

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND

Westchester Chapter

Policy Agenda

2021 - 2022





JULIE TIGHE

President, NYLCV
and NYLCVEF

2020 WAS A YEAR 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 air pollution causes, in particular for people of color and those living in low income neighborhoods, 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 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 more 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 Westchester 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 to advance these priorities.

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



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, historic preservation, and energy efficient building codes.

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. These challenges must be addressed before Indian Point shuts down in 2021, or else we risk replacing its power with fossil 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 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, transit systems and school bus fleets, expand the EV charging station network throughout Westchester, and ensure that environmental justice communities have access to and benefit from EVs.

Combating Climate Change

The State's Climate and Community Protection Act requires New York to have 100% clean power by 2040, be 100% carbon-neutral by 2050, and direct at least 35% of the benefits of climate programs to environmental justice communities. Local governments will have a significant impact on our ability to meet these goals, and must also plan for a changing climate.





ENERGY

- ▶ Become a NYSERDA-certified Clean Energy Community.
- ▶ Purchase municipal and county energy from renewable sources and increase clean energy purchasing power for local communities through programs like Community Choice Aggregation and community solar. Participate in Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing programs to increase clean energy installation and use.
- ▶ Adopt the New York State Stretch Energy Code. Require no- and low-emission heating, such as ground- and air-source heat pumps, for new buildings and explore district heating systems.
- ▶ Adopt model solar laws. Create incentives for energy-efficiency upgrades in existing residential and commercial buildings. Fund public education and outreach on existing energy-efficiency incentives.
- ▶ Install appropriately sited solar panels and other clean energy generation projects on public property, buildings, and parking lots. 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.

- ▶ Work with the State and the Public Service Commission to site new transmission lines as needed to achieve 100% clean energy by 2040, with greatest possible use of existing rights of way.
- ▶ Invest in wastewater treatment upgrades to process organic waste into renewable energy, including consideration of public-private partnerships.
- ▶ Promote policies to invest in battery storage and other emerging green technologies.

TRANSPORTATION

- ▶ Increase funding for Metro North and regional transit, increase service and routes, and improve and expand the capacity of the Metro North White Plains station.
- ▶ Convert municipal fleets to hybrid, electric, or other clean energy vehicles. Replace diesel vehicles, especially those that transport children, with electric vehicles and buses.
- ▶ Require electric vehicle charging stations in municipal garages and parking lots. Promote local ordinances that require EV charging in all new and renovated housing and commercial construction projects and provide incentives for EV charging in existing developments.



- ▶ Reduce reliance on cars by creating complete streets with dedicated bus lanes, bike lanes, and walkability that make it easier to walk, bike, use e-bikes and e-scooters, and take public transit. Create bike and scooter-sharing opportunities and expand electric car-share initiatives.
- ▶ Explore congestion easing measures on county highways.
- ▶ Evaluate ways to reduce emissions at Westchester Airport, including converting to EV ground vehicles, installing onsite solar facilities, and investing in efficiency projects.

RESILIENCY

- ▶ Implement resiliency projects including retrofits to critical facilities, installation of shoreline defenses to reduce erosion, construction of improved stormwater management systems, greater use of green

infrastructure, and long-term plans to address flooding and rising sea levels.

- ▶ Support robust natural buffers and living shoreline approaches to make the Hudson River, the Long Island Sound, and other waterways more resilient to sea level rise and flooding.
- ▶ Provide incentives and technical assistance to property owners, developers, and local governments 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.
- ▶ Adopt curbside collection of residential food waste and commercial organic waste recycling programs, establish compost facilities and anaerobic digesters, encourage backyard and community composting, and create food waste drop-off sites.
- ▶ Work with schools, restaurants, and municipalities to develop waste reduction plans, boost recycling rates, and provide education about recycling and waste diversion, with emphasis on reduction and reuse. Work with restaurants and organizations that are not covered by the State's food waste recycling law to participate in food recovery programs that donate excess untouched food to help those in need.
- ▶ Enact a county-wide 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 compostable and reusable materials, and require stores to allow customers to bring reusable containers.
- ▶ Expand product stewardship programs for items such as packaging used for residential deliveries, mattresses, and carpeting.
- ▶ 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.



Protecting People and Natural Resources

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 streams and other water resources and preserve open spaces.
- ▶ Update sewage treatment plants and reduce combined sewer overflows to prevent sewage contamination of water quality and aquatic habitat. Update stormwater systems and adopt best management practices, including the expansion of green infrastructure, 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, oceans, and bays. Support rigorous monitoring of wastewater treatment plants to ensure compliance with permitted nitrogen levels.
- ▶ Investigate and implement water conservation and water reuse options, including rainwater capture technologies.
- ▶ Enforce existing anti-idling laws.
- ▶ Protect biodiversity and natural habitats by integrating native plants for landscaping and educating the public about best landscaping practices and measures to respond to the growing threat of invasive species. Increase the number of native and pollinator-friendly gardens and natural areas in public spaces.
- ▶ Adopt Integrated Pest Management plans for publicly owned property. 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

- ▶ Create livable, sustainable communities designed with density and diversity in downtowns and with access to convenient mass transit. Modernize zoning, tax incentives, and regulations to encourage mixed land use, compact development, downtown revitalization, open space protection, and trail access.
- ▶ Make communities more walkable and bikeable through safer walkways, lower speed limits, electronic speed enforcement, protected bike lanes, and increased enforcement for reckless driving. Reduce or eliminate parking minimums to encourage walkable neighborhoods.
- ▶ Encourage adaptive reuse of existing building structures instead of new development.
- ▶ Promote ordinances and legislation to require

green roofing on new residential and commercial structures, including solar panels or plants.

- ▶ Ensure waterfront development is consistent with smart growth goals, meets resiliency targets, and facilitates public access to waterfront.
- ▶ 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, greenspaces, and street trees in underserved communities that are 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 Department of Agriculture to expand the Fresh-Connect Program to create more farmers’ markets throughout the region,

especially in “food desert” communities.

- ▶ Create outreach and awareness campaigns to take advantage of the growing popularity of regional agriculture, sustainable viticulture, local agricultural products, and micro- and urban farming.
- ▶ Promote policies to ensure every family has access to healthy, local, and affordable produce through expansion of critical food access programs, such as SNAP, Feeding Westchester, 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 Westchester schools that provide youth education on sustainability and healthy eating through workshops and school gardens.



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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.

