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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](mailto:politics@nylcv.org)
- ☒ Questions or extension requests may be directed to Joshua Klainberg ([jklainberg@nylcv.org](mailto: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: Gale A. Brewer

Office sought & district number: Council District 6

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Scheduler's name and email: Same as above

## 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.

Like many New Yorkers, I am made aware every day that most of New York City is situated on islands. As Borough President, I have become acutely aware of the connection between the city's past as a maritime colossus; that history and geography have today brought New York face to face with its vulnerability from rising sea levels and other aspects of climate change that will require the City to adapt to the natural environment it occupies in new and radical ways.

Although I have long been committed to a pro-environment agenda, and have been strongly supportive of the parks, community gardens, recreational spaces, and green streetscapes, my work as Manhattan Borough President has required me to confront how the impacts of climate change are altering every aspect of the city's infrastructure and way of life. Coming to terms with the changes that are required will prove to be one of the biggest

challenges facing city government is 2022 and beyond. Already enormous changes are in the works, such as the impact of the East Side Coastal Resiliency initiative that will permanently change how millions of New Yorkers live, work, and play on Manhattan Island.

Such changes will inevitably bring into focus age-old disparities between how wealthy and low-income communities are affected economically and make the issue of environmental justice a centerpiece of urban policy going forward.

Finally, I am proud that when elected Manhattan Borough President I immediately re-invigorated the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board (SWAB), appointing new members, ensuring regular meetings and minutes, and hosting an informative website. SWABs are charter-mandated, but until recently, the Manhattan SWAB was the only such entity functioning. Members have taken on different projects, including support for ending plastic bags, testifying against the ending of organics recycling, and supporting composting in parks, as I do.

## 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)

My level of commitment is reflected in legislation in the early 2000's to support electric charging stations throughout NYC; a law requiring the City to collect and make public the data on the volume and type of vehicle entering and leaving the city daily, as part of an effort to reduce emissions and mitigate air quality impacts. Some traffic related issues have proven to be difficult to address-such as the diesel emissions from long-haul trucks passing through the city on interstate highways. Locally, there is much we can do. I supported the City Council bill (Intro 1574) that calls for a 20- zone collection of commercial waste and reduction of private carting truck traffic by 50%. I am a strong advocate for protected bike lanes, bike parking, and mass transit, and I voted for congestion pricing.

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)

Our urban parks and open spaces are important social and recreational gathering places but also function as a "green lung" in our congested city. Among my initiatives is a long history of funding Riverside Park and in my role as Borough President annual support of millions of dollars for parks in all Manhattan neighborhoods. Community gardens are an essential neighborhood resource as green space, food production, organics recycling, but also for environmental education. For many years, I have been a keynote speaker at the annual conference on the state of our community gardens. Another initiative I strongly support is the creation of raised bed food gardens at NYCHA developments, working closely with a community-based organization. Currently, I am leading an initiative to reclaim a disused garden at a NYCHA senior center. On another front, I organized a conference on urban agriculture. A major focus of that initiative has been creating school-based street level and roof top gardening projects and greenhouse hydroponic agriculture; examples include the Brandeis High School garden at West 84 St. and the Urban Farm at George Washington High School campus at West 190 Street. Each year these projects educate hundreds of students (and their parents/guardians) about ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, and an appreciation for the role each of us must play in creating a sustainable world. Many school playgrounds are closed to the public, and I support them being part of the joint Parks-Dept of Education program to open them on weekends and evenings.

The islands play a key role in making the city green and livable. Regarding Governor's Island, I recently testified about my long-term support for the Island's garden and composting program, the Harbor School with its marine eco-system restoration project, and my opposition to a proposed high-density development. Other island initiatives that I support include the expansion of the Randall's Island gardens and their recreational function. On Roosevelt Island, I supported the creation of Four Freedoms Park and national monument, as well as the investment in increased resiliency.

I have been a strong advocate for the street tree replacement and have worked with my staff to annually survey empty tree pits and schedule their new plantings.

