

2018-2019 Blueprint for a Greener Capital Region



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

NYLCV EDUCATION FUND

INTRODUCTION

Every two years, the New York League of Conservation Voters Capital Region Chapter works closely with local advocates to develop a policy agenda. This Blueprint for a Greener Capital Region provides specific actions government officials can take to fight climate change, conserve our lands and waters, and protect public health.

Climate change is not only transforming our world, it's transforming the Capital Region. Recent severe storms destroyed our infrastructure, damaged our neighborhoods, and changed our landscape. We must become more resilient to the next storm, but we must also work to mitigate the long-term effects of a changing climate by promoting

renewable energy, building efficiency, sustainable transportation, and better solid waste management.

The Capital Region boasts vibrant natural resources from the Hudson River to the Adirondacks. Yet our natural assets are being threatened by development, pollution, and underfunding. We must safeguard and restore them for the next generation.

Finally, we must make sure that we take steps to protect public health. Every Capital Region resident deserves access to clean air, well-maintained parks for recreation, fresh food from local farms, and protection from toxic chemicals.

TOP PRIORITIES

Regional Transit: Denser, more walkable downtowns, increased ridership on public transportation, and use of ride-sharing services and the advent of self-driving cars present the Capital Region with a unique opportunity to rethink regional transit. We will advocate for expanded bus rapid transit and electric buses; better transportation networks between the central business districts in Troy, Albany, Schenectady, and Saratoga Springs; and a comprehensive rethink of how streets are used, including replacing Interstate 787 with a surface-level boulevard to restore pedestrian access to the water in Albany.

Renewable Energy: Renewable energy can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution across the region, but it is challenging to site large-scale renewable energy installations and can be needlessly difficult to install small-scale renewable technology. We will work with municipal and county governments to establish guidelines for siting utility-scale renewable energy, reducing red tape, and creating new incentives for small-scale renewable energy.

Clean and Safe Water: We will work to ensure counties and local governments in the Capital Region comply with new testing requirements for emerging contaminants in drinking water, invest in wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, obtain their fair share of state funding for these projects, and continue to address combined sewer overflows (CSOs), including through investment in green infrastructure.

SUSTAINABLE & TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Disappearing open space, traffic congestion, and a lack of coordinated planning pose serious threats to the region's economic future, while a car-dependent transportation system has led to substantial environmental challenges. Creating livable and sustainable communities should be a goal for existing and future generations. To achieve this, we should permit increased density, diversity, and mixed uses in our downtowns, expand access to energy efficient mass transit, and encourage walkable and bikeable neighborhoods.

1. Modernize zoning, tax incentives, and regulations to encourage mixed land use, compact development, downtown revitalization, open space protection, and historic preservation.
2. Reduce or eliminate parking minimums to encourage walkable neighborhoods.
3. Redesign arterial streets as complete walkways, implement traffic calming projects, lower speed limits, install electronic speed enforcement, increase penalties and enforcement for reckless and dangerous driving, and invest in other initiatives focused on safety on all streets in order to make communities more walkable and bikeable.
4. Require electric vehicle charging stations in municipal garages and parking lots and set concrete targets for converting to cleaner fleets. Encourage electric vehicle charging station networks in both municipal and private garages.
5. Create a network of complete streets that include dedicated bus lanes, protected bike lanes, bike and pedestrian trail networks, and connect residential areas to commercial areas, parks, and green spaces.
6. Explore opportunities for the creation of bike share and the expansion of car share initiatives.
7. Ensure waterfront development is consistent with smart growth goals and facilitates public access to the waterfront and water.
8. Empower Conservation Advisory Councils to encourage local and regional coordination.
9. Identify and encourage redevelopment of brownfield sites and utilize the Brownfields Opportunity Area program to ensure that local communities are engaged.
10. Work with state and regional agencies to develop light rail connections or bus rapid transit (BRT) within the Capital Region.



OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

New York's spectacular natural resources provide awe-inspiring views and recreational opportunities, and also help keep our children and families healthy. Our parks, rivers, and lakes, and should be protected so future generations can enjoy them.

1. Encourage adaptive reuse of existing building structures instead of new development and support more density in downtown areas.
2. Protect open space from development by promoting local bond initiatives, conservation land trusts, community preservation funds, dedicated revenue streams for conservation, and reduced property taxes for open space.
3. Create biotic corridors and expand regional and local land banks to preserve green space for livable neighborhoods.
4. Adopt zoning that preserves existing green space and open space set-asides.
5. Explore and encourage funding streams for farmland and open space that can leverage private and public dollars.

ENERGY

A major pillar of addressing climate change and air pollution is energy efficiency and investing in clean energy. This can be achieved in many ways: in residential and commercial settings, in existing and new buildings, and with cutting-edge technology and the smarter use of older technology.

1. Adopt a Climate Smart Community resolution and become a DEC certified Climate Smart Community by reducing greenhouse gases and taking action to protect your community.
2. Adopt green building standards for new residential and commercial construction and create incentives for energy-efficiency upgrades in existing buildings.
3. Remove impediments in laws, codes, and practices to streamline the installation of renewable energy sources for homeowners and business owners.
4. Pass local ordinances to control light pollution.
5. Support clean energy projects such as microgrids, solar, wind, geothermal, and other new technologies.
6. Design and support programs that ensure equitable delivery of reliable clean energy and efficiency programs.
7. Participate in PACE financing programs to increase clean energy installation and use.

SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ASSET MANAGEMENT

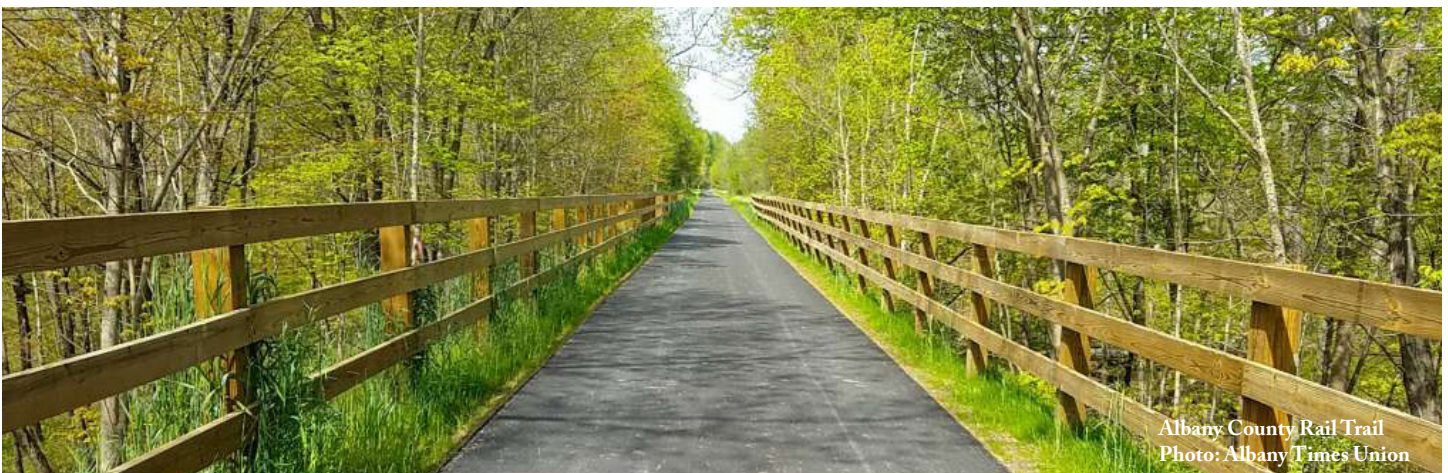
By spending money and allocating resources wisely, local and regional governments can have a significant impact on energy use and the environment.

