

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND

# Capital Region Chapter Policy Agenda

2021 - 2022





**JULIE TIGHE**

President, NYLCV  
and NYLCVEF

**2020 HAS BEEN ONE LIKE NO OTHER.** The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on our health, our economy, and our communities. It also underscored the importance of listening to science and the harm from air pollution, in particular for people of color and those with low incomes, and heightened awareness of the need to take action to help avert the worst effects of climate change.

Too many New Yorkers live in communities systematically overburdened by pollution, a problem which the pandemic shone a bright light on. This is only exacerbated by COVID-19, which puts people with respiratory illnesses like asthma at higher risk.

This year we also saw devastating wildfires on the West Coast, and flooding in the Southeast, underscoring the impacts of climate change occurring across the country.

A stark reminder that when we come out of the public health crisis, we will still have a climate crisis.

The State laid out bold and aggressive climate standards as part of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. Our power sector must achieve 70% renewable energy by 2030 and the entire economy must be carbon-neutral by 2050. Local governments are key to achieving these standards.

But air pollution isn't the only environmental harm impacting public health. Another critical connection between the environment and public health is clean water. From lead pipes to emerging contaminants like PFAS and PFOS to raw sewage overflows to harmful algal blooms, our waterways and drinking water supplies are still at risk. We need local policies that improve water infrastructure and keep our drinking water free of contaminants, and recreational waters swimmable and open for activities like fishing.

These renewable energy and clean water priorities are just some of the policies we lay out in our agenda. We continue to advocate for clean air, open space, clean transportation, and sustainable waste management.

The New York League of Conservation Voters Capital Region Chapter works to identify and advocate for solutions to the region's most pressing environmental issues. This agenda is the result of that work and it will guide our advocacy and programs through the end of 2022.

We look forward to working with local officials and partners to advance these priorities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Tighe".



# Top Priorities

## REGIONAL TRANSIT

Denser, more walkable downtowns, increased ridership on public transportation, use of ride-sharing services and the advent of self-driving cars present the Capital Region with a unique opportunity to rethink regional transit. We will advocate for expanded bus rapid transit and electric buses; better transportation networks between the central business districts in Troy, Albany, Schenectady, and Saratoga Springs; and a comprehensive rethink of how streets are used, including replacing Interstate 787 with a surface-level boulevard to restore pedestrian access to the water in Albany.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

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. We will work with municipal and county governments, and relevant state government entities, to establish guidelines on siting, taxes, and related policies that will protect the environment and encourage the expedited build-out of both large-scale and distributed renewable energy projects.

## CLEAN AND SAFE WATER

We will work to ensure counties and local governments in the Capital Region comply with new testing requirements and limits for emerging contaminants in drinking water, invest in wastewater and drinking water infrastructure and obtain their fair share of state funding for these projects, and continue to address combined sewer overflows (CSOs), including through investment in green infrastructure.

# Combating Climate Change

*The time to act on climate is now.*

We must make radical changes in short order to avoid catastrophic climate change. New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act will require action at all levels of government to achieve its ambitious goal of reducing economy-wide emissions 85% by 2050 and achieving 70% renewable energy by 2030. We will work to advance policies to decrease emissions from all sectors, increase renewable energy production and improve energy efficiency, prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change, reduce waste, and foster a strong green economy. By allocating resources wisely, local governments can have a significant impact on energy use and the environment. Localities must also adapt to a changing climate and include resiliency planning in all aspects of future governance.





## ENERGY

- ▶ Adopt a Climate Smart Community Resolution and become a DEC certified Climate Smart Community by reducing greenhouse gases and taking action to protect the Capital Region and your community.
- ▶ Purchase energy from renewable sources. Increase clean energy purchasing power through programs like Community Choice Aggregation. Install renewable energy systems on appropriate public buildings, land, and parking lots. Participate in Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing programs to increase clean energy installation and use.
- ▶ Adopt green building standards including the New York State Stretch Energy Code for new residential and commercial construction, including electric heat and heat pumps and requiring solar panels or green roofs on new commercial buildings and parking structures.
- ▶ Remove barriers in local laws and codes to streamline the permitting process for installation of renewable energy sources for homeowners and business owners. Create incentives for energy-efficiency upgrades in existing residential and commercial buildings. Fund public education and outreach on existing energy-efficiency incentives.
- ▶ Conduct energy audits, purchase Energy Star-rated equipment, and invest in energy efficiency retrofits in municipal buildings. Install sensors and energy efficient LED bulbs in streetlights.
- ▶ Invest in wastewater treatment upgrades to process organic waste into renewable energy, including consideration of the feasibility of public-private partnerships.
- ▶ Promote policies to invest in solar, wind, geothermal, battery storage and other clean energy projects and emerging technologies.
- ▶ Develop programs that ensure clean energy, microgrids, and efficiency programs are equitably delivered to low-income populations and tenants of affordable housing.



## TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ Work with state and regional agencies to develop light rail connections and/or bus rapid transit (BRT) within the Capital Region.
- ▶ Set concrete targets for converting municipal fleets to hybrid, electric, or other clean energy vehicles. Replace diesel vehicles, especially those that transport children, with electric vehicles and buses where possible and other clean fuel technology where electric is not viable.
- ▶ Install electric vehicle charging stations in all municipal garages and parking lots. Adopt local ordinances that require EV charging in all new housing and commercial construction projects.
- ▶ Reduce reliance on cars through other viable options, including walking, bicycling, scooting, and public transportation. Improve bike, scooter and bus mobility by creating complete networks of streets with dedicated bus lanes, protected bike lanes, and transportation networks that connect residential areas to commercial areas, parks, and green spaces. Create bike- and scooter-sharing opportunities and expand electric car-share initiatives.

- ▶ Evaluate ways to reduce emissions at Albany International Airport and other airports in the area, including converting ground vehicles to EV, using renewable fuels, installing onsite solar facilities, and investing in efficiency projects.

## RESILIENCY

- ▶ Implement resiliency projects, including resiliency retrofits to critical facilities, installation of shoreline defenses to reduce erosion, and construction of stormwater management systems.
- ▶ Develop county and town plans to address long-term resiliency, particularly of critical infrastructure along waterfronts, airports, and water and wastewater treatment plants that are vulnerable to power outages, and storm surge. Pursue regional collaboration to facilitate intrastate resilience planning and raise funds for critical adaptation infrastructure that protects residents from inland flooding.
- ▶ Support robust natural buffers along waterfronts and coasts, including restored wetlands, dunes, and other living shoreline approaches.



- ▶ Provide incentives and technical assistance to property owners, developers, and communities to manage on-site stormwater with a variety of technologies, such as green roofs, bioswales, rain gardens, and rain barrels.
- ▶ Strengthen zoning codes to protect homes in vulnerable areas and enact building standards designed to minimize and prevent damage from flooding and increasing storms. Apply current projections on storm surge, flood plains, and sea level rise to establish exclusionary zones for future development and strategic retreat.

## **SOLID WASTE**

- ▶ Incentivize and expand regional recycling facilities, anaerobic digesters, compost sites, and other technologies that can process waste with a smaller impact on the environment.
- ▶ Explore curbside collection of residential food waste and commercial organic waste recycling programs, with the goal of establishing facilities and anaerobic digesters capable of processing organic waste into compost and/or renewable energies.

- ▶ Work with schools, restaurants, and municipalities to develop waste reduction plans, boost recycling rates, and provide education about recycling, composting, and waste diversion, with emphasis on reduction and reuse. Work with restaurants and organizations that are not covered by the State food waste law to participate in food recovery programs that donate excess untouched food to help those in need.
- ▶ Pass county ordinances that include a fee on paper bags to complement NYS's plastic bag ban and encourage reusable bag use.
- ▶ Promote policies that ban single-use plastic straws, utensils, and containers in favor of reusable and compostable materials.
- ▶ Expand product stewardship programs for items such as packaging used for residential deliveries and carpets.
- ▶ Encourage local governments to source materials for projects from their own waste stream where possible, including use of recycled glass for concrete needs and compost for landscaping needs.

A large black corrugated metal pipe is shown discharging water into a stream. The pipe is set into a bank of earth and rocks, surrounded by lush green foliage and trees. The water is flowing out of the pipe and creating white foam as it hits the rocks in the stream below. The scene is set in a natural, wooded environment.

# Protecting People and Natural Resources

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All New Yorkers deserve indoor and outdoor environments that are free of contamination and pollution. We will promote policies that provide access to healthy air, land, and water, protect our open spaces, and improve the well-being of all New Yorkers.



