smart Growth

I will continue to work to force County and local governments to resist the pressures for enormous residential and commercial development throughout Westchester County. I will continue to work to protect dwindling open space by increasing the amount of dedicated parkland through formal dedication of currently publicly-owned parcels and acquisition of additional parcels of open space). I will continue to promote "smart growth" and encourage proper land use planning consistent with the concepts embodied in the County's Patterns. I would support enhancing the powers of the County Planning Board to stop development that negatively impacts neighboring communities.