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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: Rita Joseph

Office sought & district number: City Council District 40

Campaign e-mail: hello@ritajoseph.com

Campaign phone: 646-753-2193

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Campaign manager's name and email: Sam Weinberger, Sam@ritajoseph.com

Press Secretary's name and email: n/a

Scheduler's name and email: n/a

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 recently participated in a rally to encourage Senator Chuck Schumer to end the filibuster in order to pass a Green New Deal. I did this following the publication I wrote entitled [Climate Justice Begins With a Green New Deal](https://bklyner.com/rita-joseph-green-new-deal-opinion/). Not enough attention is being paid to the issue of climate change through a racial, social, and economic justice lense. As I write in the op-ed, while climate change affects everyone, the reality of the situation is that marginalized communities are most impacted. For instance, Black and Brown communities experience higher rates of asthma owing to poor air quality than their white counterparts. If elected to City Council, I will prioritize fighting inequities as part of the larger movement to stop and eventually reverse climate change.

<https://bklyner.com/rita-joseph-green-new-deal-opinion/>

The climate crisis is THE existential threat facing our world today. The issue impacts every other policy field, ranging from food security, to health, to gun violence, to housing, and more. We need concrete and meaningful action at all levels of government to combat climate change and all of its adverse effects. The solution: a Green New Deal — going carbon-neutral by 2030 and creating good-paying city government jobs in the process. In New York City, with a population that is knowledgeable about the threat of climate change and progressive, we have the ability to lead the country in local, progressive climate legislation. I want to be part of the coalition that leads the way for the rest of the country to combat this threat, which is the gravest one facing humankind today and moving forward.

Unless significant and meaningful climate legislation is passed, we will continue to suffer the adverse effects of climate change and the problems we face will continue to get worse. For this reason, we cannot wait any longer—we need a Green New Deal now. New York City is one of the progressive capitals of the country and the world, and we must model what high-quality climate legislation looks like to others.

The scientific evidence says we need to act now, as we should have acted yesterday. The 2020's will be THE defining decade in the movement towards climate justice, and if we have a liveable planet 30 years from now. I will do everything I can to champion a Green New Deal for our City to lead the way for progressive climate legislation in all levels of government across the country.

We must go carbon-neutral and transition to 100% renewable energy by 2030, the latest we should set our goals to guarantee that our climate does not increase by temperatures that make our planet unlivable and lead to the extinction of species and ecosystems. I will also encourage businesses to prioritize sustainability.

I want to be upfront and make it clear that climate policy is an area in which I have very limited experience. I'd also like to emphasize how much I'd like to work with your organization to build my climate policy and messaging. Now more than ever, expertise and vision is needed when trying to solve complex policy questions. For that reason, I look forward to partnering with LCV and listening to your members as we work together to take action on climate. If elected, I pledge to always have an open door for LCV and support any and all legislation that you are supporting (including all legislation listed in your policy agenda). Additionally, I am open to receiving significant input from LCV when hiring staff—if there are qualified, thoughtful people with climate policy expertise looking for a job with the NYC Council, I want to make sure I know about them and can uplift them.



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.

The City has to make meaningful transportation reforms. I fully support the Open Streets initiative and believe passionately that it must be expanded further, especially in communities of color such as District 40. We have to make subways and buses significantly cheaper and improve service quality to encourage ridership and decrease the reliance on single occupancy vehicles. We also need to fight for gas taxes at the state level. We have to increase the quality and quantity of bike and bus lanes. We must significantly reform the use of parking placards and legalize e-bikes and e-scooters. Finally, we need to reduce the City’s vehicle fleet by a very significant margin, especially the NYPD’s vehicle fleet. The remainder of whatever remains of the City’s vehicle fleet must be fully electrified. Lastly, I am proud to be a vocal supporter of the upcoming congestion pricing plan.

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)



We need to conserve and expand NYC's parks and natural areas. The lack of parkland in District 40 is an issue that has troubled me for quite some time. District 40 is ranked 45th for the number of park & playground acres per 1,000 residents out of NYC's 51 City Council Districts—we can and must do better.

I am a passionate supporter of parks and increased green spaces and believe more/ improved parks are needed as part of a larger Green New Deal. The current lack of accessibility to parks and green, open, public space in District 40, and Black and Brown communities as a whole, is totally unacceptable. It is for this reason that I support a city-wide study to determine where it's most feasible to add green space in NYC. The study will take community input from various community stakeholders and will allow elected officials and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation to make decisions that are as informed as possible. If elected, I will advocate aggressively for more public open green spaces throughout the city, especially in District 40, making sure to engage with local organizations and activists (such as yourself) so that their opinion is taken into account in a meaningful way. I will oppose any and every effort to rezone parkland in any of NYC's neighborhoods. Quality public parks should not just be accessible for the privileged or wealthy; they belong in all neighborhoods. We must also protect natural forested areas, as they are crucial for mitigating climate change.

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 order to meet the City's Zero Waste goal by 2030, we must ensure that there is buy-in from the public as well as cooperation and leadership from city officials and private industry. The City must invest in a massive public education campaign that effectively informs the public about the benefits of diminishing waste reduction. Furthermore, the city must aggressively pursue a mandatory residential organics program and ban or discourage single-use items where feasible.

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)

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Our approach to combatting climate change must be multi-faceted and dynamic, especially on the energy and infrastructure front. I support the Renewable Rikers Act. Rikers Island's prison must immediately be shut down and the island's jurisdiction must be transferred to the Department of Environmental Protection for the purpose of renewable energy generation. We need to limit emissions in a meaningful way while simultaneously creating jobs. Furthermore, we must actively pursue the growth of green technologies, including battery storage and microgrids, to ensure a transition to a modern, 21st century economy.