## **CLEAN AIR, LAND, AND WATER**

- ▶ Develop regional, county, and local plans to restore rivers, streams and other water resources.
- ▶ Improve water quality and aquatic habitat safety by reducing combined sewer overflows. Update stormwater systems and adopt best management practices that protect against water and land contamination caused by storms and stormwater runoff. Integrate permeable surfaces into new road, sidewalk and parking lot construction projects to increase stormwater capture and prevent runoff.
- ▶ Invest in wastewater treatment plant upgrades to remove nitrogen effectively and consistently to restore the health of waterways. Support rigorous monitoring of wastewater treatment plants to ensure compliance with permitted nitrogen levels.
- ▶ Investigate water conservation and water reuse options, including rainwater capture technologies.
- ▶ Promote policies to require continuation of dredging still required for a full cleanup of PCB from upper Hudson River locations throughout the Capital Region.
- ▶ Enforce existing anti-idling laws.
- ▶ Integrate the use of native species for landscaping and implement programs to prevent loss of native biodiversity to protect natural landscapes and resiliency of natural habitats. Work with local partners and public officials to educate the public about best landscaping practices to respond to the growing threat of invasive species.
- ▶ Ensure that rail transportation of crude oil complies with federal, state, and local safety and environmental regulations, especially in environmentally critical areas.

- ▶ Adopt Integrated Pest Management plans for publicly owned property to reduce use of pesticides and herbicides. Develop policies to educate private property owners and companies about the benefits of adopting Integrated Management plans to reduce pesticide and herbicide contamination in water-run off.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

- ▶ Promote livable, walkable, dynamic communities in the region that promote density and diversity in downtowns with access to convenient mass transit. Work with NYS to access funds under the NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative to create livable, walkable neighborhoods. Modernize zoning, tax incentives, and regulations to encourage mixed land use, compact development, downtown revitalization, open space protection, and historic preservation.
- ▶ Make communities more walkable and bikeable through safer walkways, lower speed limits, electronic speed enforcement, and increased enforcement for reckless driving. Reduce or eliminate parking minimums to encourage walkable neighborhoods.
- ▶ Ensure waterfront development is consistent with smart growth goals, meets resiliency targets, and facilitates public access to waterfront.
- ▶ Protect and restore sensitive habitats. Plant trees and canopies and support other green street initiatives. Increase the number of native and pollinator-friendly gardens and natural areas in public spaces and promote other policies to protect native biodiversity, including non-toxic pest management practices.
- ▶ Identify and encourage redevelopment of brownfield sites and utilize the Brownfields Opportunity Area program to ensure that local communities are engaged.



## **PARKS AND OPEN SPACES**

- ▶ Adopt zoning that preserves existing green space and open space set-asides. Expand regional and local land banks to preserve green space for livable neighborhoods.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Promote investment in parks and greenspaces to underserved communities in greatest need of parkland development.

- ▶ Create programming in parks and other open space to encourage the public's use and appreciation of them.
- ▶ Create pocket parks and community gardens and protect them through conservation easements held by land trusts or municipalities. Protect parks and playgrounds from alienation through lease or sale of these spaces for other purposes.

## **FARMS AND LOCAL FOOD**

- ▶ Work with the State Department of Agriculture & Markets to expand the Fresh-Connect Program to create more farmers' markets throughout the region, especially in "food desert" communities.



- ▶ Seek funding on behalf of the agricultural community through conservation programs in the federal Farm Bill.
- ▶ Create programs to assist young and beginning farmers. Adopt legislation that protects farmland and use of land for food production. Maintain productive farmland through the acquisition and donation of development rights.
- ▶ Explore funding streams for farmland and open space that can leverage private and public dollars.
- ▶ Create outreach and awareness campaigns to take advantage of the growing popularity of regional agriculture, sustainable viticulture, and local agricultural products.
- ▶ Promote policies to ensure every family has access to healthy, local, and affordable produce through expansion of critical food access programs, such as SNAP, and other types of health bucks redeemable at farmers markets across the county. Identify food recovery partners for programs to feed those in need.
- ▶ Expand the number of Capital Region schools that provide youth education on sustainability and healthy eating through workshops and school gardens.

## NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

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

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



**Julie Tighe, President**  
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