

# Seattle City Light – 2015-2020 Strategic Plan Update

## Summary of Outreach

### OVERVIEW

In February and March 2014 Seattle City Light leadership engaged in a robust outreach effort to inform its commercial and residential customers, community advocates, employees and other interested parties about progress made on the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan, and new initiatives that may be proposed for the updated 2015-2020 plan.

This outreach builds upon the extensive community and stakeholder engagement done in 2011 and 2012 to create the original six-year plan, which was unanimously approved by the Mayor and City Council in 2012. That plan established a path for rate increase, which average 4.7 percent/year through 2018. The updated plan lowers that to 4.4 percent/year for 2019-2020.

The utility's strategy for getting feedback on the proposed updated plan was to maximize its outreach efforts by using a combination of in-person meetings with Neighborhood District Councils and business groups, surveys and focus groups, social media, as well as an unprecedented level of outreach to non-English speaking communities.

### SPECIFIC OUTREACH EFFORTS

#### Surveys

Customers were asked to give City Light feedback by taking an online survey about the original 2013-2018 plan and proposed initiatives for the 2015-2020 updated plan. Approximately 20,000 customers (residential and commercial) were randomly selected and sent an email with an invitation and a link to the survey. In addition, the survey was promoted via social media and prominently displayed on the Strategic Plan website.

Overall knowledge, interest and support for the Strategic Plan is strong. Residential customers give City Light particularly good marks for customer service and environmental leadership. Regarding the Strategic Plan objectives, residential customers rate affordability, investing in renewable energy, and increased efficiencies as important priorities. A slight majority of survey respondents feel that the rate path for the current six-year plan and the update is reasonable.

#### Focus Groups and Town Hall meetings with non-English speaking customers

In February and March, City Light hosted a large number of focus groups and community presentations to engage Seattle's diverse ethnic communities in the utility's rate design and Strategic Plan update. All presentations were conducted in the participant's native languages. Ethnic communities participating included: Chinese, Korean, Somali, Vietnamese, Filipino, Spanish, Cambodian, Native American and Pan-Asian. A summary report of this outreach is attached.

A highlight of this outreach was a first-ever all- Spanish language Town Hall meeting in partnership with KUNS-TV Univision featuring City Light General Manager Jorge Carrasco. City Light staff created a Spanish language video summarizing the Strategic Plan that was included in the broadcast. The half-hour show aired twice and was viewed by tens of thousands of Spanish speaking customers in the Seattle area.

### In-person meetings with neighborhood District Councils

An important component of the outreach included a series of presentations by members of the City Light leadership team followed by discussions with members of Seattle’s Neighborhood District Councils (Lake Union, Magnolia/Queen Anne, Central and Northwest. Information was also given to the Department of Neighborhoods District Coordinators, so they could share the information at community events and meetings). The purpose was to gage customer knowledge of the original six-year plan and talk about the new initiatives proposed for the update. Through this outreach, the utility met with at least one Neighborhood District Council in each of the three regions of the city; South, Central, and North.

Overall, customers clearly understood the concepts in the original plan and generally understood the new initiatives being offered in the updated version. Specific knowledge about the work of Seattle City Light beyond providing electricity varied greatly. While some customers new little about the utility’s conservation efforts and how it produced power, others had extensive knowledge of the utility’s operations and programs. Below is a summary of the type of questions asked and comments made at the District Council meetings:

#### *Rates*

There was some discussion at each meeting regarding the rate path described in the original Strategic Plan and in the update. Participants felt that offering some of the lowest rates in the country is a key attribute of the utility. They went on to say that residential and commercial customers are proud of this and want to keep it that way. Some participants wanted more details on how low-income customers could access the utility discount and conservation programs in order to mitigate any rate increases.

Overall, while rate increases are not desirable, customers expressed an understanding that they are necessary in order to ensure continued service reliability. Customers also valued predictable rate increases as a positive change from the unexpected rate increases of the past.

#### *Reliability*

For the most part, customers were pleased with the reliability of City Light’s service. One participant said that he had not experienced an outage in 30 years. A participant from the Fremont area said that some businesses had experienced 6 outages in the past year and clearly understood the need for increased attention to the utility’s infrastructure.

### *Carbon reduction*

Conservation and carbon reduction came up at every meeting. Customers are very proud that City Light was the first public utility in the country to be carbon-neutral. Others wanted more information on City Light's carbon reduction programs and how climate change is impacting the utility. There were questions about conservation services available to homeowners and if there will be an increase in the subsidies offered for LED lights.

### *Maintenance/Tree trimming*

Customers had questions about the maintenance backlog. Some wanted to know why it is such a problem and how long it will take to catch up. There were also some questions about trees. Some customers would prefer the utility cut fewer and plant more of them for other City properties.

### *Operations*

Overall, participants were engaged in learning about how their utility operates. They had specific questions about City Light's annual budget, its debt service, customer count, and revenue from wholesale power sales. At one meeting, a customer wanted to talk about undergrounding all of its power lines.

Unrelated to the Strategic Plan, some customers who live in large apartment complexes wanted to talk about how they are billed and if their bill included a basic service charge.

## Online/Social Media

City Light staff used social media (Twitter, Facebook) to talk with customers about the values inherent in the Strategic Plan. Utility communications staff organized and hosted a live online chat with City Light chief of staff Sephir Hamilton and chief financial officer Jeff Bishop. Promotion of the live online chat included postings on social media platforms with links to the Strategic Plan website and information about how customers could provide feedback. Customers were asked to submit questions via Twitter to @seacitylight with a #strategicplan hashtag. Currently, City Light's Twitter reach is more than 8,000 customers. Facebook was also used as a forum for customers to submit questions. Answers were displayed on the Facebook page as well as the Strategic Plan website.

The vast majority of questions posted related to rates and environmental protections. Customers wanted to know how the Strategic Plan would impact their bills, and gave support to the utility's environmental programs.

Social media was also used to promote the online survey. All followers of City Light's Twitter and Facebook pages were given a link to the customer survey and encouraged to give City Light their feedback.

Utility communications staff also created content for the Power Lines blog promoting the survey, the live chat and links to community meetings.

The Strategic Plan website was also revised with content related to the update. New content included:

- A folio which included progress made on the 2013-2018 plan and new initiatives planned for the 2015-2020 update.
- A calendar of community meetings
- A customer survey

### Correspondence/emails

The utility received very few letters or emails from customers about the Strategic Plan- less than ten. Most provided comments about keeping rates low, the Utility Discount Program, new metering technology and continuing the utility's environmental leadership.

### Materials created

- Printed folio for use at community meetings and other outreach
- PowerPoint presentation for use at community meetings
- Spanish language video for KUNS-TV Univision Town Hall Meeting