



# 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update Outreach Summary

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## **Executive Summary**

In accordance with Resolution 31463, adopted in September 2013, Seattle City Light engaged with customers and stakeholders to offer opportunities for these groups to provide input on the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan, the 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Update, and the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update. Outreach efforts for the new six-year Strategic Plan began in early 2020, when the intent was to publish a plan in 2021 in line with the normal cadence of City Light's strategic planning process. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in our region in March 2020, progress on the strategic plan was halted in order to attend to the more pressing needs of our community, staff, and business.

When the planning process resumed in early 2021, outreach for the new plan resumed as well. In March and April 2021, City Light presented our six-year 2022-2026 Strategic Plan to community groups and hosted a virtual town hall open to the public. We created a Strategic Plan Executive Summary document and made the summary and presentation slides available online for those who were unable to attend one of the outreach sessions.

For the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update, City Light engaged with over 130 customers and stakeholders. We continue to build on previous outreach efforts. As some of the business strategies and programs identified in the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Update are multi-year efforts, we continue to reference the feedback we received earlier to inform planning and implementation for 2024 and beyond. City Light plans to continue discussions with customers and stakeholder groups to inform program plans going forward. The outreach efforts we initiated for the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan are leading to ongoing, mutually beneficial relationships with community-based organizations and stakeholders as we continue moving forward over the next six years.

## **Outreach Methods**

### *Residential Customer Satisfaction Survey*

In October 2023, the Seattle City Light Residential Customer Satisfaction Survey was conducted using both phone and text-to-online formats. City Light provided the research consultant with a list of 462,304 customers, from which a random representative group of respondents were contacted via home phone (to take the survey over the phone) or via cell phone (sent a text with a link to take the survey online). The random-sample format was conducted from October 5-12, 2023. The sample size was 620 residential customers.

An overwhelming majority (81%) of residential customers are satisfied with the overall service they receive from City Light (54% very satisfied and 27% somewhat satisfied). Reliability of service is the main reason most customers are satisfied. A majority of customers rate City Light positively for almost every service area tested (providing reliable service, being responsive and friendly, having affordable rates, keeping customers informed, providing clean power, helping reduce energy use, and being active in the community).

Of the 17% of residential customers who are not satisfied, they reported that cost is the primary concern. Outages, billing issues, and customer service are second-tier concerns.

Customers continue to rank providing carbon-free power as their highest priority. Providing quality customer service, keeping customers informed about changes that can affect them, and helping customers manage their energy use continue to be the second-tier priorities for most residential customers.

The survey results show that customers are most likely to interact with City Light first via website (to pay their bill online or to find information) and second by phone. Most customers are satisfied with getting answers to their questions and service needs resolved, regardless of which method of communication is used.

Customers are more aware of programs for billing and payment assistance than programs to help save energy, money, and the environment. Lack of awareness of these programs is higher among People of Color and residents that are new to the Seattle area.

Customers in every demographic group have positive perceptions of solar, wind, and hydropower energy from dams.

### *Community Engagement with Seattle Environmental Justice Communities Report*

In 2023, Kambo Energy Group, a social enterprise company that designs and delivers turn-key energy solutions for environmental justice communities on behalf of utilities, interviewed and engaged with over a dozen influential community leaders from environmental justice communities across the greater Seattle region. Community leaders were largely concerned with affordability. The Kambo report demonstrates that City Light customers need support to understand their bills. Households need help understanding their bills, especially when the bill is high. City Light has an opportunity to improve messaging and communications to help customers understand their bills. Community-based organizations often provide assistance to help households navigate systems and pay their bills online.

It was further highlighted that the Utility Discount Program (UDP) has inherent barriers that prevent residents from participating. Community-based organizations (CBOs) that offer UDP support can build awareness and support the households they work with to participate in the program, however, leaders shared concerns that households who are not connected to these CBOs can't access UDP, either because they do not know about the program or because they do not have the digital and literacy skills needed to apply.

### *Clean Energy Future Survey*

The Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) commits Washington to an electricity supply free of greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. Clean electricity will allow Washington residents and businesses to power their buildings and homes, vehicles, and appliances with carbon free resources, such as wind and solar. Reductions in fossil fuel use will improve the health of communities, grow the economy, create family-sustaining jobs, and enable the state to achieve its long-term climate goals.

