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2021 Environmental Questionnaire for New York City Candidates

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the New York League of Conservation Voters Questionnaire.

To ensure your responses address the issues NYLCV and its partners are most concerned about, please consult [NYLCV's 2021 New York City Policy Agenda](#) when answering the questions.

The New York League of Conservation Voters is the only non-partisan, statewide environmental organization in New York that fights for clean water, clean air, renewable energy, and open space through political action. This questionnaire is designed to elicit your views regarding what environmental, public health, clean energy and transit, and environmental justice groups consider to be the most important issues of the day. Responses may inform NYLCV's educational and legislative programs and actions NYLCV takes in the election cycle.

Responses should be considered public. Although NYLCV may choose not to publicize the responses to every question, verbatim responses may be reproduced and distributed publicly. If so, your responses may be shortened, if necessary, but will not be edited in substantive ways. If you choose to refer us to a position paper or website, please indicate exactly what text you would like us to cite. For candidates choosing not to respond to the questionnaire, NYLCV will note as much in its public materials.

NYLCV and its partners in the environmental policy arena believe that New York's voters are determined to make the environment a voting issue this year. Candidate positions on issues such as protecting public health, building a clean energy future, and mitigating climate change will help voters decide how to cast their ballots this election cycle. This questionnaire is one of the primary ways the public will get this information.

Here are a few guidelines:

- Questionnaires are due **Friday, February 26, 2021**.
- The completed questionnaire is mandatory for endorsement consideration and must be submitted via e-mail as a Microsoft Word file to: politics@nylcv.org
- Questions or extension requests may be directed to Joshua Klainberg (jklainberg@nylcv.org)
- After receipt of the completed questionnaire, candidates will be invited to participate in a formal interview with a local Chapter Board.
- Candidate endorsements will be made by the NYLCV State Board on April 29, 2021.

CAMPAIGN CONTACT INFORMATION

Candidate name: Alexa Avilés

Office sought & district number: City Council, District #38

Campaign e-mail: Alexa@Alexaforcouncil.com

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PERSONAL INFORMATION

1. Please share your accomplishments or experiences that indicate your commitment to advancing a pro-environment agenda. These experiences may be professional or personal.

I have been honored to have a long and distinguished career in social justice philanthropy, working on decarceration efforts to keep youth and adults out of the (in)justice system, environment, and racial justice initiatives, and revitalizing native cultures and languages. As the Program Director for the Scherman Foundation, I manage grants to local & national organizations working on critical campaigns to ensure people are treated with dignity and respect. These include campaigns to protect workers' rights, preserve affordable housing, support community-led economic development, advance reproductive and gender justice, reduce barriers, and reform systems that harm people. As a funder, I am proud to have successfully advocated for support for critical state and citywide environmental justice initiatives such as NY RENEWS, decommissioning peaker plants, and transforming the commercial waste system.

For the past decade, I've worked with hundreds of families from the district. I partnered with parents and teachers to build programs and support and address families and students' needs. We have brought environmental school clubs and launched green initiatives in the school. As a member of the local Community Board 7, we have elevated resiliency and environmental justice concerns with other

members. As a resident, I have directly supported many initiatives and actions advanced by UPROSE and NYC EJA and other community-based groups calling for: transportation justice, resiliency projects, completion of the Greenway, adopt mitigation/resiliency demands related to local development and the industrial working waterfront, and implement education initiatives on recycling, composting and importance of stewarding our trees.

ISSUES

Each year, NYLCV works closely with New York’s leading environmental, public health, conservation, energy, environmental justice, and transportation organizations to identify the most pressing priorities on fighting climate change, conserving land and water, and protecting public health. These issues drive NYLCV’s advocacy work throughout the legislative session, influence the bills we select for NYLCV’s Environmental Scorecards, and informs the decision on the candidates we choose to endorse. To ensure your responses are in alignment with the issues NYLCV and its partners are most concerned about, please review [NYLCV’s 2021 New York City Policy Agenda](#) when formulating your responses.

Please indicate your level of commitment to, and if applicable your recent personal and professional activity concerning, all the policy priorities of our partners per the following issues:

Top Priorities

Transportation isn’t only the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions in our state—it is also a major source of air pollution, causing respiratory and other public health issues. This is particularly the case near New York City’s many major highways where too often, these communities are low-income and communities of color.

2. Encouraging the Shift to High Efficiency, Low Emission Forms of Transportation (p. 3)

We must invest in public transportation and the electrification of our buildings and the City’s fleet. Electrification of the school bus fleet is another critical initiative that will support our community’s health and well-being. While the pandemic’s economic impact has been devastating, it has also created opportunities to implement new approaches like the Open Streets Initiative, which we should continue to build on. Our district is heavily dependent on the bus system, which needs to be significantly invested in and improved. We must bring back Fair Fares because many riding the subways is a necessity but an economic burden for many low-income workers. We must ensure congestion pricing moves forward and the revenue is captured and reinvested into mass transit systems.

