

Candidate Questionnaire on Austin Energy Issues

Participating Organizations:

- Public Citizen
- SEED Coalition
- Sierra Club
- Solar Austin
- Texas ROSE (Ratepayers' Organization to Save Energy)
- Clean Water Action
- Austin Climate Action Network
- Texas Drought Project
- First Unitarian Universalist Green Sanctuary Ministry
- Wildflower Unitarian Universalist Church

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1. The mission of the Austin Energy Department is to deliver clean, affordable reliable energy and excellent customer service. During your term, what will be the most important challenge for the city in regard to Austin Energy?

Meeting the expansion goals to at least 60% by 2025 while maintaining average energy costs to not rise more than 2% per year is a worthy goal which I support and why I am shocked that the council made the decision last week that can be extremely costly to tax payers and the city. Yes, we need affordable goals for Austin Energy but locking us into how we do it when there are other less costly resources currently without taking into consideration new technologies on the horizon is a huge mistake in controlling affordable energy costs. My number one concern is affordability. Pricing people out of their residents be it a homestead or rental just to say we are the greenest city is cruel and not humane at all.

2. From a citywide and district perspective, briefly describe your vision for managing and improving Austin Energy?

Transparency! Zero line accounting practices and get all things that don't belong in the utility departments out of them. If there is a city expenditure we need to have, then put it in the general fund budget and call it as it is. Renewable energy goals that keep affordability as the priority I will support

3. What is your position on climate change?

The burning of dirty fossil fuels has had an impact on the warming of our climate. There is ice core data to prove this. However the data does not go back far enough to show what % of climate warming is due to burning fossil fuels and what % of warming is due to a world warming trend that has occurred many times in the 4.5B year history of the earth. As a result I think we should control the outcomes of the things we can, like moving towards new energy technologies and being wary of what building we do on our coastlines, river banks and lakes. Currently we spend quite a bit of money on insurance to help people rebuild their houses on the banks of these different water-ways.

4. Do you support implementation of the recommendations in the report developed by the [Austin Generation Resource Planning Task Force](#) and are there any other specific changes you would like made to the [Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan to 2020](#)? What would you change and how?

a) First I think we need to know what percentage of greenhouse gases are produced by electric power production versus the percentage that is produced by vehicle transmissions. This will help us determine whether we need to invest more in transportation projects versus energy production projects. That being said, transitioning our oil and Texas coal usage for creating energy to natural gas (which is a much cleaner fossil fuel but only emits 40% of the greenhouse gases as oil and Texas coal - which is the dirtiest coal in the US) Natural gas is abundant in Texas and the US has the largest natural gas reserves in the entire world.

b) Water projects- We need to protect Austin's supply versus the projected demand while not impacting downstream users such as the rice farmers and the ecosystem where the Colorado River dumps into the Gulf of Mexico. Projects I would approve of would be price tiering / conservation incentives, restricting future building projects to using native plants and providing incentives for current business and residential properties to use native planting, re-use of waste water, discussion with the LCRA to not oversell lake water to surrounding cities (this is not something I know a lot about but I do see that the LCRA is on a selling rampage of water from area lakes and the Colorado river) and fixing current underground water line infrastructure to new materials that have a longer life as leakage in Austin's water line infrastructure losses has been pegged between 30% and 40%. Figure out the best usage of our water supply plants, which currently have a 400% capacity over what we need. Letting these large capital investments sit idle and deteriorate is not the best plan. Projects that I would not support, as they impact downstream users are re-injection of flood water into underground aquifers and building of above ground levys downstream to capture flood waters.

c) Determine how much solar capacity could be built here in Austin, since we have 300+ "sun days" per year. This would be cheaper than buying solar and wind generated power from west and north Texas as the price of these sources of energy are at least 3 times as much as Texas coal and are also more expensive than natural gas. Also these sources are much more volatile than natural gas, so we have to be conscious of how much sun and wind power we use versus a more stable energy source. Essentially we will have to overbuy solar and wind generated energy to compensate for its volatility and we need to wait until that cost curve is viable for the City's budget.

5. City Council serves as the board of directors for Austin Energy. As a council member, what do you consider your role to be in regard to Austin Energy's governance?

Given it is a business that we run, we need to have a presence, however we also need those with expertise in energy and strong corporate experience serving on this board. It is what a well respected, profitable run business would do.

6. What renewable energy resources and programs should be incorporated into the Austin Energy generation resource mix?

We still need to better understand from a financial prospective all current, new, and on the horizon energy options. We have yet to have a financial plan in place for solar power (partial quotes from the current City Council), especially since we have targeted a date of 2030. We must always go back to the question of affordability. Having clean renewable energy plans is awesome! However it needs to be eased in so as not to tilt the scale and run people out of their residences due to being unable to pay their bills. High property taxes and utility fees have run generations of Austinites out of their homes city wide.

The city needs a viable business plan on how to get to their targeted goal. We know coal is dirty, so let's take small steps and utilize gas as an energy source since it only puts out 40% of the greenhouse gases that oil does especially since it is the most affordable source of energy right now and our state is flush with natural gas. Lastly, there has yet to be shown reliable data that shows realistically how consumers will begin using solar as a new energy source. Consumers may talk about being green, but if one were to drive through any Austin subdivision on trash day, the % of people who actually put out a recycling bin is very low.

7. How and to what extent should Austin Energy provide customer energy efficiency programs?

Austinites should be given incentives for installation of solar panels. We also need to raise code compliance for rental complexes which will help address affordability of income housing. Someone with a hole in their ceiling is not going to have efficient bills and fine landlords for non compliance.

8. What are your thoughts on whether Austin Energy should invest in more nuclear reactors and whether the utility should remain involved in the existing South Texas Project reactors after their currently scheduled retirement dates of 2027 and 2028 if they get relicensed for 20 additional years?

No. I do not support a fixed timeline since there may be other options that may be much more cost effective in the short term. And we know how costly these plants have been thus far when they go down for months which require us to go out on the grid and buy energy at much higher costs. I do support local generation of solar power if we bring it online slowly so that the volatility of sun power is never a factor in our electric generation capacity and our consumption needs. Again affordability must always be at the forefront with transparency of costs of the project.

We should be careful about bringing on a volatile source (as sometimes starting down the road of a project only leads to a more aggressive growth line of that project, just like once we bring on a source of tax revenue, we never ever cap that tax or lower it) before we have extra, lower cost and non-volatile energy generation in place. Solar and wind have had subsidies from the Fed. Govt for a long time but what will be the price of these sources if the Fed Govt cuts those subsidies out of their budget?