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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: Shekar Krishnan

Office sought & district number: City Council, District 25 – Elmhurst & Jackson Heights, Queens

Campaign e-mail: PeopleForShekar@gmail.com

Campaign phone: NA

Website: www.VoteShekar.com

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Scheduler's name and email: NA

## 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.

Environmental justice is a matter of racial and economic justice. We need to move towards a sustainable and green future in NYC as quickly as possible, committing as a city to 100% clean and renewable energy by 2030. Our survival depends on a Green New Deal for NYC. We must center low-income communities of color that have suffered from environmental racism, environmentally toxic development practices, and harmful urban planning practices for decades going back to the Robert Moses era. Creating a sustainable future for NYC means undoing these serious injustices and ensuring that green infrastructure benefits our most vulnerable first and foremost. It also requires taking a sustainable approach to every aspect of our city, from power, to housing, transportation, and workers' rights.

We must take swift and decisive action to become a sustainable and resilient city. Rapid climate change threatens our coastlines and low-income communities of color in particular. Aging buildings and traffic congestion are two of the biggest sources of pollution in our city, with grave consequences for our health and the environment. We

need to focus on expanding green public transit, create and enforce strict environmental and sustainability requirements on development, and build out strong, green, union jobs in the process.

Professionally, I am a civil rights lawyer representing low-income tenants and communities of color against housing discrimination and harmful land use/rezoning practices that displace neighborhoods. My work is in neighborhoods that have been harmed for decades by environmental racism and poor urban planning practices, and these issues overlap considerably with fighting for housing and community justice for residents who have called these neighborhoods home for so long.

Personally, my communities of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst have some of the least amount of open space in NYC. For that reason, I have fought for a decade in my neighborhood around these issues. I am a member of the Jackson Heights Green Alliance and a leading community activist in the fight for our district's open spaces – such as Diversity Plaza, the Travers Park expansion, and 34<sup>th</sup> Ave. Open Streets. I was the co-founder of Friends of Diversity Plaza, a crucial open space in our neighborhood that has become a vital town square in Queens. I am also an avid cyclist. To me, the fight to create a more sustainable world is a fight for the future of my children, who will inherit this planet and this city. I am 100% committed to fighting for a greener future for them.

## 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)



I am completely committed to this shift. One of my highest priorities in our climate crisis platform is to push for the creation and expansion of a sustainably-fueled mass transit system – as a straphanger myself who has always relied on mass transit every day to get around this city. Not only would such a green mass-transit system cut our carbon emissions and reduce harmful pollution, it can also be used to address transit equity and justice to high-density low-income communities that have been ignored for far too long. Also, as an avid cyclist, I strongly support the creation of a comprehensive network of protected bike lanes for both leisure and commuting in Queens, intentionally designed to make it easier for people to choose walking, cycling, or using other means of non-vehicular transportation to get to-and-from work and between parks in our borough and in our city.

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 have long been a committed advocate for open and green spaces, in our district and elsewhere. Elmhurst and Jackson Heights rank at the bottom of the list for greenspaces in New York. I am a co-founder of Friends of Diversity Plaza more than 8 years, now the central town square and a vital open space in our neighborhood that is also deeply cherished in Queens and NYC. For the last decade, I have been a vocal advocate and leader in the fight to expand Travers Park; in the ongoing fight to remove a Koppel car dealership from Travers Park (cutting into our space and breaking a fundamental promise to our community); as well as, recently, to make 34<sup>th</sup> Ave Open Streets a permanent Open Street. I will continue to fight for open spaces perhaps through innovative methods such as greening streets, pocket parks, and utilizing rooftops of city buildings. We can also use these green spaces in partnership with schools and innovators to test sustainable energy sources, urban farming, bee-keeping, or carbon capture technologies. At the same time, we must increase and expand green open spaces with a focus on equity, mindfully building out these spaces in low-income communities of color that have historically been denied green spaces and parks. My work around Diversity Plaza for the last decade has taught me so much about the issue of open space equity in our city. Through this work, I have collaborated with some of the leading advocates in the city around this issue. As a community lawyer, I also believe it is critical to solicit community input on the design and utilization of public spaces.

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)

Yes, I fully support citywide common sense waste management strategies. This is especially true of commercial wastes. We need to restore and expand organics recycling programs, which was wrongfully cut in the last City budget, and push for mandatory organic recycling both residentially and commercially. While doing so, we must also make sure that the costs of commercial recycling and waste collection are not passed on to consumers, especially in ways that hurt low-income communities.

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 am absolutely committed to a complete overhaul of New York’s energy and infrastructure in order to meet 2030 climate goals. This includes rapidly transition to a 100% sustainable power grid, converting all city-owned vehicles, and investing deeply in fostering innovation in renewable energy and green industries. We must pass a Green New Deal for NYC as well as implement Renewable Rikers now that it has passed. We can be a pioneering city in creating clean, green, union-led industries that provide good growth jobs. I will also fight to make New York City’s new buildings carbon neutral and to require sustainability retrofits and upgrades to existing buildings while also preventing landlords and developers from passing those costs onto renters.

