

The Many Functions of Public Works

LIZ AMSDEN / 17 AUGUST 2020



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NEIGHBORHOOD POLITICS-The Department of Public Works consists of more than 5,500 employees and is responsible for the design, construction, renovation, and operation of public projects ranging from bridges to wastewater treatment plants to libraries to curbside collection to graffiti removal to maintenance of streets, sidewalks, sewers, streetlights, and street trees.

The Department of Public Works' five Bureaus are Contract Administration, Engineering, Sanitation, Street Lighting, and Street Services.

The Offices of the Board of Public Works are Board Secretariat, Accounting, Community Beautification, Citywide Filming, Petroleum Administration, Community Forest Advisory Committee, Project Restore (works to improve and protect historic buildings), and Employee Resources.

The Board of Public Works governs the Department of Public Works and is comprised of a politically appointed five-member full-time executive team that is committed to delivering projects and programs that enhance quality of life, economic growth, public health and the environment to all Angelenos. About 100 staffers support the Board.

The Bureau of Contract Administration has a staff of 300 whose focus is protecting the City's interests by ensuring that Citywide personal service contracts and Public Works construction contracts are administered and/or constructed safely and in accordance with contract provisions as required by Federal, State, and City mandates.

The Bureau of Engineering is the City's lead agency for the planning, design and construction management of public buildings, infrastructure, and open space projects. Projects include municipal buildings, such as police and fire stations, convention centers, and recreational and cultural facilities, as well as bridges, street and transit projects, and stormwater and wastewater systems.

Open space projects include the development of parks and the restoration of wetlands.

Engineering's 750 professionals also manage permitting for construction in the public right-of-way, as well as the City's state-of-the-art online mapping system. Engineering's projects are nationally recognized in the areas of environmental sustainability and design and fully support the City's goals of creating a prosperous, livable, and safe city for all residents and businesses.

The Bureau of Sanitation, also known as LA Sanitation or LASAN, is the lead agency for the City's environmental programs and initiatives. It protects public health and the environment through the administration and management of three program areas: Clean Water (wastewater), Solid Resources (solid waste management) and Watershed Protection (stormwater).

These infrastructure programs collect, treat, recycle, and dispose the solid and liquid waste generated by the over four million residents of the nation's second largest city.

With more than 3,000 workers, LA Sanitation provides these essential public service programs to deliver a triple bottom line of economic, environmental, and social benefits that sustain the quality of life in Los Angeles.

The Bureau of Street Lighting's 200 plus people are 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 streetlights in the City consisting of more than 400 designs. 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 of Street Services has over a thousand men and women working to preserve, protect, maintain, and renew the City of Los Angeles' street network and urban forest.

Recently branded "StreetsLA," they are responsible for the City's sidewalks, bikeways, trees, and medians. StreetsLA is committed

to providing high-quality, efficient, and equitable services across all Los Angeles neighborhoods, focusing on building its services around integration, innovation, and inclusion.

The Office of the Board Secretariat, otherwise known as the Commission Secretariat, is comprised of the Board Secretary and seven clerical employees who prepare agendas, journals, and minutes of meetings for the Board, and provide for permanent accessibility to these records.

The Accounting Office is responsible for tracking all financial transactions, accumulates and records project and program costs, and bills and collects revenue from the public and governmental agencies for City services.

The Office of Community Beautification works with volunteer groups and organizations across the City providing tools and equipment tools and equipment for neighborhood cleanup and beautifications, graffiti abatement, sidewalk repair, and Adopt a Median programs through their Clean Streets Program.

The Office of Citywide Filming facilitates filming in the City. As well as a major tourist draw in non-pandemic years, in good times the film and television and related industries employ over 200,000 Angelenos in high-paying middle-class jobs and these businesses buying power multiplies their benefit to the City's economy.

The Office of Petroleum and Natural Gas (P&N/G) Administration and Safety is home to the Board of Public Works Petroleum Administrator who provides citywide technical advice on all matters related to the City's legacy petroleum contracts and future site remediation. The Administrator is responsible for planning, developing, administering, examining, and reporting on a comprehensive P&N/G Administration and Safety program

The Community Forest Advisory Committee includes community members from each Council District, nominated by City Council members and appointed by the Mayor, as well as staff from City Departments with tree-related issues i.e. Urban Forestry Division, LADWP, and Recreation and Parks.

The Committee advises the City Council on tree-related issues and develops policies to protect, expand and improve Los Angeles's urban forest.

Project Restore is a public-private partnership and nonprofit organization, which works to preserve and protect historic buildings in the City of Los Angeles.

This has included the seismic retrofitting and restoration of the Los Angeles City Hall and the restoration of Hollyhock House at the Barnsdall Art Park. The latter, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, is the first and only World Heritage site in Los Angeles.

The Department's Office of Employee Resources is exactly what it sounds like; the office which provides resources for the Department's many employees.

Staffing at the Public Works Department.

As it is in many City departments, filling open positions and retaining staff is a serious concern.

The lack of Civil Service reform and structural flaws in the employee classification system – a complaint common to many City departments – has caused years-long chronic vacancy rates in a number of areas. Additionally, existing requirements which are not pertinent to job performance prohibit promotions in some areas leading to the loss of qualified personnel.

The Personnel Department was rolling out a new Human Resources system to mitigate some of the hiring issues before the pandemic.

However, the employee classification system still needs to be overhauled to match the right title with appropriate requirements and suitable pay levels to hire and retain staff.

The Internship process for attracting employment candidates needs to be streamlined and personnel policies amended to promote permanent hiring in a more efficient and timely manner.

Civil service exams need to be scheduled more frequently to maintain up-to-date Cert Lists.

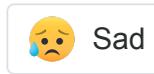
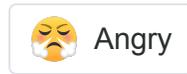
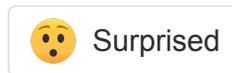
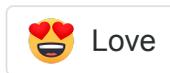
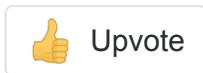
Furthermore, there must be some flexibility added to the system to allow for the hiring of qualified candidates on the spot, using a candidate's education and experience in lieu of an exam, to ensure the Department does not lose these qualified candidates to competing employers.

Finally, the strictures being imposed by the Mayor to cut the City's overall budget will inevitably be applied unevenly resulting in the loss of services to Angelenos and, more importantly, the loss of institutional knowledge.

(Liz Amsden is a member of the Budget Advocates, an elected, all volunteer, independent advisory body charged with making constructive recommendations to the Mayor and the City Council regarding the Budget, and to City Departments on ways to improve their operations, and with obtaining input, updating and educating all Angelenos on the City's fiscal management.) Prepped for CityWatch by Linda Abrams.

What do you think?

1 Response



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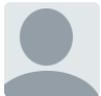
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