FRONTRUNNER: CITY OF SANTA MONICA WATER NEUTRALITY PROGRAM

SANTA MONICA EMBRACES WATER NEUTRALITY GOALS

OVERVIEW

Recognizing that water conservation is increasingly important in an environment prone to regular drought, increased average daily temperatures and devastating wildland-urban interface fires, the City of Santa Monica adopted ambitious water efficiency goals intended to achieve water self-sufficiency by 2023. In fact, water self-sufficiency is one of the four primary aspects of the City's Climate Action Plan and is also linked to the City's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

DEVELOPING WATER NEUTRALITY MEASURES

With a Mediterranean climate, average annual rainfall in the region is 13"; however, from 2012-2017, the annual average was only eight inches. Approximately 25-30 percent of the City's water requirements were fulfilled by importing water. The City has identified Water Neutrality (WN) as a water conservation tool that eliminates, or "neutralizes", the impact of building development on the City's overall water demand. In other words, WN allows development to occur without increasing the amount of water used City-wide.

WN is a critical tool for achieving Water Self-Sufficiency by 2023 (i.e., no imported water, just local groundwater). This, in turn, will increase the resiliency of the water supply in the face of drought and climate change and will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from importing, treating, and distributing water (often referred to as the 'Water+Energy' nexus).



Santa Monica is home to popular tourist destinations and expansive beaches. Photo by Gerson Repreza on Unsplash.

Santa Monica took its first steps toward achieving water neutrality with the passage of an ordinance in May 2017 that became effective in July 2017.

The ordinance development process involved substantial community outreach and engagement, with nearly a dozen meetings with stakeholders including residents, developers, staff from neighboring jurisdictions, and NGOs.

“The City was committed to establishing a water conservation program that serves the community and provides the certainty developers need when planning new projects,” noted Thomas Fleming, Sustainability Analyst, Water Conservation for the City of Santa Monica. “Creating an offset program ensures the flexibility the business community needs while providing a funding stream for important water conservation efforts such as retrofitting existing buildings with more efficient fixtures.”

The ordinance was modified in early 2019 to broaden the measure’s applicability as well as to incentivize affordable housing development.

New Construction	Single-family homes	Multi-family & Commercial (including mixed-use)
Baseline Water Usage	5 Year Annual Average	5 Year Annual Average
Projected Water Use	Total of Indoor + Outdoor usages	Total of Indoor + Outdoor usages
Offsets	• New: Required if projected use > baseline • Remodels: Required if projected use > water conservation threshold • Home offset = 100% • ADU offset = 50%	• Required if projected use > baseline • Affordable Housing offset = 50% • All others = 100%



Santa Monica's Direct Install Program is funded by the water neutrality offsets and has installed more than 5,000 high-efficiency fixtures to date.

Applicants that are required to offset water use have two options for compliance. They may offset new water demand by installing water-efficient fixtures and systems or by paying an in-lieu fee that directly funds the City's Water Neutrality Direct Install Program.

Fleming notes that the City conducts ongoing outreach and education on the WN program and has developed its own robust tools to identify baseline water usage and calculators. Project permits have not declined, with approximately 500 permits being

filed annually. Offsets continue to fund the City’s Direct Install Program, with more than 5,000 high-efficiency fixtures installed for a total estimated water offset/saved to date: 24.5 million gallons/year (or 75.4 acre-feet/year (AFY) since the program began.

RESOURCES

The City of Santa Monica maintains a comprehensive webpage devoted to its Water Neutrality Program:

https://www.smgov.net/Departments/OSE/Categories/Water/Water_Neutrality.aspx

Ordinance (original here) (modified eff. Jan 2019 here).

Presentation for stakeholders.

News release about the 2017 ordinance.

OTHER FRONTRUNNERS

City of San Rafael Pursues Collaboration in its Development and Adoption of a Flex Path Residential Reach Code City of Cotati City of San Luis Obispo
Archives