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2021 Environmental Questionnaire for Westchester 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 Westchester 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, May 14, 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.
- General election endorsements will be made by the NYLCV State Board on July 29, 2021.

CAMPAIGN CONTACT INFORMATION

Candidate name: Ruth Walter

Office sought (& district number if applicable): Westchester County Legislator, District 15

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Campaign manager's name and email: Brendan Carty cartyb44@gmail.com

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Scheduler's name and email: Sarah Carbonaro sjcarbonaro@gmail.com

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.

Presently, I serve as Chair of the Environment & Health Committee at the Westchester Board of Legislators. I have run meetings on a) noise pollution b) single-use plastic c) lead in drinking water. I have put \$750,000 in our capital budget to install bottle refill stations across the County in our parks and buildings. I have put \$1,000,000 in the capital budget to install senior playgrounds to allow seniors to enjoy the outdoors and increase strength and flexibility. I have worked on outreach to commercial property owners to let them know about potential partnership with commercial installers of rooftop solar installations, and I have advanced the green roof concept for bus shelters at the county Bee-line bus system. I have put \$250,000 in the capital budget for a hydrology study of the Bronx River and \$200,000 in the capital project for a noise barrier access gate to relieve flooding and increase resilience in my district.

Prior to becoming a legislator (and ongoing), I own a small business with an emphasis on ecological packaging, including starch-based packing peanuts, palm leaf plates and



water-based freeze-paks. I continue to look for solutions to single-use plastic packaging for food service, including Avast a cutlery based on avocado pits (Mexico) and other innovations. My family has invested in a company that makes compostable coffee pods and is expanding to compostable cutlery.

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 Westchester 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:

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. 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.

2. Energy (p. 5)

Electrifying the County fleet by 2030 has just been announced. I have driven a high-efficiency diesel car since 2010 and have an EV on order. More charging stations have been installed around the County and we passed a new ordinance that requires any capital project on parking to include EV stations. Encouraging the use of solar on the consumer end, I have partnered with Sustainable Westchester to host a forum on Westchester Power on 6/3/21. I have also personally done outreach to commercial building owners to inform them of the revenue potential of solar rooftop installations (modeled on the Yonkers initiative at Executive Blvd). I have proposed a model ordinance to offer municipalities a way to encourage/permit solar installations on rooftops and carports. One thing overlooked is conservation of energy. I would encourage the adoption of STRETCH code and encourage building owners to install and upgrade windows so they are not heating and cooling the outdoors (ie. leaking their HVAC). As Library President of the Bronxville Library Board of Trustees, I oversaw the upgrade of the HVAC system to a more efficient system in 2019.

The



Bronxville Green Committee is hard at work on installing food scrap recycling and just initiated their Bronze Certification for Climate Smart Communities. I have worked with Jason Baker to connect City of Yonkers to the County and state for grants and initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint.

3. Transportation (p.5)

Complete Streets and bicycle infrastructure is essential in our commuter-based communities, especially for short trips to the station. One of the positive things about COVID was fewer cars on the road, more children on bicycles, the BIRD scooter program in Yonkers and people generally getting outside to walk to commercial areas. We need to invest in East-West transportation in the County, possibly with a light-rail that could connect Metro North Hudson line and Harlem Line. Parking is extremely tight across my district, and the solution is more and better transportation options, not more parking infrastructure. I also support EV infrastructure and electrifying personal, business and government vehicles.

4. Resiliency (p. 6)

As I mentioned, flooding is a big problem in the east and west portion of my district (my district is experiencing flooding of both the Saw Mill River and Bronx River). I have addressed this issue in our capital budget and will continue to partner with and give 2021 County operating contract support to Groundwork Hudson Valley, whose program to remove invasive plants will return the riverbanks to the natural floodplain. I put \$250,000 into the Capital Budget for a hydrology study of the Bronx River and \$200,000 into the Capital Budget for a flood mitigation project along the Sprain Brook Parkway. These substantive actions will help homeowners and businesses before the next big storm and restore confidence that “someone is doing something” to address chronic flooding in the district. For example, in 2019, a flash flood submerged two cars driving along the Bronx River Parkway and passers-by spoke of the sense of helplessness and inertia they felt watching this happen over and over. With climate change, these vulnerable areas will become even more problematic. Hurricane Isais showed our vulnerability to power outages due to high winds. Tornados have struck in Westchester and we have a long way to go to increase our after storm repair and reconnect power and broadband lines.