6. Transportation (p. 5)

Transit justice and sustainability are key issues for me and top priorities in my platforms. As stated above, I support the creation and expansion of a sustainable and comprehensive mass transit network that centers transit equity and justice for vulnerable communities. Our district is a

key example of how streets can be carefully converted to the benefit of the community such as with the expansion of Travers Park and the 34<sup>th</sup> Ave. Open Street. We can and must replicate this success all across the city. I fully support the creation of a citywide network of protected bike lines and protected bus lanes and express busways (including here on a safer, greener Northern Boulevard in Jackson Heights), as well as development of further energy-efficient mass transit systems.

#### 7. Resiliency (p. 6)

We must absolutely strive to make our city more resilient through every avenue – changes to zoning, infrastructure, coastal ecology, technology and more. For far too long, communities of color have borne the brunt of the cost of climate change. We need to center and prioritize the most vulnerable communities of color in any resiliency plan. I will fight for an immediate moratorium on all luxury waterfront developments and instead push to restore natural buffers which can also serve as educational green spaces as well as to fortify our coastlines in the event of natural disasters. We also must absolutely strengthen and re-evaluate critical waterfront infrastructure, especially those facilities which, if breached, would result in massive harm to the environment – such as wastewater treatment, industrial facilities, and more. Zoning codes must be revised to protect homes and communities and the ULURP and land-use processes must be completely overhauled to stop placing profits over people.

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

I completely support improving New York’s solid waste management, including implementing laws to advance citywide recycling, composting, and reuse. I would also push for greater enforcement of waste regulations against commercial waste and waste collection. Organics waste, in particular, can be collected more broadly and efficiently and can also contribute to the cyclical economy/reused as compost in order to advance Zero Waste goals. We must invest more in and expand our organics waste collection program, not cut it, as was wrongfully done in the last City budget.

### 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)

Maintaining and expanding safe, open, green spaces are not only essential to combating environmental destruction and climate change but also massively beneficial to communities. Our district here in Elmhurst & Jackson Heights has one of the lowest ratios of green spaces to residents. We need to make sure that these green spaces are being created equitably throughout the city by prioritizing underserved neighborhoods and applying funding equity as well as open space equity. Existing public spaces and natural areas must be maintained and protected against degradation and privatization. Waterfront spaces should be converted to parks and protected natural spaces and we must absolutely stop all luxury redevelopment of waterfront lands.

10. Lead Poisoning Prevention (p. 9)

Lead poisoning is still a critical issue throughout the city and especially for our most vulnerable communities. We must absolutely have interagency cooperation to detect, prevent, and remove lead poisoning hazards. A key part of this is fully funding public housing in order to make necessary repairs and capital improvements as lead poisoning remains a massive and deadly issue for NYCHA residents. Enforcement must be increased against landlords who fail to remove lead hazards from their properties. Lead poisoning is overwhelmingly an issue of racial justice.

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

The urban heat island effect is devastating for low-income communities and is a matter of both racial justice and environmental justice. I completely support expanding the Cool Neighborhoods program as well as increasing city investment in other community solutions such as the creation of social hubs like libraries and community center, cooling green public spaces, and more.

12. Clean Air for All (p. 10)

I am absolutely committed to the electrification of city fleets and the prioritization of environmental justice communities. I believe we should aim for 2030 and will push hard to require compliance from commercial fleets as well as city and MTA fleets. I support the rapid conversion of heating oils to cleaner sources and also the ban on the installation of gas pipelines in new construction. I would completely support pilot programs for green loading zones, e-cargo bikes, and neighborhood distribution centers. As we've seen already in Jackson Heights, I also support shutting down selected streets and converting them into green pedestrian plazas and pocket parks. Also, I would love to see more collaboration between the city, educational institutes, and innovators to develop emissions capture technologies and strategies.

### 13. Clean Water for All (p.11)

I completely support full transparency of DEP and other city agencies so that we can keep them accountable to green goals like the Long Term Control Plans. I believe that all city agencies, including DOT, DOE, Parks, Sanitation, and more, must be held accountable to a comprehensive green plan; piecemeal one-off reforms are entirely insufficient to combat the climate crisis. Community input is absolutely essential as is language access to both educational/engagement materials as well as comment and feedback processes.

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

It is absurd that in the wealthiest city in the wealthiest nation in the world, we have thousands upon thousands of people lacking access to healthy, affordable food options. No child should ever, under any circumstance, be forced to go hungry. The city food distribution programs need to be expanded to improve access - both physically and in terms of language/cultural competence. Importantly, City food programs must support the work of community organizations on the ground and follow their lead, rather than bypassing them. We also need to de-stigmatize these programs so that more families and children are comfortable accessing them. The city should better fund and better enforce programs to expand green grocer access in a sustainable way. We can also expand the use of the Good Food Purchasing Program to more agencies and city contracts so that more and more of our food comes from local, ethical, and sustainable sources. Schools, government building rooftops, and greenspaces can be used to create community food gardens, apiaries, and learning centers for students and we should revise zoning codes to allow for sustainable urban agriculture. Fresh food access must be prioritized in our city. In fact, one of my upcoming weekly, virtual town halls in our



community is on food justice, and our panelists are some of the leading advocates in the city on this issue.