My office of the Borough President has completed 171 ULURPS, many of them involving re-zonings. In every case, I advocate for public space. In the East Midtown re-zoning, I was the lead advocate for a requirement that new development include publicly accessible open green space, and one important outcome of that effort is the creation of a permanent Public Realm Task Force to evaluate the proposals from developers to ensure that public green space is included. When the Metro North rail lines are upgraded, the shed over them on Park Avenue will be removed, and this Task Force has the mandate to re-imagine Park Avenue as a greener, more hospitable corridor-an effort that I fully support.

Parks also need to coordinate with projects that support public art.

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)

In the City Council, I led the effort that created the first organics recycling program in the public schools. The program started with moms from Upper West Side schools. It became the model for the city's first residential organics recycling program, and I worked with DSNY to create routes for pickup that coordinated with participating schools. It is unfortunate that Mayor de Blasio has cut the budget for this program, especially when block associations and community members have been enthusiastically embraced the program. Working with the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board (SWAB), which I appoint, and which is the most active SWAB in NYC, we have identified partners and funding to evaluate how the organics program can be made sustainable. I support a mandatory residential organics program.

I supported the City Council bill (Intro 1574) that calls for a 20- zone collection of commercial waste and reduction of private carting truck traffic by 50%.

## 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 have been the leading advocate for supporting the implementation of our waste stream being evaluated for COVID-19 or other viruses. I pushed for the NYC Dept of Environmental Protection to hire 3 trained staff members, purchase equipment and open a lab to begin this process during the pandemic. It is now operational.

I fully support the upgrading of the city's treatment plants to eliminate the sewage overflows into our rivers due to the CSO problem.

I support legislation to ensure the use of Rikers Island for environmental purposes such as wastewater treatment plants, energy storage, and renewable energy generation. My advocacy for the closure of the jail on Rikers Island would make possible the redevelopment of the island for renewable energy and water treatment projects; that advocacy has included creation of a Rikers Island Task Force, hundreds of meetings and hearing, and testified in support of the borough-based jail plan for Manhattan. It is hard to overestimate how difficult this process has been so far.

I am not a supporter of connecting to the Canadian hydropower project.

As Borough President, I am working with NYCHA's recycling staff to identify major opportunities to improve NYCHA's recycling practices; for example, to achieve a robust recycling program at NYCHA the garbage chutes must be made larger. In addition, NYCHA must purchase more garbage compactors. NYCHA's plan to implement sink disposals must be evaluated to ensure that it does not increase the flow of organics into the waste stream; at Newtown Creek Treatment Plant, the sink disposal in a near-by development is being tested. These fine-grained details of how the mechanics of recycling must work cannot be overlooked if we are to make real progress in bringing recycling to 400,000 New Yorkers.

As Borough President, I have strongly supported eliminating mandatory parking minimums for new developments in transit-rich neighborhoods. I have signed off on 171 ULURPs, and many of them involve this issue, and I have always rejected a developer's request for parking when mass transit is near-by.

## 6. Transportation (p. 5)

As an elected official since 2002, I have fully supported, fought for, and implemented transit signal priority, dedicated bus lanes and all-door boarding. For example, I was the first elected official to support the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Busway that severely restricts the use of the street by private vehicles. Despite opposition, the Busway has been a success and I am now supporting a similar effort on West 181 Street.

Regarding bicycle transit, I have supported bike-share programs from the very beginning. I passed a bill that prohibited cars in Central Park, freeing the roads for bicycles and pedestrians. I am now advocating for a bikes only transverse road across Central Park. I have strongly supported a citywide build out of protected and dedicated bike lanes, and locally fought for the creation of a bike lanes on Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, and for the expansion of the lane on Central Park West, including the removal of parking. To address the end point of bike commuting, I sponsored a bill to mandate that parking garages provide bike parking. And I support the current effort to increase secure on-street bike parking.