The law provides safeguards to maintain affordable rates and reliable service. It also requires an equitable distribution of the benefits from the transition to clean energy for all utility customers and adds and expands energy assistance programs for income-eligible customers.

In August 2021, Seattle City Light sent out a Clean Energy Future survey to 180,000 residential customers via email. The total number of responses that City Light received was 4,522. The survey questions were informed by CETA equity indicators as well as other utility-wide initiatives including the Transportation Electrification Strategic Investment Plan, the Clean Energy Implementation Plan, the Integrated Resource Plan, and the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan that had been recently adopted.

A vast majority of respondents were concerned about climate change. All demographics listed reducing climate change impacts, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and reducing environmental impacts as the three most important benefits of achieving 100% clean energy by 2045. The main concerns with achieving 100% clean energy were a mixture of four responses: bill increases, negative impacts of clean energy technology, reliability of service, and construction impacts. More than 80% of respondents believe that City Light's power supply is less than 90% renewable and 41% of respondents believe less than 50% is renewable.

When asked about transportation, more than half of respondents listed a personal vehicle as their main form of transportation. Low-income customers and renters are the most likely to use public transportation. The main concerns when choosing transportation were a mix between ease of access to home/work, commute time, options to reach destination, and cost.

When asked how comfortable respondents were in transitioning to all electric in their daily life (electric cooking, electric heat, electric vehicle, etc.), more than half responded with 'very comfortable', and about a quarter responded somewhat comfortable. Renters are the most comfortable transitioning to all electric in their daily lives.

### *Customer Experience Outreach*

City Light has continued to engage with customers to understand the barriers they face when interacting with the utility. A core commitment for the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan and 2023-2028 Strategic Plan Update was to improve the customer experience. This cannot be done without working directly with our customers to understand the challenges they face when interacting with City Light.

In 2022, City Light, Seattle Public Utilities (SPU), Human Services Department (HSD), and Seattle IT launched a new Utility Assistance Programs online application process. This online application provides access to City Light and SPU emergency assistance programs for residential customers. The online, automated system provides a single, streamlined process for all customer assistance programs. This is one way we can continue to improve the customer experience.

Efforts are underway to modernize and improve the customer journey by making the Utility Discount Program more accessible for income-eligible customers. City Light and SPU continue to add new features to the Utility Services Website to enhance self-serve options and the overall customer service experience.

## Stakeholder Meetings

City Light presented at two annual forums and contacted four stakeholder groups offering an opportunity to hear more information about the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update. Stakeholder meetings were arranged for City Light leadership to provide an overview of the strategic priorities and answer questions. Over 130 individuals participated in these stakeholder meetings. City Light heard a variety of perspectives and gathered feedback about the strategies presented in the plan. A summary of the stakeholder meetings and key findings are presented on the following pages.

### Stakeholder Meetings

#### Summary of Meetings

Date	Stakeholder Group	Key Questions/Comments	Number of Attendees
October 25, 2023	Annual Key Customer Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of interest and concern about rate increase</li> <li>• Questions about how long it will take to refill the Rate Stabilization Account to \$100 million</li> <li>• Concerns and questions about how City Light is actively preparing to diversify generation resources to address climate change and future hydropower uncertainty</li> </ul>	51
October 30, 2023	Annual Franchise City Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in more robust marketing for City Light programs that customers and businesses in the franchise cities can take advantage of</li> <li>• Question about network and non-network services</li> <li>• Questions about upcoming projects and what impacts may be to ratepayers</li> <li>• How to show customers benefits of electrification initiatives despite concerns and hesitation from the general public</li> </ul>	18
March 8, 2024	Community Action Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerns about City Light rates</li> <li>• Look at energy burden more holistically</li> <li>• Re-evaluate utility assistance programs</li> <li>• Start a committee to work together to identify solutions for income-eligible customers</li> </ul>	7
March 18, 2024	NW Energy Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions about how City Light plans to meet higher demand due to electrification</li> <li>• Questions about market power purchases and long-term planning for future resource needs</li> <li>• Questions about make-ready incentives for EV chargers</li> <li>• Questions about what City Light needs from the state legislature to help set policy</li> </ul>	31