5. Solid Waste (p. 7)

The County has done a great job with food scrap recycling, but more municipalities need to sign up. Yonkers has a heavier lift with many high-density apartment buildings and concerns over



vermin, but the cost savings is undeniable and so eventually may join. The Bronxville Green Committee is energized and working with high school students to encourage green practices.

Protecting People and Natural Resources

All New Yorkers deserve indoor and outdoor environments that are free of contamination and pollution.

6. Clean Land, Air, and Water (p. 9)

As Chair of the Environment & Health Committee, I have met with advocates for smoking cessation and indoor air quality. I also have met with advocates for bicycle infrastructure to lessen traffic on our roads and encourage bicycling not just for recreation but for transportation. The County has hired an outside consultant to help municipalities study ways to encourage Complete Streets, and I am doing outreach to municipal officials to encourage their using these consultants. We have also held meetings regarding water testing along the Bronx River and Saw Mill Rivers (Riverkeeper as well as Bronx River Alliance). Where they have found high levels of bacteria, we are working to source the contaminants and mitigate the sources. I regularly attend Soil and Water Advisory Board meetings as well as co chairing the Bronx River Advisory Board, which held its first meeting of 2021 last week. Working together with municipalities to address water, air and land issues is a way to keep people aware of short and long-term issues. Over the winter, a home heating oil leak into the Bronx River was quickly addressed and mitigated by Westchester Parks, NYS-DEC and local wildlife rescue organizations. I am highly attuned to the conditions of the river and local parks, recently nearly 50 tires were dumped on the Bronx River Reservation and I quickly alerted Westchester County Parks Department to remove these tires and contact police for any information about the illegal dumping. For the 2021 County operating budget, I advocated for nearly \$70,000 for community gardens across Yonkers, including new gardens at Andrus (school for vulnerable children) and Yonkers public library (Crestwood and Will branches) as well as support for existing gardens run by Greyston.

7. Sustainable Development (p. 10)

I support the adaptive reuse of large retail big box stores, including those along Central Park Avenue. Rather than green field developments, it is more ecological and economical to revitalize existing commercial corridors and commercial structures for things like schools, day care and light manufacturing. I've called for a Central Park Avenue business improvement district to



address traffic calming measures and beautification of the median, including pollinator pathways and heat spot mitigation.

8. Parks and Open Spaces (p.10 – 11)

We have worked to preserve open spaces and parks. I have worked to support efforts to keep JFK Marina open to the public as well as other spaces. As Vice-Chair of Parks & Recreation, I have supported infrastructure improvements as well as sent out notices for Parks during COVID, including Bicycle Sundays, park cleanups and other ways to bring the public outdoors. Participating as an elected official in Old Croton Aqueduct Cleanup, Sprain Ridge Pool Cleanup, Tibbets Brook Park cleanup, Bronx River vine cutting, Bacon Woods (Bronxville) cleanup and Village-wide cleanup, encourages the public to participate and heightens awareness of the necessity of protecting our parks.

9. Farms and Local Food (p. 11)

As the co-owner of Dobbs & Bishop Fine Cheese, I am working with local farms like Sprout Creek Farm (Poughkeepsie), Cato Corner Farms (Connecticut) and several Vermont Cheesemakers to bring farm products to customers. We have long supported local goods including bakery items from Nutmeg in Tuckahoe NY and charcuterie from Larchmont Charcuterie. We participate in the Bronxville Farmer's Market and have (in the past) participated in New Rochelle, White Plains, Chappaqua and Irvington farmers's markets. Seeing hundreds of customers each week come out to support local farmers and farmstand products has increased our understanding of farming locally as well as helping bring local farm products to customers.