Regarding residential parking, we released in the office of the Manhattan Borough President, a report on all of the municipal residential parking programs in the United States of America. In New York City, we need to create an office of Public Realm Czar that would coordinate the more than 25 city, state, and federal agencies that govern our streets, plazas, and public spaces, an initiative that will include the permanent establishment of outdoor dining and Open Streets.

We must be vigilant that new uses of the public way, such as Open Streets, avoid creating disparities. As an example, the City's original plan for Open Streets in Manhattan neglected to include streets above 116 Street. My office sent out on social media a request that the community nominate sites for the program, and 30 such sites were identified! The City selected a number of them to become permanent.

Placard abuse is decades-old and will require radical reform of which I am supportive.

## 7. Resiliency (p. 6)

Addressing the city's need to increase its resiliency to storm surges and sea level rise has been in the forefront of my work as an elected official. I supported the East Side Coastal Resiliency Project, a \$1.4 billion initiative over 3 years to protect the vulnerable communities of the Lower East Side from catastrophic flooding as occurred during Hurricane Sandy. Because this has been a controversial project, I brought in an independent, outside expert in coastal flooding mitigation to evaluate the proposed ESCR project. At Governor's Island, I have expressed my reservations



about proceeding with costly, large-scale development at sea level without adequate planning for predicted sea level rise and storm surges. At the Harbor School on Governors Island, I support its expansion of a marine eco-system project, especially the Billion Oyster Project. In East Harlem, at Esplanade Gardens, on the Harlem River, I am advocating that the Federal government pay the \$18 million needed to repair the bulkhead that flooded during Hurricane Sandy. And also in East Harlem, I allocated funding and support the City's \$254 million toward the East River Esplanade and the 107 Street Pier.

In lower Manhattan, I support the Battery Park City Resiliency Project and have participated in the many community engagement sessions. However, the South Street Seaport and Wall Street areas have yet to have funding allocated to them to help plan and implement adequate resiliency mitigation.

To help increase the resiliency of the shoreline in lower Manhattan, I allocated funding to the creation and maintenance of the Brooklyn Bridge Beach; I prevailed upon the City (EDC) to construct the beach without a raised esplanade, enabling visitors to walk the beach at the water's edge.

Resiliency planning must include all five boroughs, and it must ensure that it is strategic and not re-active. The City must deliver for the low-and middle-income communities that have lived by the shore and were flooded by Sandy. As the resiliency plans move homes away from the shoreline, the same families must be able to continue to live there; the areas should not be resettled by wealthy individuals.

#### 8. Solid Waste (p. 7)

In the City Council, I led the effort that created the first organics recycling program in the public schools. The program started with moms from Upper West Side schools. It became the model for the city's first residential organics recycling program, and I worked with DSNY to create routes for pickup that coordinated with participating schools. It is unfortunate that Mayor de Blasio has cut the budget for this program, especially when block associations and community members have been enthusiastically embraced the program. Working with the Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board (SWAB), which I appoint, and which is the most active SWAB in NYC, we have identified partners and funding to evaluate how the organics program can be made sustainable. I support a mandatory residential organics program.

I was upset that the organics collection was cut in the budget. I introduced a bill to mandate that a community compost drop-off center be located in every community board.



I supported the City Council bill (Intro 1574) that calls for a 20- zone collection of commercial waste and reduction of private carting truck traffic by 50%.

I support the creation and implantation of a mandated curriculum unit in the public schools that addresses recycling, composting, waste diversion, reduction and reuse, packaging waste, and issues of disparate impact.

Examples of reuse technology that I support include takeout food containers that are returnable and reusable; and permanently reusable coffee cups in place of paper takeout cups. The issue of bottled water touches on a multitude of environmental problems, such as the wasteful use of fossil fuels to make the bottles, their brief use and disposal, and the exploitation of local water supplies which is harmful to the environment.

Meeting this challenge has been a priority of mine. I have long-advocated for water fountains in every public building, and that every New Yorker be given a permanently reusable water bottle.

