West Hollywood Markets Its Small Size for Smart City Projects

Skip Descant | April 11, 2018

Tiny West Hollywood could become a leader in smart city technologies. The two-square-mile city in Los Angeles County, nestled at the base of the Santa Monica Mountains and home to more than 34,000 residents is, perhaps by design, the perfect size for trying out smart city ideas.

"We're kind of like an ideal test bed for a lot of these smart city technologies, because of our size, because of our density," said Francisco Contreras, innovation manager for West Hollywood.

"Because we have the mobility challenges that the entire L.A. region has, you could really test out some of these smart city technologies in West Hollywood, and then be able to scale it maybe across L.A. County or the L.A. region," he said. "We deal with a lot of the same issues as, say, Beverly Hills and Los Angeles, which are neighboring cities."

West Hollywood recently adopted the West Hollywood Smart City Strategic Plan to guide its development of projects in five core areas: sustainability, mobility, access to government, resiliency and transparency.

"So it's, 'how can we use data to improve our service delivery and customer satisfaction in these five realms?'" said Contreras.

The new strategic plan is not West Hollywood's first foray into smart city innovation. Several years ago, city officials began exploring opportunities for improving internal efficiencies and capacities through innovation.

Already, the city has launched several pilots like the "smart city public safety" project, which uses video cameras and other devices to gather data from four locations related to possible criminal incidents, but also to offer a look into traffic and pedestrian flows and how residents interact with public spaces.

"The idea is we want to do more than your typical, say, surveillance. We want to see if the cameras can provide insights into how people interact in an urban environment; things such as pedestrian movements, vehicular miles-per-hour, etc.," said Contreras.

"Aside from being just a public safety project, it's also a community development project," he added, noting the potential to grow collaboration among different city departments.

The idea of testing out smart city pilots on small test sites is not new. Las Vegas has its Innovation District — a small area of downtown dedicated to testing smart technologies in areas like traffic, public safety and autonomous vehicles. Atlanta has its "Living Lab" and North Avenue Smart Corridor Project, where officials can try out traffic and other smart technologies. Dallas has its own Smart Cities Living Lab, a four-block corridor of downtown where numerous projects are in the testing and development phase.

West Hollywood differs in that the whole city, possibly the densest municipality in southern California, can function as a test bed.

"Really, what's driving us is taking a look at how can we solve some of our urban challenges with the use of new technologies and data," said Contreras.

"And luckily, we have the support from our council, our mayor, and our city manager," he added.

West Hollywood Mayor John Heilman, in a statement, said, "in employing these new technologies, we will be able to more effectively measure our efficiencies and better analyze everything from energy use to traffic flow in order to make more informed decisions about city priorities, which will benefit everyone in the community."

http://www.govtech.com/West-Hollywood-Markets-Its-Small-Size-for-Smart-City-Projects.html