Date	Stakeholder Group	Key Questions/Comments	Number of Attendees
March 26, 2024	Building Owner and Managers Association (BOMA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerns surrounding condition of existing, aging infrastructure</li> <li>Predictable service connection timelines and rate predictability is important</li> <li>Concern about load growth and City Light’s ability to respond</li> <li>Since downtown network rate is higher, customers would like to see accountability for what the higher rates are used for</li> <li>Interest in incentive programs to help businesses fund the move to electrification</li> </ul>	13
March 27, 2024	Franchise Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Question about grid modernization</li> <li>Question about grid security</li> <li>Ensure adequate power that aligns with franchise city plans for development/redevelopment</li> <li>Adequate capacity for electrification, particularly support for electric vehicles</li> <li>Support delivery of franchise city capital projects</li> </ul>	11
<b>Total Attendees</b>			<b>131</b>

### Key Findings

#### Affordability and Predictability of Rates

Customer bills remain a high priority across all stakeholder groups. Stakeholders expressed interest in understanding how their rates are currently structured, how rates might be structured in the future, and how City Light can ease transitions to higher or different rates. Customers would like to see a clear explanation when rates are going to change, and they ideally would like rates to increase at a time of year when energy use is not at its peak. Customers also had questions about how advanced meters will impact rates and improve the customer experience.

Residential customers emphasized the need to reimagine some of our bill assistance programs to help those who currently “fall through the cracks” of existing programs. Feedback included encouraging City Light to look at energy burden more holistically and reimagine what assistance programs can look like to benefit the most people who need help.

#### Mixed Feelings Around Electrification

Stakeholders from environmentally focused groups applauded City Light’s plans for increased electrification and urged the utility to be a leader in bringing the region along with us.

However, for others, there were concerns. Business owners are apprehensive about the high costs associated with retrofitting existing buildings to conform with new electrification standards and pushed for more incentives for converting to electric. Some business representatives noted that they would support a modest rate increase to fund more commercial incentives. These customers also had questions about how City Light's electrical grid will be able to handle the increased load that will come with more electrification. Commercial customers are eager to see City Light continue to make improvements to our infrastructure so that their power supply is more reliable and consistent.

Environmental justice community members want to ensure that electrification does not come at the expense of their communities through unintended impacts. These representatives would like to see pathways to green jobs and opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community members not only to start jobs at City Light, but to advance through the utility.

#### **Additional Programs and Interest in Solar**

According to the Clean Energy Future Survey, customers have interest in additional programs and education surrounding renewable energy, electric vehicles, and solar power. The top area of interest was the development of solar in our region, most notably solar incentives, residential solar, solar education, and community solar programs.

#### **Building Awareness of Utility Incentives**

Residential customers expressed interest in receiving personalized and educational messaging related to utility rebates and incentives. Overall, customers would like to learn more about incentives and receive information to help homeowners and renters save energy and adopt new energy technologies (such as electric vehicles and solar panels).

#### **Customer Involvement in Utility Decision Making**

Commercial and residential customers alike would like to be included in decision making at City Light earlier in the process when their input can shape the outcomes. One idea for improving customer service in this area is to align our customer-facing programs with other City departments to maximize accessibility and minimize confusion in the community. If given a seat at the table, customers can advise on environmental justice work already underway at the community level. This would allow City Light (and other City departments) to focus on finding ways to lift up and support existing grassroots programs.

Business customers shared a strong desire for City Light to be quicker to roll out new incentives for energy efficiency projects. These customers would also like to have a greater

voice in determining what the incentives will be. They noted that sometimes the bureaucracy involved in City Light processes prevents customers from getting the help they need in a timely manner. Business customers would like more opportunities to partner with City Light to develop mutually beneficial solutions.

### **Positive Reaction to Debt Strategy**

Overall, stakeholders were pleased and relieved to hear about City Light's plan to control debt and right-size the capital improvement program. They appreciate that City Light leadership understands the need to control costs.

### *Employee Outreach*

In addition to public outreach, City Light leadership presented information about the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update to City Light managers and supervisors and to the City Light Employee Advisory Group. A Strategic Plan update was shared with employees in the internal employee newsletter and on the SCL Hub (City Light's internal employee website).

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

Our outreach efforts have informed the development of the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update. Over the next six years, we will continue the conversations that we have started with community-based organizations, customers, and stakeholder groups. Some of the business strategies and programs identified in the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan Update will be multi-year efforts. We anticipate using the feedback we received from our outreach efforts to inform planning and implementation for 2024 and beyond.