### 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)

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(and their parents/guardians) about ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, and an appreciation for the role each of us must play in creating a sustainable world.

Many school playgrounds are closed to the public, and I support them being part of the joint Parks-Dept of Education program to open them on weekends and evenings. I have always been the lead advocate for all school parks/playgrounds to be jointly operated. Under no circumstance should the jointly-operated playgrounds – those that are open to the public when school is not in session – be alienated or ever leased or sold for another purpose.

The islands play a key role in making the city green and livable. Regarding Governor's Island, I recently testified about my long-term support for the Island's garden and composting program, the Harbor School with its marine eco-system restoration project, and my opposition to a proposed high-density development. Other island initiatives that I support include the expansion of the Randall's Island gardens and their recreational function. On Roosevelt Island, I supported the creation of Four Freedoms Park and national monument, as well as the investment in increased resiliency. Regarding the East

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#### 10. Lead Poisoning Prevention (p. 9)

I support all of the measures listed to prevent lead poisoning. This issue is a prime example of the unequal impact of environmental toxins on communities of color. My office receives far too many complaints about lead poisoning from residents of NYCHA where despite years of effort lead poisoning in children still occurs -. an issue that cannot be neglected.

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

The heat island effects impact Black and Brown communities predominantly. During heat emergencies, like those that have occurred here, we need a more comprehensive and strategic approach that reaches vulnerable residents in their homes as well as cooling centers and free air conditioner distribution. In Chicago, groups like Mutual Aid went door to door to ensure that people at risk were identified, aided, and provided with heat mitigation support so that many more people survived.

12. Clean Air for All (p. 10)

I support every one of the initiatives listed under the heading of Clean Air for All. As noted above, I have long advocated for and achieved the implementation of many of these ideas.

An impact of the pandemic is the increase in on-line purchases and a resulting increase in vehicle deliveries. For example, Amazon distribution centers in NYC have brought a noticeable increase in truck traffic in inner city neighborhoods, with worsening air quality and increasing congestion. These effects need to be measured and, if necessary, remediated.

There is a general problem with truck deliveries in all neighborhoods that create increased pollution, traffic congestion and environmental hazards. The use of alternative policies for residential and commercial deliveries, such as off-peak hour incentives, green loading zones, and water freight transportation, are each examples of an achievable greening of our current fossil fuel-based delivery systems.

13. Clean Water for All (p.11)

I support the items listed in Clean Water for All. I am a strong supporter of the Waterfront Alliance and of the South Street Seaport Museum, both of which are leaders in educating the public about our “Sixth Borough,” which is our waterways. All agencies must be involved in supporting a community engagement process that will keep our waterways clean and accessible and maximize job opportunities. I also

believe in the installation of bioswales and rain gardens wherever possible.

In addition, I have toured the Croton and other water systems upstate, including the labs where water samples are evaluated. This huge operation is not known to the public downstate but is

important to our future. The City of New York must ensure that developers and farmers are incentivized to utilize green infrastructure.

#### 14. Sustainable Food Systems (p. 11)

Sustainable food systems have been a focus of mine for decades. As an elected official, I believe that upstate NY and NYC should work together to support the family farms and provide fresh, locally produced food to New Yorkers, especially for low-income families. With Grow-NYC, we initiated an UWS and then borough-wide Fresh Food for Seniors program; this very popular effort gives every senior a bag of fresh vegetables/fruits, and at a \$20 value it goes for \$8. We also initiated a CSA at 1 Centre Street/Municipal Building for city workers, NYPD officers, and City Council staff. I have organized and sponsored 3 trips to upstate farms, with NYC and NYS Commissioners and other stakeholders to promote several policy agendas:

1. NYC agencies and the DOE must purchase locally. I passed **Local Law 50 of 2011** which encourages City agencies and vendors to purchase food grown or produced in New York State by establishing tools of procurement. These include a price preference within 10% of the lowest responsible bidder; mandating that particular products come from New York State; and ‘best value’ provisions that ensure freshness by limiting the length of time between harvest and delivery. The law also requires the City’s Chief Procurement Officer to provide an annual report of the efforts during the preceding fiscal year to implement the City guidelines for the purchase of New York State food.

