



Q & A with LADWP's Chief Sustainability Officer

Nancy Sutley Discusses LADWP and L.A.'s Green New Deal

By Carol Tucker

In April 2019, Mayor Eric Garcetti announced [L.A.'s Green New Deal](#), an update of the Sustainable City pLAN that sets aggressive new goals for the city's sustainable future. The plan envisions a carbon neutral city by 2050 by zeroing out key sources of emissions—buildings, transportation, electricity and trash. It also calls for recycling 100% of the city's wastewater and sourcing 70% of our water locally by 2035.

Many of the plan's new goals and targets revolve around LADWP or rely on the Department for support. As Chief Sustainability Officer, Nancy Sutley plays a central role in LADWP's efforts to meet the Green New Deal targets. Nancy oversees regulatory compliance of greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency goals and programs, transportation electrification, building electrification and other sustainability initiatives. She also collaborates closely with water and power staff on sustainability goals related to renewable energy, water supply and water conservation.

In the following interview, Nancy offers her perspective on the Green New Deal, what it means for LADWP and the challenges that lie ahead.

Describe the Mayor's vision as outlined in the Green New Deal - 2019 Sustainable City pLAN?

The Green New Deal builds upon the city's first Sustainability pLAN from 2015. Like the first plan, it takes a broad view around sustainability. It isn't just focused on environmental issues, but it's also about the economy and about equity. It looks at how the city's environmental policies affect people in Los Angeles beyond whether the air is cleaner and water safer, but really what does it mean for quality of life, jobs and how we interact with each other.

What aspects of the plan will affect LADWP's planning and operations going forward?

Climate change is a big focus in the Green New Deal with the overarching goal for the city to become carbon neutral by 2050. The plan starts with that goal, talks about what that means and how we achieve

that. That includes some big pieces, and many of them involve LADWP—how we produce energy, along with electrification of buildings and transportation. LADWP has a big role to play in all of those. These are areas LADWP has already been working on—renewable energy, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, and helping to promote electric vehicles.

The plan also has a big focus on the water side—water conservation and the local water supply, such as recycled water and stormwater capture. Also what’s important for LADWP and city government is walking the talk. We have a big impact on how the rest of L.A. can demonstrate leadership, such as helping the Police Department with their electric vehicles and the Port with their clean air action plan.

Is this the first Sustainable City pLAN to set a citywide target for zero carbon?

It’s been discussed over the past two years that LA should be carbon neutral by 2050 but there were questions about what it means and how to achieve that. So this plan tries to layout all those pieces systematically. Instead of recounting what’s been done, this plan starts with the goal and looks at what we need to do to get there. It’s not necessarily new programs for LADWP, but it in many cases it means accelerating or expanding our targets.

What are some of the new targets that will affect LADWP?

Renewable energy is a good example. We have state mandated goals and legislation, SB 100, that calls for 100% clean energy by 2045 and 60% renewables by 2030. The Green New Deal accelerates some of the targets, such as 55% renewable energy by 2025 and 80% by 2036. *(The most recent Power Strategic Long-Term Resource Plan target was 65% by 2036 and LADWP was looking to raise that to 70% by 2036).*

Does the Green New Deal include new or accelerated targets for L.A.’s local water supply?

Compared to the 2015 pLAN, the Green New Deal has a bigger focus on local water by considering how climate change has impacted the water levels relative to the cycles of drought and wet, then drought and wet again. The Green New Deal is calling for 70% local water supply, capturing 150,000 acre feet/year of stormwater, and recycling 100% of wastewater by 2035.

With your science and water policy background, would you attribute those year-by-year hydrological fluctuations to climate change?

California does these periodic climate assessments, looking at global models and trying to scale them down for California. A lot of what we’ve seen in terms of climate variability is consistent with what the models say. For L.A., we store our water in the snowpack and all the climate change models say we’re going to have warmer, wetter winters. That’s a very different model than we’ve been used to. A lot of the current water policies reflect what LADWP has been doing for decades—viewing water conservation as a way of life, even when there isn’t a drought, as well as capturing rain when it does fall and then reusing what water we can reuse.

That relates back to the Mayor’s announcement in February—recycling 100% of all wastewater by 2035, with a focus on expanding the recycled wastewater capabilities at the Hyperion Wastewater Treatment Plan. What are some of the big issues involved with that goal?

One issue is the public's view of recycled wastewater has changed a lot in past 15 to 20 years but that's still a work in progress, especially regarding groundwater recharge. (Groundwater recharge, also known as groundwater replenishment, is the process of injecting advanced treated wastewater into the groundwater basin.) Also we have a lot invested in existing infrastructure that was built for a different reality. So we have to think about what strategic investments will allow us to make this transition.

The Green New Deal sets aggressive goals for developing more stormwater projects. What are the challenges of expanding the capture and reuse of stormwater runoff?

Stormwater capture is a very important goal and strategy for improving our local water supply, but how you do you actually do that in a fully built-out city, and given that we have a whole flood control system designed to move stormwater as quickly as possible away from people? Now we're saying wait - we need to slow down.

Cities that have done this successfully look at all scales. Historically, we tend to focus on doing big projects. Now we are looking at more regional projects such as the green streets, and even at individual homeowner level. Offering rebates for residents to use rain barrels, for example, is a start.

Also, when it comes to stormwater we have to consider the water quality piece. There isn't a lot of water supply benefit to capturing stormwater in certain areas where we can't use the groundwater basin. So the planning has to work these two elements together.

Are there any new focus areas for LADWP as a result of the Green New Deal?

The plan puts a lot of focus on building electrification, which is viewed as a high potential for carbon reduction. We have started to track progress in building electrification and understanding potential opportunities for new incentives. The challenge with decarbonizing buildings is how to deal with existing buildings.

There is also more emphasis on workforce development in this plan - training the next generation of workers for jobs in green industries.

I think the plan presents a lot of challenges for the Department, especially with many accelerated targets. But LADWP has always risen up to meet challenges. People in Los Angeles are counting on us to get it done.