EXCLUSIVE: Environmentalists Call on Bloomberg to Make the Most of Time Left

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As Mayor Michael Bloomberg's tenure draws to a close, a coalition of environmental organizations is urging him to take action now to make the city more sustainable.

"Now is the time to lock in forward-thinking sustainability policies and prioritize the most critical projects for completion," the New York League of Conservation Voters and other organizations say in Bloomberg-Countdown.pdf .

The goal of the 2013 New York City Sustainability Countdown is "to help focus the city's efforts for the remained of 2013."

The groups argue the city could take immediate steps in several key areas, including preparing for the impacts of climate change; addressing ongoing air quality issues; reducing and de-contaminating the waste stream; making buildings more energy efficient; and increasing mass transit options.

They note that their goals "are practical and achievable, and with the support of Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council, can be made realities by the year's end."

One such goal is requiring the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to conduct a Community Air Survey in every borough. The report's authors argue that a more "more complete picture" of New York City's air quality is needed.

"The survey should measure street-level air pollution at 150 locations across the city over every season, gathering data on common air pollutants that affect public health," NYLCV and partners like the American Lung Association state. They also propose that data collected during these

surveys should be made available to the public in an annual report.

Last week, as the region was scorched by temperatures into the 100s, the state issued air quality health advisories for the metro and Long Island regions three times because of dangerously high surface ozone levels.

Other sustainability goals that the group says can be accomplished by year's end include making mass transit more affordable and increasing options for commuters.

They propose that the city's Department of Transportation finalize its preparation for Select Bus Service routes now in development (M34/34a, M15, B44, Bx41, S79) and start to plan for two to three new SBS routes. The group is also urging the City Council to pass existing legislation that would require employers of fifty or more to offer tax-free federal transit benefits.

Dan Hendrick, a spokesman for NYLCV, noted that other cities have already passed similar legislation in order to expand the number of employers who offer such federal benefits.

Perhaps the most far-reaching goal is that the city lock-in and prioritize planning for climate change no matter who becomes mayor.

The Sustainability Countdown proposes that "climate resilience" become a "clear, codified responsibility of the Mayor's Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability." And the document states that the public should be able to track the city's progress through the release of annual assessments.

NYLCV and its partners say that the city can act now to protect against the growing risk of flooding by following its own just-released recommendations [link to Resiliency report] to study the viability of additional Bluebelts , Greenstreets , and other naturally-occurring drainage systems throughout the city.

Dan Hendrick said the mayor and the City Council have made the city's present and future environmental sustainability a major priority, but that as time drains away, "we see there's going to be competing priorities … There's only so much bandwith that the administration can have right now."

Referring to the Sustainability Countdown, he added, "These are really the important ones. The criteria to be in the countdown (was that) … It had to be far-along. That it has real traction, and there's a mechanism for it to advance. And now it's time to move ahead and lock it in."

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