More than ever, New Yorkers realized the value of our parks and open spaces in 2020 as our cultural institutions were closed and we had to practice social distancing. Open green space is one of the City’s most valuable environmental assets but also contributes to the well-being of our residents and our economy.

3. Conserving New York City's Parks and Natural Areas (p. 3)

I support putting the power to shape and share our neighborhood resources in the hands of our neighbors. In cities across the country (Seattle, Portland) and the world (Bogota, Paris) the Director of the Public Realm has had positive effects on the social needs: housing support, reclaiming public space, climate change, et al. As we face the COVID-19 crisis together we need to increase equitable access to public space and resources. As the legislative body and the most local form of government, the City Council is the bridge between what constituents are experiencing and how government can better support healthy, safe, and vibrant communities.

I believe that using the City Council's oversight capacity and holding regular public discussions with other public officials will improve the dialogue regarding access. The first step to solving this issue is admitting that there is a web of bureaucracy stopping voters from accessing their public spaces and resources in a way that benefits them and their community. The next step is introducing legislation to ensure this access is made permanent to materially benefit the voters. A public portal can capture the inventory and characteristics of public space, their availability, and the process to access it with clear instructions that follow an equity criteria. We must continue to invest in green space, especially in communities that do not have an appropriate amount of dedicated green space. We must keep our parks and our waterfront in the hands of the public. We should consider coastal protection projects that will advance resiliency.

Reaching the City's Zero Waste goal by 2030 will require work from all New Yorkers—cooperation of city officials and private industry, and buy-in from the public. Stimulating behavioral change is critical to meeting this goal, as is ensuring the City has programs in place that promote waste reduction, diversion, and sustainable waste management.

4. Common Sense Waste Management (p. 3)

As I mentioned above, as the Program Director of the Scherman Foundation, I have advocated and directed resources to the Transform Don't Trash campaign, among other critical important citywide campaigns. As a Council Member, I will vigorously defend the commercial waste franchising system and support full implementation in partnership with the advocates, workers, and community members. We must double down on our residential organics waste collection and re-open essential sites (such as Red Hook) closed during Covid.

Combating Climate Change

The time to act on climate is now. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report makes it clear that we must make radical changes in short order to avoid catastrophic climate change. We will work to advance policies that decrease emissions from all sectors, prepare us to meet the unavoidable impacts of climate change, reduce waste, and foster a strong green economy. We must also ensure the

changes we make to tackle climate change benefit disadvantaged communities and provide for a just transition.

5. Energy and Infrastructure (p. 5)

I stand with the Public Power Campaign to fight for public ownership and control of our state's utilities and energy. As a Sunset Park Solar Cooperative member, we must invest in significantly scaling up solar and cooperative models that allow communities to be more self-sustaining and build renewable infrastructure from the ground up. Frontline communities must be prioritized in these investments to be cleaner and more resilient. With all the recent climate disasters, we have seen the absolute need for flexible energy systems built on renewable sources. We must continue the fight to decommission PEAKER plants and support the use of renewable technology. We must continue to target our public infrastructure to ensure facilities are retrofitted and aligned with decarbonization goals.

6. Transportation (p. 5)

Improved bus service throughout our district, but especially in Red Hook, is a vital piece of the puzzle in moving toward better efficiency, low emissions forms of transportation. Over the years, residents have been asking for bus improvements. We must leverage the procurement and electrification of the bus fleet for good jobs and reduce emissions.

The Brooklyn Greenway remains unfinished in our district. As directed by our community members, we must complete the Greenway and ensure that it is connected to the larger network.

The siting and proliferation of massive last mile warehouse facilities in our district are very concerning to residents who already suffer the BQE and other polluting facilities' impacts. We must find ways to mitigate, if not stop, the deluge of trucks and the pollution they bring into our communities. Mandating zero-emission trucks and rationalizing truck routes throughout the community will be critical tasks for the community's health and well-being.

7. Resiliency (p. 6)

I will address the impact of the climate crisis by working with individuals and organizations that have developed programs and methods that have helped mitigate the effects on BIPOC frontline communities, including working with organizations like UPROSE to decrease emissions from municipal facilities; working with housing advocates to encourage energy conservation; working with unions to create jobs and training programs in solar, wind power and related renewable energy industries and upgrading public transportation with zero-emission vehicles; prioritizing investing in green infrastructure; demanding the best healthcare, housing and access to clean air, water, and healthy affordable food.

