

# National Resources Defense Council - Local Questions to Ask

How can you make sure your local government is doing its part? If your city has a sustainability director or resiliency officer—and more than 200 U.S. cities do—that’s a good sign. If not, put some heat on the mayor’s office by asking the five questions below.

## 1. What are our options for cleaner transportation?

Cities nationwide are jumping on the “mobility on demand” bandwagon by improving public transportation and walkability and supporting car- and bike-sharing programs that give residents quick, cost-effective ways to get around without personal vehicles. Even cities historically resistant to mass transit are incorporating projects to improve congestion and solve the “last mile” problem—how to get people from a transportation hub to their home or office.

## 2. Can we handle extreme weather?

If your city has a disaster preparedness plan, it should be posted on its official government website. If it doesn’t, international and national government agencies [offer tool kits](#) to help create one with community input. Involving local stakeholders will boost the plan’s chances of success.

Of course, resiliency isn’t only about reacting to disastrous weather events; it’s also about prevention. This is where green infrastructure, which absorbs water naturally without overtaxing drainage and sewer systems, comes into play. Push for green roofs, which capture rainwater and help cool buildings and streets, and initiatives to plant more trees and sidewalk gardens, all of which prevent polluted runoff from entering public water systems.

## 3. What are we doing to encourage energy efficiency?

City buildings, specifically, are responsible for more than 50 percent of U.S. energy consumption. Just as they’ve tackled smoking, recycling, and other wasteful or unhealthy behaviors, now many city governments are working to pass regulations for energy efficiency in existing buildings. Building owners should be compelled to calculate their energy consumption and use that data to improve their overall

efficiency. Residents can play their part, too, by turning off lights, air conditioners, appliances, and computers, which drain energy even in idle or “sleep” mode.

#### 4. Do we have enough access to locally grown food?

“It may seem obvious, but growing your own food lessens demand for, and pollution from, big corporate agriculture,” Poticha says. Community gardens and farmers’ markets are part of a healthy urban ecosystem and have the added benefit of bringing communities together. Ask your city to support these efforts and to purchase locally grown food for schools and other city services.

#### 5. Are we working to protect every resident?

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio once said, “A beautifully sustainable city that is the playground of the rich doesn’t work.” Not just in New York, but in cities all across America, lower-income residents live closer to dirty power plants and reside in older buildings with leaky windows and inefficient appliances and systems. Along with wasting energy, these subpar housing conditions cause these residents to suffer disproportionately from the negative health effects of pollution, like asthma. Look into your city’s policies on affordable housing, and point out any issues that could prevent low-income residents from enjoying clean air and water and lower utility bills.