

# 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?**

The most important challenge facing Austin Energy under the new 10-1 council will be the beginning of a process of adopting a new business model for our public utility that not only accomplishes its mission but that also goes beyond the simple selling of electricity. It will be the approximate equivalent of a "constitutional convention" for the utility.

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

I read the recent (July 2014) analysis of Travis County government conducted by PSPC Consultants with considerable interest and think it would be worthwhile for city leaders to commission a similar study. Such a study should include a comprehensive audit of Austin Energy.

I found page 4 of the document refreshing, mainly because of its focus on first principles. In reminding readers of Max Weber's classic 1922 work *Economy and Society* and its clear focus on efficient administration and accountability as the lynchpins of any modern bureaucracy, the authors of the study did Travis County citizens a service.

**3. What is your position on climate change?**

As a Ph.D. level environmental scientist and educator, my position on this matter is clear: it is real and it is anthropocentric in origin.

- 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?**

I am in agreement with many of the report's recommendations. However the report is not as well written or organized as the similar report produced by the Water Task Force, which is a problem. Public communication (and education) on energy matters is one of the more important problems our city faces; reports of this nature need to be written for the people, not specialists. I would support a do-over of this report: its argumentation needs to be tightened up, and its prose and visual presentation should be easier to read and understand.

On the policy side, I am a supporter of a Feed-In-Tariff, which the report is not. They are more equitable than Third Party lease agreements, less bureaucratic, and they can generate funding for housing affordability as well as other community benefits.

- 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?**

The role of a city council member vis-a-vis our public utility is spelled out in our city charter. As a city council member I expect to be an active, engaged and informed member of the board of directors of our public utility.

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

There are plenty of examples from which to choose. I support more rooftop distributed energy (primarily solar, but wind, fuel cells and other energy sources as well), micro-grids, exploration of HVDC, demand reduction programs (weatherization, greenbuilding, etc.) as well as the establishment of a comprehensive de-carbonization strategy that includes the achievement of measurable reduction targets, such as phased-in adoption of the German Passive House standard.

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

As the city's only African-American energy auditor and rainwater catchment professional, I look at this issue from both an energy savings as well as equity perspective. What we require are measurable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and reductions in utility bills, not just the continuance of "programs" for their own sake that do not serve and are not participated in by our city's minority-majority population. Accordingly, on the city council dais I will support increased funding for our energy auditing and weatherization programs--which I strongly support--but I will also insist on qualitative and quantitative improvements in how these programs are administered.

**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?**

There is no scenario that I can envision under which I would support further investments in nuclear power on the part of our public utility.

When it comes to nuclear power I am not a novice. I am familiar with the arguments proffered by contemporary nuclear power advocates concerning reactor safety and waste disposal. I spent considerably amounts of time on nuclear powered ships and submarines during my years in the U.S. Navy.

But in my judgment nuclear power is 20th century technology; we need to be embracing 21st century solutions.