

## BUREAU OF STREET LIGHTING

### Attendees at a meeting on December 8, 2021

For the Bureau of Street Lighting: Megan Hackney (Assistant Director and Executive Officer); Kerney Marine (Assistant Director)

For the Budget Advocates: Kay Hartman, Carol Newman

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with Neighborhood Councils in neighborhoods targeted for public wi-fi to receive their input on what they want and where they want it [*no additional cost; community involvement*]
- Extract Smart City Goals table from the 5-year strategic plan and publish on the Department's own web page where actual results can be shared with the public [*no additional cost; increased transparency*]
- Expedite a ballot initiative to increase lighting district funding [*could result in additional funds for maintaining lighting and fighting copper wire theft and power theft*]

### DISCUSSION

The mission of the Bureau of Street Lighting (BSL) is to provide reliable, safe lighting for all residents and visitors, lighting the way for Angelenos. It is responsible for the design, construction, operation, maintenance and repair of the street lighting system within the City of Los Angeles. There are currently more than 210,000 lights in the City consisting of more than 400 designs.

Streetlights provide illumination for city roadways and sidewalk areas. The main purpose of a lighting design is to provide comfortable visibility that will encourage vehicular and pedestrian traffic. All lighting installed in the City is designed to meet National Lighting levels that provide visibility and reduce sky glow and glare. All streetlights installed are tested for efficiency, safety, and maintainability.

The Bureau has a 5-year strategic plan covering 2020-2025. The 5-year plan includes a table with its Smart City goals for roll outs of 8 programs. It would be useful to extract this table to a web page and document actual achievement as compared to goals.

BSL's main goal for the next year is to keep the street lights on and maintain public safety. There are ideas for additional projects some of which are discussed in this report.

### Revenue

The current fiscal year budget for the BSL is \$41 million, representing a decrease from the FY 2019-2020 budget of \$42.9 million and an increase from the FY 2020-2021 of \$40 million.

Approximately 92% of the BSL's budget is paid by special funds. Generally, the BSL receives very little General Fund money.

The BSL's primary source of funds, the City's Street Lighting District Assessment, has been frozen at 1996 levels because of Proposition 218. This is not a sustainable model, but due to Proposition 218 the City may not increase the fees or change the fee structure. BSL is planning a City ballot measure to update over 550,000 frozen parcels to current costs so it can properly maintain the streetlights.

BSL started a group dedicated to applying for grant money. There is a lot that can be done with street lights and there are a lot of them. The Bureau received a grant from NASA to measure air quality so now there are sensors on top of some poles.

Another important potential source of revenue for BSL and the City is the co-location program, in which telecommunication companies lease BSL's poles to install their equipment, primarily small cell antennas up to this point. BSL's staff does the work and recoups all of the costs, and the companies pay a lease fee to the City. BSL may be able to expand this program in the future with electric vehicle (EV) chargers, possibly broadband equipment, and "code the curb" equipment (to monitor parking spaces).

#### Staffing

BSL requested and was granted 16 positions to address copper wire theft and power theft from the poles. Still, the Bureau had a net loss of staffing. Twenty-seven positions, 8% of the staff, were lost to the Separation Incentive Program (SIP). The Bureau was required last year to cut its budget by 3% which made filling positions problematic. The sixteen new positions were for a half year so hiring can't start until January 2022.

Even after the SIP, 16% of the staff remains eligible for retirement. The Bureau is working on transferring historical knowledge and increasing training so people will be in the right positions to be able to move into promotions when they become available.

BSL is giving new engineers training in all aspects of the Bureau through a rotation system. It is also moving managers around to spread internal knowledge. This system was impacted by COVID and the Bureau is working to get it back on track.

The Bureau tries to treat its staff well. For example, when people were working in the office, there were ping pong clubs and lunch time training. There was good camaraderie. In general, people think BSL is a good place to work.

#### COVID

BSL has been able to maintain all services during the COVID emergency. Many services were moved online and are now fully electronic. On the other hand, the Bureau was not able to meet all of its milestones. This is understandable given staff being sick or quarantined and having to be reassigned. Ten percent of the Bureau participated in the Disaster Workers

Program (reassignment). A few employees are still working as contact tracers. The pandemic also caused materials and contracting work delays. The vaccines have improved the outlook for this year.

To mitigate the personnel outages, the Bureau staggered work shifts. Logistics were challenging as was maintaining a high morale. The COVID safety rules were hard on the field workers.

Field personnel have been coming in throughout the pandemic. Half of the Bureau's staff is working from home. BLS has had a good experience with telecommuting. It is not in a rush to undo it and is considering a hybrid model and trickling people back.

#### Public Wi-fi

BLS received a \$2.1 million grant to implement public wi-fi in disadvantaged neighborhoods. It released a Request for Information (RFI) to learn about the technologies and other aspects required for deployment.

As indicated above, the BSL works with telecommunication companies to attach small antennae to the street light poles. The telecoms want the antennae where they want them. The City wants antennae in communities where there is less connectivity. These existing antennae may or may not be useful to the program.

BSL is still figuring all of this out. What are the costs? Where does the IT come from? The Department of Public Works is in the right of way all the time. Can it tap into what already exists, such as fiber, while the ground is open?

It is clear public wi-fi is in its embryonic stage. Talking to Neighborhood Councils once the responses to the RFI are received could help provide another source of information to the Bureau.

#### Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

BSL is installing EV chargers around the city. A level 1 charger charges at 120 volts in an AC socket. A level 2 charger charges at 240 volts in an AC socket. While a level 2 charger charges at twice the rate of a level 1 charger, both require considerable time to charge, overnight or more. DC chargers (sometimes called level 3) charge at a much more rapid rate, but require wiring for a DC connection and can cause the car's battery pack not to last as long. The existing light poles are all wired for AC.

The Bureau has been installing 150 charging stations a year, although none were installed last year due to COVID. It has a 5-year plan to achieve a rate of 1000 charging stations installed each year with the goal of 10,000 EV chargers on our street lights. The plan is for 100% level 2 chargers.

The EV charging stations are funded exclusively through the Municipal Improvement Corporation of Los Angeles (MICLA) and the Special Gas Tax Improvement Fund. MICLA is a non-profit foundation that provides financial assistance to the City and is managed by the City's executive team. Some MICLA funds are loans; the funds for the EV charging stations are not loans.

Once installed, the charging stations may generate revenue that could directly support program maintenance while charging would be free in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

### **SUMMARY**

The Bureau of Street Lighting did a good job of maintaining services during the COVID emergency and is working to recover. It is working on some interesting projects that promote a "Smart City." Fundamentally, it is working on keeping the street lights on and it is meeting that goal while handling challenges successfully.