

2018-2019 Blueprint for a Greener Westchester



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

NYLCV EDUCATION FUND

INTRODUCTION

Every two years, the New York League of Conservation Voters Westchester Chapter works closely with local advocates to develop a policy agenda. This Blueprint for a Greener Westchester provides specific actions government officials can take to fight climate change, conserve our lands and waters, and protect public health.

Climate change is not only transforming our world, it is transforming Westchester. Recent severe storms destroyed our infrastructure, damaged our neighborhoods, and changed our landscape. We must become more resilient to the next storm, but we must also work to mitigate the long-term effects of a changing climate by promoting renewable

energy, building efficiency, sustainable transportation, and better solid waste management.

Westchester boasts vibrant natural resources from the Hudson River to the Long Island Sound. Yet our natural assets are being threatened by development, pollution, and underfunding. We must safeguard and restore them for the next generation.

Finally, we must make sure that we take steps to protect public health. Every Westchester resident deserves access to clean air, well-maintained parks for recreation, fresh food from local farms, and protection from toxic chemicals.

TOP PRIORITIES

Sustainable Development: Municipalities can combat climate change by creating livable, sustainable communities. We will advance modernized zoning to encourage mixed land use, compact development, downtown revitalization, open space protection, and historic preservation.

Renewables: Renewable energy can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution across the region, but it is challenging to site large-scale renewable energy installations and can be needlessly difficult to install small-scale renewable technology. These challenges must be addressed before Indian Point shuts down in 2021, or we risk replacing its power with dirty fuels. We will work with municipal and county governments to establish guidelines for siting utility-scale renewable energy in order to reduce red tape and create new incentives for small-scale renewable energy.

Clean Air: With the recent passage of legislation to phase out No. 4 and No. 6 home heating oil, we will work to speed up conversions and retrofits to cleaner, more efficient heating systems. We will continue working to reduce emissions from power plants and automobiles, including a push for more electric school buses and targeted interventions to protect environmental justice communities.

Electric Vehicles: Electric vehicles (EVs) reduce greenhouse gas emissions and produce zero emissions, improving air quality. We will continue our successful advocacy efforts to increase the number of EVs in municipal fleets and expand the EV charging station network throughout Westchester.

SUSTAINABLE & TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

High housing costs, disappearing open space, traffic congestion combined with a car-dependent transportation system and a lack of coordinated planning pose serious threats to the region's economic future and cause substantial environmental challenges. We support livable, sustainable communities that include density and diversity in our downtowns and access to convenient mass transit.

1. Modernize zoning, tax incentives, and regulations to encourage mixed land use, compact development, downtown revitalization, open space protection, and historic preservation.
2. Reduce or eliminate parking minimums to encourage walkable, environmentally and economically sustainable neighborhoods.
3. Redesign arterial streets through traffic calming projects, lower speed limits, electronic speed enforcement, increased penalties and enforcement for reckless and dangerous driving, and other initiatives in order to make communities more walkable and bikeable.
4. Require electric vehicle charging stations in municipal garages and parking lots; set concrete targets for converting to cleaner fleets.
5. Create a network of complete streets that include dedicated bus lanes, protected bike lanes, bike and pedestrian trail networks, and connect residential areas to commercial areas, parks, and green spaces.
6. Explore opportunities for the creation of bike-share and the expansion of car-share initiatives.
7. Increase funding for regional transit, increase the frequency of service and routes, and improve and expand the capacity of the Metro North White Plains station.
8. Ensure waterfront development is consistent with smart growth goals, meets resiliency targets, and facilitates public access to waterfront.
9. Identify and encourage redevelopment of brownfield sites and utilize the Brownfields Opportunity Area program to ensure that local communities are engaged.



Photo credit: Harlem Valley News

PUBLIC HEALTH

Every Westchester resident deserves access to clean air, well-maintained parks for recreation, fresh food from local farms, and protection from toxic chemicals.

