



Blueprint For A Greener Schenectady

2008 Policy Agenda



NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS
EDUCATION FUND
www.nylcvef.org



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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Balancing the Environment with Economic Growth

Schenectady, a city with a proud history of industrial and scientific achievement, has suffered for decades from problems familiar to many urban areas in the Northeast. The city has seen its population fall and its property values and fiscal health decline.

The city, however, has many advantages. A central location in the scenic and increasingly popular Mohawk River Valley provides the city's business community with easy access to

Albany and other communities of the growing Capital Region. Additionally, the presence of Union College and the headquarters of General Electric's corporate research and development in neighboring Niskayuna provide rich sources of human capital.

Implementing a comprehensive sustainability agenda will make Schenectady a leader in the growing "green cities" movement and will position it to take advantage of a burgeoning green economy. Through creative planning and the application of sustainable development practices, Schenectady can once again become the "City of Invention."



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcia Bystryn". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Marcia Bystryn
President



A COMPREHENSIVE SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

Sustainability is a unified policy approach to making our society more environmentally sensitive and enhancing its ability to responsibly meet the challenges of population and economic growth. Urban policy makers must learn to encourage growth in an intelligent and well-planned manner that does not harm the environment. Sustainability policies provide the key to marrying economic growth with environmental protection. Creating a truly sustainable city, however, requires a comprehensive approach to policy making.

The city should embrace the principles of sustainable development and environmental consciousness articulated below and develop a series of regulations and policies spanning the entire range of government activities. In some instances, city funding is required to fully implement a recommendation – a difficult task when some cities, like Schenectady, are facing difficult economic times. However, in order to implement this agenda and other sustainability activities currently being contemplated by the city, Schenectady should:

- Establish an Office of Sustainability that is legally mandated to develop and implement a comprehensive sustainability agenda. This office should be required to assist in coordinating and developing sustainability policies and practices for an array of city agencies, including the Departments of Development, Parks, Engineering and Buildings.

SMART GROWTH & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Despite its many challenges, Schenectady has seen an impressive increase in development activity under the leadership of Mayor Brian Stratton. Since 2004, more than \$150 million has been invested in the downtown area, and the results are apparent in new commercial and retail development. Mayor Stratton has also taken the extraordinary step of launching the “Schenectady 2020” planning effort. This comprehensive planning exercise, the first in the city since 1971, includes a comprehensive citywide master plan, neighborhood plans and a comprehensive update of the city’s zoning regulations. The plan is based on several “smart growth” principles, including promoting mixed-use development, developing walkable neighborhoods and multiple transportation choices, and preserving open space.

NYLCVEF applauds these efforts. We also recommend the following steps be undertaken to build on the mayor’s laudable initiatives and further the goal of a truly sustainable Schenectady:

- Continue to improve access to the Mohawk River waterfront and develop plans to enhance the utilization of this valuable, scenic resource;
- Continue to improve the Amtrak station and develop a transit-oriented development plan to take advantage of this resource;
- Continue to work with the Capital District Transportation Authority to improve transit options and enhance the city’s connection to Albany International Airport;
- Continue to improve the pedestrian environment throughout the city;
- Continue to create bike lanes as a part of large development projects and reduce the number of projected parking spaces per project;
- Build on the partnership created with General Electric to encourage more “cleantech” and other green industries to relocate to the city; and
- Encourage the redevelopment of the city’s historic properties and communities. The city should provide direct incentives to property owners to restore and “green” historic properties and should develop resources to assist property owners with the technical aspects of “greening” their properties.

ENERGY CONSERVATION & CLIMATE ACTION

Encouraging smart growth policies and improving mass transit will have a positive impact on controlling climate change. However, municipalities can directly act to control climate change by improving energy efficiency of buildings and vehicles. Americans consume enormous amounts of energy, with consumption projected to increase at an unsustainable rate in the future. Reducing energy use will control greenhouse gases and greatly improve our environment.

Local governments can take the lead in reducing energy usage by encouraging conservation both within their own facilities and in private homes and businesses. Schenectady has already taken the lead by conducting an energy audit and committing to reduce its carbon footprint seven percent by 2012. The city has already cut its carbon output by four percent over the last four years, but to meet and exceed its seven-percent goal, NYLCVEF encourages the city of Schenectady to:

- Develop clear and attainable targets for reducing the city's energy usage and carbon footprint. This action plan should be developed within the next year and should include reasonable deadlines and comprehensive metrics that allow the public to measure the city's progress towards achieving its goals. Key components of the plan should:
 - ✓ Adopt necessary local ordinances to require reduction in municipal energy usage;
 - ✓ Develop a mechanism for the city to regularly report progress toward reducing its own energy consumption and carbon footprint;
 - ✓ Require all new vehicles purchased by the city after December 31, 2008, to be hybrid or able to operate using ultra-low sulfur diesel (ULSD) fuel; and
 - ✓ Require the city to purchase only EnergyStar-rated equipment.

In addition, NYLCVEF encourages the city of Schenectady to:

- Build on the recent construction of 10 affordable green homes in the city by adopting green building (LEED) standards for all new construction projects and creating incentives for the construction of energy-efficient and environmentally friendly private homes and commercial properties. Specifically, the city should:
 - ✓ Update building and electrical codes to require energy-efficient appliances and construction techniques;
 - ✓ Incorporate a review of proposed projects' energy consumption into the land use approval process; and
 - ✓ Create and fund a city office devoted to encouraging homeowners to make their homes environmentally friendly.





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