

Blueprint For A Greener Westchester



2009 Westchester Policy Agenda



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS
EDUCATION FUND
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ABOUT THE NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS EDUCATION FUND

The New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (NYLCVEF) engages and educates New Yorkers on environmental issues and the environmental decision-making processes at the local, regional, state and federal government levels. NYLCVEF fosters open, nonpartisan discussion on environmental policy and empowers New Yorkers to be effective advocates for the environment.

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Building on the Successes of the Westchester Action Plan

In 2008, the Westchester County Global Warming Task Force released a countywide climate change action plan called the Westchester Plan for Climate Change and Sustainable Development (WAP 2008). This document lays out a comprehensive vision for a sustainable future for Westchester County and commits the county to a 20 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2015 and an 80 percent reduction by 2050. NYLCVEF applauds this bold and forward-thinking initiative and highlights here some of the measures we believe to be of the greatest urgency.

NYLCVEF's 2009 Westchester Policy Agenda articulates our vision of what Westchester's county government, as well as municipal governments throughout the county, can do to further critical sustainability goals. The issues addressed in this document – ranging from smart growth and transportation to protecting Westchester's dwindling stock of open space – also coincide with NYLCVEF's broad statewide advocacy goals that are detailed in our State Policy Agenda.

It is our hope that, through intelligent and forward-thinking planning, Westchester County can address these challenges and create communities that will be models of suburban sustainability.



**NYLCVEF President
Marcia Bystryn**

SUSTAINABLE & TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Westchester County's policymakers and community leaders are faced with a series of important economic and community development challenges. High housing costs and traffic congestion pose serious threats to the county's economic future and a car-dependent transportation system has led to substantial environmental challenges.

A new, more comprehensive growth strategy is needed to mitigate the serious environmental consequences of Westchester's population and to create livable and sustainable communities that will be desirable for future generations. This new development model must encourage a focus on downtown revitalization with increased residential density as well as mixed-use and transit-oriented development. A properly implemented sustainable growth program will create the sort of housing diversity that is critically needed for the county, while preserving fast disappearing open space and reducing carbon emissions and traffic congestion.

NYLCVEF urges Westchester's local leadership to adopt sustainable growth strategies by:

- Creating financial and regulatory incentives to encourage the adaptive reuse of older properties.
- Changing zoning regulations to allow for and encourage increased residential density in downtown areas.



- Changing zoning regulations to encourage mixed-use development in areas with adequate infrastructure.
- Creating inclusionary zoning programs aimed at encouraging affordable housing.
- Encouraging downtown development and revitalization projects.
- Actively identifying and working to develop brownfield sites as alternatives to environmentally costly “greenfield” development.
- Improving local land use review processes by simplifying administrative decision-making in a way that will encourage projects that meet smart growth design principles.

These broad smart growth principles should form the basis of local land use actions. NYLCVEF will work to make sure that these principles are incorporated into local planning activities and will support individual projects that meet these criteria.



ENERGY CONSERVATION & CLIMATE ACTION

The impact of human actions on the global climate is now past debate. New evidence of a warming climate emerges with regularity, and the effects of these changes are potentially catastrophic.

Other sections of this agenda, such as policies encouraging sustainable growth policies and mass transit improvements, will have a positive impact on controlling climate change. However, municipalities can directly act to control climate change by improving energy efficiency both in buildings and vehicles. Americans consume enormous amounts of energy, with consumption projected to increase in the future at an unsustainable rate. Reducing energy use will lower greenhouse gas emissions and greatly improve our environment. Local governments can take the lead in reducing energy usage by encouraging conservation within their own facilities and in private homes and businesses.

Much action needs to occur in the next year to implement the recommendations of WAP 2008 and begin the process of reducing the county's environmental footprint. The following initiatives mirror many of WAP-2008's goals.

We believe these to be the most important short-term projects that both the county and local governments can take to implement this program:

- Create an easily accessible system for measuring the progress of the county's implementation of the WAP 2008 program, develop clear goals and indicators for key WAP initiatives and pass legislation requiring a robust reporting program to ensure the efficient implementation of WAP 2008.
- Partner with local labor leaders to create a green-collar job training program that will support the development of a local green economy based around energy efficiency programs.
- Adopt green building standards for new construction projects.
- Conduct energy audits of municipal facilities.
- Convert municipal vehicle fleets to hybrid or other clean vehicles.
- Plant street trees and support other "green streets" initiatives.
- Commit to purchasing energy from renewable sources.
- Set clear goals for energy reductions.
- Purchase Energy-Star rated equipment.
- Create incentives for the construction of energy-efficient private homes and commercial properties.
- Require all new heated pools to be heated using solar power.
- Pass local ordinances to control light pollution.
- Consolidate community services where practical.



TRANSPORTATION

Westchester County relies on its excellent mass transit links to New York City for its economic vitality and quality of life. Improving and expanding these transit networks and fostering the development of new housing and commercial centers that are accessible to energy-efficient mass transit is a cornerstone of our plan to combat climate change.

We urge all Westchester County and local officials to:

- Support the inclusion of mass transit options in any plans for the rebuilding of the Tappan Zee Bridge.
- Support increased funding for the MTA.



Mass transit options should be included in any plan for rebuilding the Tappan Zee Bridge.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

Westchester County's extensive coastline varies from the spectacular expanse of the Hudson River to the rivers and saltwater environments of Long Island Sound. In recent decades environmental regulations and cleanup efforts have vastly improved water quality in both the Hudson and the Sound. Unfortunately, much work still needs to be done. Protecting these important natural resources should be a vital goal of every Westchester elected official. Managing and protecting these resources will require a comprehensive effort whose success will be largely dependent on the ability of local governments to coordinate the upgrading and maintenance of infrastructure projects.

The local leadership of the many towns and villages in the county must work collectively to protect the region's natural resources. NYLCVEF urges policymakers to:

- Consolidate environmental facilities where significant economies or environmental resources can be realized.
- Revise drainage codes to provide incentives for communities, property owners and developers to manage stormwater on-site with green roofs, rain gardens and rain barrels, and develop a countywide stormwater management plan that emphasizes point-source control solutions
- Systematically identify and implement opportunities to improve water quality and aquatic habitats and develop countywide plans to restore streams and other water resources.
- Support increased funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) and actively utilize monies made available through the EPF to finance local resource protection programs.

OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Open space is fast disappearing in many areas of Westchester County. While some communities in the county have made laudable efforts to preserve open space, it is clear that more needs to be done. Local leaders need to develop planning strategies such as clustering, creating pocket parks in urban areas and encouraging biotic corridors in less densely populated areas. Communities should also make certain that their master plans encourage affordable housing and residential adaptive reuse of building structures in downtown areas. Taken together, these strategies will help ease development pressure affecting “greenfields” and permit further preservation of available open space.

NYLCVEF urges policymakers to:

- Create community open space acquisition funds with funding coming from local bond propositions, increases in property tax levies or the Community Preservation Act.
- Look for opportunities to protect land in partnership with other levels of government as well as not-for-profit land preservation organizations.
- The county government should develop a planning resource center so that local land use officials can learn about the variety of open space preservation tools available to municipalities, including conservation easements.
- Map green space in each Westchester town, village and city to help determine where development could and should occur, and, therefore, where open space is most needed, accessible and viable for preservation efforts.



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