1. Encourage and accelerate the adoption of cleaner alternatives to #4 and #6 home heating oil, including natural gas and electric heat.
2. Replace diesel vehicles, especially those that transport children, with electric vehicles, including electric buses.
3. Protect parks and playgrounds from alienation of parkland.
4. Adopt Integrated Pest Management plans for publicly-owned property to reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides.
5. Create pocket parks, community gardens and urban farms and protect them through conservation easements held by land trusts or municipalities.

ENERGY

Improving energy efficiency and increasing renewable energy production are major pillars of combating climate change. These goals can be achieved in many ways - in residential and commercial settings, in existing and new buildings, and through construction and technology.

1. Become a DEC certified Climate Smart Community by reducing greenhouse gases and taking action to protect your community.
2. Adopt green building standards for new residential and commercial construction and create incentives for energy efficiency upgrades in existing buildings.
3. Fund public education and outreach on existing energy-efficiency incentives.
4. Remove impediments in laws, codes, and practices to streamline the installation of renewable energy projects for homeowners and business owners.
5. Design and support programs that ensure equitable delivery of clean energy and energy efficiency programs.
6. Pass local ordinances to control light pollution.
7. Support clean energy projects such as microgrids, solar, wind, geothermal, and other new technologies.
8. Ensure that the Indian Point nuclear power plant is replaced by reliable, clean energy.

SUSTAINABILITY PUBLIC ASSET MANAGEMENT

By spending money and allocating resources wisely, local and regional governments can have a significant impact on energy use and the environment.

1. Purchase energy from renewable sources and increase clean energy purchasing power through intra-governmental aggregation.
2. Conduct energy audits of municipal facilities, purchase Energy Star-rated equipment, invest in energy efficiency retrofits, and upgrade streetlights to energy-efficient bulbs.
3. Install clean energy generation projects on public lands and buildings.
4. Convert municipal fleets to hybrid, electric, or other clean energy vehicles.
5. Plant street trees and support other green streets initiatives.
6. Create programming in parks, farms, and other open space to encourage the public's use and appreciation of them.

FARMS AND LOCAL FOOD

A vibrant agricultural sector plays a key role in managing development and providing access to healthy, fresh foods.

1. Work with the Department of Agriculture and Markets to expand the Fresh Connect Program to create more farmers' markets throughout the region - especially in communities lacking access to fresh foods.
2. Maintain productive farmland through the acquisition and donation of development rights.
3. Create programs to assist young and beginning farmers.
4. Create outreach and awareness campaigns to take advantage of the growing popularity of regional agriculture, sustainable viticulture, and local agricultural products.
5. Adopt legislation that protects farmland.



Photo credit: Living in Westchester

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

Managing and protecting regional natural resources will require a comprehensive effort that focuses on air, water, and land.

1. Provide incentives and technical assistance to communities, property owners, and developers to manage stormwater on-site with a variety of technologies such as green roofs, bioswales, rain gardens, and rain barrels. Implement strategies outlined in stormwater management plans.
2. Integrate the use of native plants for landscaping and implement programs to address the growing threat of invasive species. Work with local partners and public officials to educate the public about invasive species and develop a robust eradication program in Westchester.
3. Develop regional, county, and local plans to restore streams and other water resources.
4. Prioritize and fund a forestry and tree regeneration program including in downtown areas.
5. Integrate permeable surfaces into new road, sidewalk and parking lot construction projects.
6. Improve water quality and aquatic habitat by updating sewage treatment plants and reducing combined sewer overflow drainage.
7. Ensure that rail transportation of crude oil complies with federal, state, and local safety and environmental regulations, especially in environmentally critical areas.

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Open space is disappearing and is under development pressure throughout the region. While many communities have made laudable efforts to preserve open space, it is clear that more needs to be done.

