

# Blueprint for a Greener Capital Region 2016-2017



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS

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NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS 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 analysis** - Traveling between central business districts in Troy, Albany, Schenectady and Saratoga Springs and moving workers to their jobs should be planned for and prioritized as the Capital District Transportation Authority continues to improve and change. We will work with the Regional Economic Development Council and a local partner to develop general guidelines for such a transit expansion with the goal of a funded study for regional rapid transit such as bus rapid transit or light rail.

**Renewable energy** - We will push to streamline and modernize the process for obtaining government approval to install renewable energy facilities. We will also push county and city governments to install renewable energy on government properties.

**Clean and safe water** - We will work to ensure counties and localities regularly test their drinking water using EPA's Contaminant Candidate List and Unregulated Drinking Water Contaminants.



Saratoga Springs' Complete Streets initiative has implemented measures to improve safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and motorists through features like curb cuts, plazas, bike lanes, bus lanes, medians, and better signage.

## SUSTAINABLE & TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Disappearing open space, traffic congestion and the lack of coordinated planning pose serious threats to the region's economic future and 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. This goal should include entitlements that permit increased density and diversity in our downtowns and neighborhoods with convenient mass transit.

- Modernize zoning, tax incentives, and regulations to encourage mixed land use, compact development, downtown revitalization, open space protection, and historic preservation.
- Work with local towns to develop downtown revitalization plans.
- Reduce or eliminate parking minimums to encourage walkable neighborhoods.
- Adopt a Climate Smart Community resolution.
- Redesign arterial streets as "complete streets" in order to make communities more walkable and bikeable.
- Implement traffic calming projects, lower speed limits, install electronic speed enforcement, increased penalties and enforcement for reckless and dangerous driving, and other initiatives focused on safety on all streets.
- Ensure waterfront development is consistent with smart growth goals and facilitates public access to waterfront and to water.
- Re-establish Conservation Advisory Councils to encourage local and regional coordination.
- Identify and encourage redevelopment of brownfield sites, and utilize the Brownfields Opportunity Area program to ensure that local communities are engaged.

# TRANSPORTATION

**Maximizing use of transit networks and developing new mixed-use housing and commercial centers that are accessible to energy-efficient mass transit will help fight climate change while spurring economic activity. Transit is key to developing walkable neighborhoods and towns.**

- Create dedicated bus lanes, bike and pedestrian trail networks, and protected bike lanes that connect residential to commercial areas, parks, and green spaces.
- Increase funding for regional transit and increase service and routes.
- Encourage electric vehicle charging station networks in both municipal and private garages.
- Encourage bike share and car share initiatives.
- Develop light rail connections or bus rapid transit (BRT) between Albany, Schenectady, Saratoga Springs and Troy.

# OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

**New York's spectacular natural resources not only provide awe-inspiring views and recreational opportunities, they help keep our children and families healthy. Our parks, rivers, lakes and oceans should be protected so future generations can enjoy them.**

- 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.
- Expand regional and local land banks to preserve green space for livable neighborhoods.
- Create local community gardens and urban farms, and encourage their conservation easements be held by a land trust or municipality.
- Adopt zoning that preserves existing green space and open space set-asides.

**Water contamination in towns such as Hoosick Falls have sparked an important discussion about monitoring and protecting our water to ensure it is safe for drinking.**





Left: The CTDA's BusPlus program has upgraded three lines to create bus rapid transit corridors with express stops, articulated buses, bus-only lanes and a number of customer amenities designed to provide better, faster service. Right: Volunteers picking up debris in Schenectady's Woodlawn Preserve Pond. The pond and its surrounding wetlands play an critical role in local stormwater management.

## SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC ASSET MANAGEMENT

Local and regional governments can make significant impacts on energy use and the environment simply by deciding to spend money and deploy resources wisely.

- Purchase energy from renewable sources.
- Purchase Energy Star-rated equipment.
- Install solar and wind generation on public buildings.
- Increase clean energy purchasing power through intra-governmental aggregation.
- Convert municipal vehicle fleets to hybrid, electric, or other zero emission vehicles.
- Use 5% biofuel in existing diesel vehicles, especially those that transport children.
- Plant street trees and support other "green streets" initiatives.
- Conduct energy audits of municipal facilities.
- Develop a plan to reduce each locality's total fossil fuel use by 4% per year, in line with an Energy Descent Action Plan.
- Fund public education and outreach on existing energy efficiency incentives.
- Participate in PACE financing programs to increase clean energy installation and use.
- Upgrade street lights to energy-efficient LED bulbs.
- Adopt Integrated Pest Management plans for publicly-owned property to reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides.
- Create programming in parks, farms and other open space to encourage the public's use and appreciation of them.

# NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

**Managing and protecting regional natural resources will require a comprehensive effort that looks at air, water and land.**

- Reduce the use of single-use plastic bags and encourage re-useable bags through fees and regulations.
- Provide incentives for communities, property owners and developers to manage storm water on-site with a variety of technologies such as green roofs, bioswales, rain gardens and rain barrels, and implement strategies outlined in storm water management plans.
- Encourage the use of native plants for landscaping and implement programs to address the growing threat of invasive species.
- Develop regional, county and local plans to restore streams and other water resources.
- Encourage permeable paving surfaces.
- Develop waste reduction plans such as municipal composting and “swap meets.”
- Prioritize and fund a forestry and tree regeneration program, including downtown areas.
- Protect parks and playgrounds from alienation of parkland.
- Improve water quality and aquatic habitat by updating sewage treatment plants and reducing combined sewer overflow drainage.
- Ensure that rail transportation of crude oil complies with federal, state, and local safety and environmental regulations, especially in environmentally critical areas.

# FARMS AND LOCAL FOOD

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

- Work with the state Department of Agriculture and Markets to expand the FreshConnect Program to create more farmers markets throughout the region—especially in “food desert” communities.
- Maintain productive farmland through the acquisition and donation of development rights.
- Adopt legislation that protects farmland.
- Create outreach and awareness campaigns to take advantage of the growing popularity of regional agriculture, sustainable viticulture and local agricultural products.
- 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. 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.**

- Adopt green building standards for new residential and commercial construction projects.
- Remove impediments in laws, codes and practices to streamline the process for homeowners and business owners to install renewable energy sources.
- Create incentives for energy-efficiency upgrades in existing buildings and new development.
- Pass local ordinances to control light pollution.
- Support clean-energy projects, such microgrids, solar, distributed energy and efficiency investments.
- Expand the use of biofuel blends in home heating oil, commercial buildings, and vehicles—especially vehicles used in dense urban areas with high levels of childhood asthma.
- Encourage the adoption of #2 home heating oil or natural gas to replace #4 and #6 oil.
- Design and support programs that ensure equitable delivery of reliable clean energy and efficiency programs.

**Left: Monolith Solar, a rapidly growing company based in the Capital Region is manufacturing and installing rooftop solar panels on schools, homes, and businesses. Right: The Capital Region boasts a large network of farmers markets, such as this one on Empire State Plaza, which provides fresh, local produce to city dwellers.**





**30 Broad Street, 30th Floor  
New York, NY 10004  
Phone: 212-361-6350  
info@nylcv.org  
www.nylcv.org  
www.nylcvef.org**

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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.*

Cover Photo: Cohoes Falls by Tyler McCall