8. Solid Waste (p. 7)

We must support local, low-emissions organics processing that includes micro hauling companies linked to local residents' economic opportunities. Given our abysmal recycling rates, we must figure out ways to incentivize and make recycling easier throughout the district. Lastly, we should move away from incineration and waste to energy and toward anaerobic digesters.

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 and water, protect our open spaces, and improve the well-being of all New Yorkers.

9. Parks, Natural Areas, and Active Waterfronts (p. 9)

Our community would like continued public access and investment in outdoor green space on the waterfront while also sharing it with an industrial manufacturing sector that we want to preserve. As a Significant Maritime Industrial Maritime waterfront community, we would like to continue working with resiliency businesses. I support the GRID, an ambitious and forward-leaning plan with the potential to realize thousands of climate jobs, promote local, sustainable manufacturing, and address climate mitigation, adaptation, and recovery needs for our industrial waterfront developed by environmental justice organization UPROSE. Ensuring coastal flood resiliency will be critical for the survival of our working waterfront. It is one of several good proposals outlined in the Climate and Community Stimulus Platform developed by the Climate Works for All coalition in the approach toward a just transition. As Councilmember, I would also fight for equity within the City's Park's budget. Our district does not have adequate greenspace or sufficient staff to maintain or maximize our available greenspace.

10. Lead Poisoning Prevention (p. 9)

Lead poisoning is a severe problem, especially for residents in Red Hook NYCHA campus. Despite led mitigation mandates, NYCHA has provided our NYCHA residents

little or no services. It is criminal. We must not only strengthen legislation but leverage other city assets and agencies to help truly mitigate the problem that thousands of NYC residents in NYCHA. There must demand greater transparency and accountability on NYCHA's progress to abatement efforts. We must also ensure not to lose sight of NYCHA developments placed under RAD who are released from oversight from the federal monitor, potentially leaving those residents without any protections or recourse. Despite the massive financial challenges (including the currently logistical challenges created by Covid) our City and state must fully invest in and support our public housing residents and public housing stock as one of the City's most significant assets.

11. Reduce and Mitigate Heat Vulnerability (p. 9 – 10)

As a frontline community, our district suffers from the heat island effect. During the pandemic, NYCHA decided against residents' agreements to implement a massive Recovery and Resilience construction project across the entire campus rather than in phases. Within that highly irresponsible (potentially criminal) unilateral decision, NYCHA cut down 475 trees throughout the development. Also, there has been no plan to include other green infrastructure to mitigate heat in the interim. We must demand that FEMA demand significantly invest in mitigation efforts with more trees, cool roofs, permeable pavements, and other infrastructures that help with stormwater management and cool down neighborhoods.

12. Clean Air for All (p. 10)

Our district suffers from very high asthma rates, among other poor health outcomes. Given all the polluting infrastructure located within the district, we must seriously interrogate how to decommission facilities and structures that pollute the air. The pandemic has unfortunately increased car usage and traffic. Additionally, with the proliferation of last-mile warehouses in our district, we will continue to see traffic increases. We must figure out how to incentivize or require clean/green fleets for any new development and continue retrofitting buildings to help reduce emissions. We must demand full funding and implementation of LL97 and LL199 to significantly reduce GHG emissions while also transitioning to a cleaner and just energy system that will offer green job opportunities to communities left behind and most impacted by polluting infrastructure.

13. Clean Water for All (p.11)

We have not seen nearly enough investment in green infrastructure projects that would help stormwater management and much by way of improvements to clean water management. Our district has suffered multiple water main breaks due to insufficient investment and maintenance in critical infrastructure. The lack of a comprehensive,

coordinated, and community-engaged, and the developed plan is a significant problem that contributes to inaction or band-aid approaches. We need to fund and invest in public education projects like the Billion Oyster Project to inform residents of how they have the power to be part of the solution to clear and restore our critical waterways and water infrastructure.

14. Sustainable Food Systems (p. 11)

The pandemic has illustrated the significant food insecurity residents are experiencing throughout the City. One year later, our district is still seeing long-lines at mutual aid sites and food pantries. I support the comprehensive set of policy recommendations made by the NY Covid-19 Food Coalition. For low-income communities, access to affordable quality food is not a reality. Communities need greater control and engagement in development and implementation from production to consumption. In addition to increased investment at the federal level, we must invest in food cooperatives that are community-owned and controlled. Our schools and public facilities must also do better on the food front. Rather than being trapped by procurement contracts that provide unhealthy food to low-income residents, we must establish healthy food standards, engage students and parents as decision makers, link-local/regional suppliers as an economic engine and ensure a more resilient food system.