6. Transportation (p. 5)

I support the expansion of non-vehicular transit, as instituting alternatives to cars is a crucial tool in the fight against climate change. Electric busses, bike lanes, bike share programs, ferries, and rail services must be properly funded and expanded to end our collective reliance on cars. We need to expand bus service throughout the city, with a special emphasis on expanding access in transit deserts and creating more bus lanes. Furthermore, we need to increase enforcement of bus and bike lane violations. The city also has to become more pedestrian friendly, which is why I passionately support increased Open Spaces. Lastly, I support significantly reforming the parking placard system to curtail abuse.

7. Resiliency (p. 6)



Communities like mine in District 40 have problems that are only being worsened by the growing climate crisis: food insecurity, poor infrastructure, flood zones, etc. Low-income communities and communities of color often are hardest hit on these fronts and climate change will continue to make these problems harder to deal with. A Green New Deal for NYC that focuses on increasing the resiliency of these types of communities will not only help grow our economy with good paying jobs, but will also help combat some of the long term health outcomes we face. Additionally, combating the climate emergency through infrastructure projects will also allow us to create sustainable improvements like increasing energy efficiency to lower utility bills, protecting our neighbors from rising temperatures, and investing in public transportation alternatives. I also support community food banks as a way to ensure that all Brooklynites, no matter their income level, have reliable access to healthy food. We also need to increase density in District 40, as low-lying neighborhoods in flood zones (in New York and beyond) may no longer become habitable, which will generate migration to inland areas such as District 40. Our city needs a comprehensive resiliency plan to protect at-risk communities and critical infrastructure. We need to strengthen zoning codes to protects areas that are particularly at-risk while simultaneously supporting robust natural buffers.

I fully support legislation that will mandate residential organic waste recycling. At the same time, the city must invest in robust recycling, composting, and waste diversion public education programs.

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)

I support a greenbelt trail to run through central Brooklyn. As I mentioned previously, District 40 is severely lacking in parks, and I will do everything in my power to expand access to parks, natural areas, and waterfront parks.

10. Lead Poisoning Prevention (p. 9)



Lead poisoning represents an absolute crisis. I pledge to use every power of my office to eradicate it to the fullest extent possible if elected. For this reason, I support legislation that would encourage greater transportation between City agencies to prevent exposing people to construction dusts in buildings that have known or are likely to have lead paint. Additionally, I support legislation that will require aggressive investigations by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene surrounding any report of elevated blood lead levels in youths. Lastly, NYC must improve tenant notification, interagency cooperation, number of inspections conducted, and actively issue stop-work orders in connection with lead paint and construction work

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

I 100% support the expansion and continued implementation of the Cool Neighborhoods program. We also need to evaluate and mitigate the increased risk of extreme heat exposure on children who are spending more time in their homes and learning virtually. Lastly, the City must reduce the urban heat island effect throughout the five boroughs by increasing the number of parks and trees.

12. Clean Air for All (p. 10)

Access to clean air is a human right. I support electrifying NYC's vehicle fleet, mandating that all school buses, whether public or private, are electric, reducing private car and truck usage in a meaningful way, transitioning from heating oils to cleaner heat sources.

13. Clean Water for All (p.11)



Like air, access to clean water is a human right. For this reason, I believe the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) should implement a formal, transparent reporting process on the progress of the Long Term Control Plans for the city's waterways. At the same time, we must go beyond projects by DEP, including urging the Departments of Transportation and Parks and Recreation to use pervious pavement and installation of bioswales and rain gardens wherever possible.

14. Sustainable Food Systems (p. 11)

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Food deserts are perennial issues in NYC: despite the FRESH program giving tax breaks and zoning incentives to grocers to locate in food deserts, food deserts persist.

No New Yorker should face food insecurity and I am ready to fight to guarantee New York's basic human rights to food, housing, and healthcare.

Adequate nutrition is a human right, but across the five boroughs, 12.9 percent of people were food insecure in 2018. Children are especially vulnerable— 16 percent were food insecure. In one of the richest cities in the world, this is inexcusable. We can and must do better.

Food insecurity is equally an economic, racial justice, and public health issue. The list of its consequences is extensive; it includes depression, anxiety, fatigue, immune dysfunction, diabetes, and heart disease. Along with that comes reduced productivity, increased crime, and a

lifetime economic burden that all members of our community must share. Like many of our societies' issues, it disproportionately burdens communities of color.

Social safety net programs and charities are crucial, and we must continue to support and

strengthen them. However, we must not only put a band-aid over the wound; we must also stop the blade that's causing it. We need to tackle the root causes of food insecurity and food apartheid—that is, poverty.

The Pew Research Center recently conducted a survey of Americans which found that only 23 percent of respondents had enough emergency savings to cover three months of their expenses. Eliminating food insecurity also means ensuring New Yorkers have equal opportunities, livable wages, affordable housing, and quality education.

By making progress to ensure that people are earning a fair wage, living in safe housing they can reasonably afford, sending their children to high quality schools, we are investing in our future and investing in helping people be better prepared for the hardships they may face. These early investments have shown time and time again to have long lasting, positive effects in communities.

We can combat food insecurity directly by expanding commercial urban agriculture, increasing the number of NYC schools that provide youth education programs on sustainability and healthy eating, and expanding food access programs to be redeemable at farmers markets across the city.

In order for all of this to work, it's also important that we foster a supportive, inclusive community to eradicate the stigma surrounding poverty. People should never feel ashamed or uncomfortable to get the help they need. Additionally, our local elected officials need to do more to ensure they are helping to provide access to basic services people desperately need.