1. Encourage adaptive reuse of existing building structures instead of new development and support more density in downtown areas.
2. Adopt zoning that preserves existing green space and open space set-asides.
3. Protect open space from development by promoting local bond initiatives, conservation land trusts, community preservation funds, dedicated revenue streams for conservation, and reduced property taxes for open space.
4. Create biotic corridors and expand regional and local land banks to preserve green space for livable neighborhoods.
5. Aggressively expand the number of Westchester schools that provide youth education on sustainability and healthy eating in schools through workshops and school gardens.



Photo credit: Daniel Case

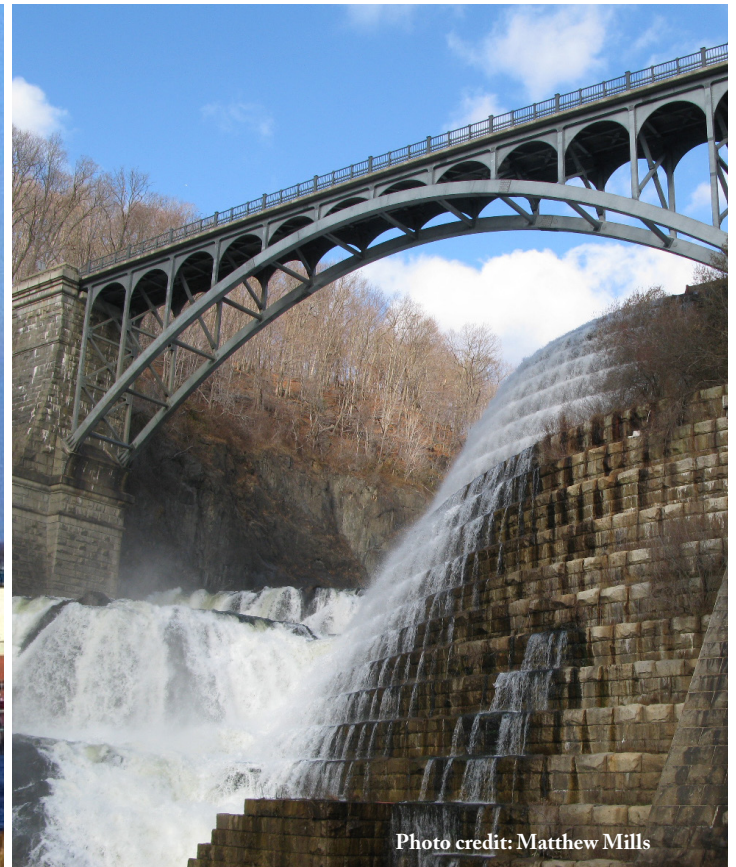


Photo credit: Matthew Mills

Left: Sustainably decommissioning Indian Point and replacing its energy with renewables are two of the major environmental decisions facing Westchester in the coming years. Right: The Old Croton Aqueduct played a critical role in supplying clean drinking water downstate. Contemporary water infrastructure must build on its then-state-of-the-art engineering achievements.

WASTE

Waste is a large contributor to pollution and climate change, from dirty diesel trucks that export waste to landfills in other states to methane emissions as waste decomposes in landfills. Sustainable waste management can protect the environment and public health and create local jobs.

1. Eliminate the needless waste and pollution carryout bags create by passing a local law that includes a fee on all carryout bags or a ban on thin plastic bags with a fee on all other carryout bags.
2. Work with local governments to boost recycling rates.
3. Incentivize regional recycling facilities, anaerobic digesters, compost sites, and other technologies that can process waste with a smaller impact on the environment.
4. Explore curbside collection of residential food waste and commercial organic waste recycling programs.
5. Develop waste reduction plans and engage schools, restaurants, and municipalities in food composting programs.
6. Implement a “save-as-you-throw” program to charge for collection of non-recyclable trash based on the amount being thrown away.



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NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS, INC.

NYLCV is the only nonpartisan, statewide environmental organization in New York that fights for clean water, clean air, renewable energy and open space through political action.

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND, INC.

NYLCVEF educates, engages and empowers New Yorkers to be effective advocates for the environment.