1. Purchase energy from renewable sources and increase clean energy purchasing power through intra-governmental aggregation.
2. Conduct energy audits of municipal facilities, purchase Energy Star-rated equipment, invest in energy efficiency retrofits, and upgrade streetlights to energy-efficient bulbs.
3. Install clean energy generation projects on public lands and buildings.
4. Convert municipal fleets to hybrid, electric, or other clean energy vehicles.
5. Plant street trees and support other green streets initiatives.
6. Fund public education and outreach on existing energy efficiency incentives.
7. Create programming in parks, farms, and other open space to encourage the public's use and appreciation of them.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Every Capital Region resident deserves access to clean air, well-maintained parks for recreation, fresh food from local farms, and protection from toxic chemicals.

1. Encourage and accelerate the adoption of cleaner alternatives to #4 and #6 home heating oil, including natural gas and electric heat.
2. Replace diesel vehicles, especially those that transport children, with electric vehicles, including electric buses.
3. Protect parks and playgrounds from alienation of parkland.
4. Adopt Integrated Pest Management plans for publicly-owned property to reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides.
5. Create pocket parks, community gardens and urban farms and protect them through conservation easements held by land trusts or municipalities.



Albany County Rail Trail
Photo: Albany Times Union

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

Managing and protecting regional natural resources will require a comprehensive effort that focuses on air, water, and land.

1. Provide incentives and technical assistance to communities, property owners, and developers to manage stormwater on-site with a variety of technologies such as green roofs, bioswales, rain gardens, and rain barrels. Implement strategies outlined in stormwater management plans.
2. Integrate the use of native plants for landscaping and implement programs to address the growing threat of invasive species. Work with local partners and public officials to educate the public about invasive species and develop a robust eradication program in Westchester.
3. Develop regional, county, and local plans to restore streams and other water resources.
4. Integrate permeable surfaces into new road, sidewalk and parking lot construction projects.
5. Prioritize and fund a forestry and tree regeneration program including in downtown areas.
6. Improve water quality and aquatic habitat by updating sewage treatment plants and reducing combined sewer overflow drainage.
7. Ensure that rail transportation of crude oil complies with federal, state, and local safety and environmental regulations, especially in environmentally critical areas.

WASTE

Waste is a large contributor to pollution and climate change, from dirty diesel trucks that export waste to landfills in other states to methane emissions as waste decomposes in landfills. Sustainable waste management can protect the environment and public health and create local jobs.

1. Eliminate the needless waste and pollution carryout bags create by passing a local law that includes a fee on all carryout bags or a ban on thin plastic bags with a fee on all other carryout bags.
2. Work with local governments to boost recycling rates.
3. Incentivize regional recycling facilities, anaerobic digesters, compost sites, and other technologies that can process waste with a smaller impact on the environment.
4. Explore curbside collection of residential food waste and commercial organic waste recycling programs.
5. Export as much waste as is feasible by rail rather than by truck.
6. Develop waste reduction plans and engage schools, restaurants, and municipalities in food composting programs.
7. Implement a “save-as-you-throw” program to charge for collection of non-recyclable trash based on the amount being thrown away.

FARMS AND LOCAL FOOD

A vibrant agricultural sector plays a key role in managing development and providing access to healthy, fresh foods.

1. Work with the Department of Agriculture and Markets to expand the Fresh Connect Program to create more farmers' markets, especially in communities lacking access to fresh healthy food.
2. Maintain productive farmland through the acquisition and donation of development rights.
3. Create programs to assist young and beginning farmers.
4. Adopt legislation that protects farmland.
5. Create outreach and awareness campaigns to take advantage of the growing popularity of regional agriculture, sustainable viticulture, and local agricultural products.
6. Explore and encourage funding streams for farmland and open space that can leverage private and public dollars.





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NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS, INC.

NYLCV is the only nonpartisan, statewide environmental organization in New York that fights for clean water, clean air, renewable energy and open space through political action.

NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND, INC.

NYLCVEF educates, engages and empowers New Yorkers to be effective advocates for the environment.