According to the Fiscal Year 2017 Local Law 50 report, only 59 vendors from across the five boroughs were sent surveys, of which only 11 responded. As per the Fiscal Year 2018 report, 66 vendors were sent surveys and only 3 responded. The limited pool of vendors surveyed along with the abysmal response rate creates an immense information gap that contributes to an incomplete understanding of the challenges we face in increasing procurement of locally grown and produced products.

It is obvious that although agencies have responded, and DOE attempts a 1-day a week local purchase for all student food purchases, more oversight is necessary.

2. The NYC Department of Environmental Protection must work with upstate farmers and their allies, such as the Watershed Agricultural Council, to promote and implement a best management practices program that benefits water quality and land conservation, and that will result in high quality water for 9 million New Yorkers downstream and will benefit, with payments, the landowners upstream. I have sponsored forums on this topic in NYC and on farms upstate. I sponsored and spoke on 10/28/19 at the NYC Watershed Foodshed Farm-to-Table

Forum with Pace University, Fulton Stall Market, Watershed Agricultural Council, Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center, CADE, National Resource Defense Council and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection.

It was a half-day event for wholesale food buyers and food policy professionals showcasing NYC Watershed Agriculture and its products and connecting restaurants, retailers, institutions and distributors to NYC Watershed and Catskills farmers and to regional food hubs for product delivery. City government must sponsor more of these events.

During the pandemic, we supported the food pantries as we always have, partnered with Fresh Direct and Hunts Point to distribute food to every NYCHA development in Manhattan every day for 7 months, and advocated with city agencies to make the Food Hubs more accessible. We worked with the Randall's Island farm, which usually hosts thousands of Title 1 students who get educated on the environment and take food home, and New York Sun Works hydroponics, to donate their massive amount of produce to local food pantries.

Pre-pandemic, we advocated for scratch food at senior centers and in schools. Eating a healthy diet is only possible with education and a sustainable program. In summer 2019, I organized a program with Greenmarket Co, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House's Teaching Kitchen, and DFTA for Manhattan senior center administrative and kitchen staff to learn more on how local produce can be affordably and deliciously integrated into senior center meal planning.

As a result of my Urban Agriculture Conference, and annual capital allocations to public schools, there are many more roof top gardens, hydroponic growing greenhouses, and street level gardens at schools, with science curriculums. We fund non-profits such as Edible Schoolyard, New York Sun Works, Harlem Grown, and Green City Force to create urban agriculture sites.

I support the expansion of SNAP, FRESH, GrowNYC Youthmarkets and Health Bucks, all of which support the rural and urban populations who need the support now more than ever. And we need affordable supermarkets. Fresh Taste Manhattan: As a community, we need to incentivize local supermarkets to offer affordable high quality fresh foods that promote healthy eating and home preparation. Supermarkets are key affordable fresh food access points, yet some stores offer lackluster produce which discourages customers from buying it- often a result of food-sourcing that focuses on shelf life over quality in order to reduce waste and overhead.

In the Fall of 2016, the Manhattan Borough President's office launched the \$61,000 Fresh Taste Manhattan initiative as part of its annual Manhattan Community Award Program. Education and experience are essential to increasing access to high quality fresh produce.

The Fresh Taste Manhattan program supports healthy eating by funding free plant-based food preparation demonstrations at local supermarkets and farmer's markets with a particular focus on seniors and families. The program encourages consumers and advocates to collaborate with store produce

managers to reduce waste, improve the quality of produce in their neighborhoods, and attract new customers.

When Grow NY's Regional Food Hub is finally built out at Hunt's Point, farmers will be able to bring product directly to this site in New York City.