

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?

Reducing our dependence of fossil fuels to the maximum extent possible while keeping energy bills affordable for all of our customers, and especially mitigating the effects of rate increases for lower income customers.

District 4 includes many neighborhoods that have benefited from expanded energy efficiency programs and many of our families could benefit greatly from an expansion of the programs, especially to rental units. Lowering utility bills is just part of the equation: these programs are a great way to provide locals with jobs and create apprenticeship programs for both youth and adults. I believe my challenge will be balancing increased investment in weatherization programs with an ongoing expansion of our CAP program that gives immediate utility relief to many of our residents that are feeling acute economic struggle.

We need to broaden the environmental movement to all neighborhoods, and creative renewable energy solutions - such as distributed solar - are a great way to do it. I support a publicly-owned utility for good reason: the utility is not only a business, it is a public service that can be directed by the community to serve our longer-term goals.

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

Austin Energy is owned by Austinites and must reflect our values and remain open to citizen input, while remaining a successful utility that provides revenue for taxpayers to reinvest deliberately on other services.

I strongly believe that Austin Energy must remain a publicly-owned and publicly-controlled utility through the Council. I hope that with an expanded Council, members will have more time to address Austin Energy's issues. From a district perspective, my district is largely composed of renters in multifamily units and residents living in older and less energy efficient housing-- therefore energy efficiency will be a top priority for me, to focus simultaneously on affordability and reducing carbon emissions.

From a citywide perspective, I believe Austin Energy is an opportunity to not only provide excellent customer service and power, but also address social equity and our environmental goals with every major policy decision.

3. What is your position on climate change?

Climate change is a serious threat. Austin should be a leader in the United States for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that accelerate climate change.

I take it as a given that we have to take dramatic action to reduce emissions. For example, replacing the Decker Creek Power Plant makes both environmental & economic sense considering a possible increase in natural gas prices in the near-term. If we can make the numbers work, we should close that plant and replace it with long-term solar buys before the federal renewable energy tax credits expire.

I support the recent climate change goal passed by the City Council of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and sooner if possible. I support the goal of reducing CO2 emissions from all city-controlled generation resources to zero by 2030.

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?

The *Climate Protection Plan to 2020* has a renewables goal of 35% by 2020. In order to meet the goal set by City Council of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, we need to move as aggressively as possible off of fossil fuels. I support renewable energy goals of 50% by 2020 and 65% by 2025. Prices for wind and solar have been dropping and can be competitive with new gas generation-- without the long-term costs to our environment of non-renewable energy generation.

I support maintaining the current affordability goals of keeping rates among the 50% lowest in Texas and not increasing the average residential energy bill more than 2% in any year. I would maintain a tiered rate structure, and I support ensuring that our tiers are structured to both incentivize low usage and provide fairness to low and moderate income customers. Throughout my campaign, I've championed an expansion of the utility relief program to provide relief for more low and moderate income ratepayers.

I support implementation of the Generation Task Force recommendations. I oppose building a new gas generation plant, and I support shutting down the Decker gas plant as soon as is feasible.

In addition to reducing greenhouse gases and air pollution, it is important that we protect and conserve our water resources, so the Task Force recommendation to reduce water use is important. Fossil fuel generation plants use large quantities of water.

I support revising the Green Choice program so that residents do not pay more for supporting renewable energy.

I support establishing a task force to determine how to work toward net zero energy goals for all new buildings.

I would like to see more specific recommendations for improving the energy efficiency and renewable energy programs for low and moderate income people. The Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force set up recently by the Council will help with that effort.

The *Climate Protection Plan to 2020* sets a target of closing Fayette in 2020, and we should continue to work towards that goal.

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?

Austin Energy is a great public asset and it should remain under public control. To achieve this goal, I believe the board members of Austin Energy should be the City Council, who are directly accountable to the public during elections. However, Austin Energy has lacked the attention it needs from the Council, so I will champion regular, dedicated meetings of a Council subcommittee on Austin Energy.

I'll bring my experience as a community organizer to elective office. I believe a Council Member under the new 10-1 system will be to empower our communities and the organizations that represent them. By working directly with the community, we can make the tough decisions and pass the creative policy we need to balance all our priorities: maintaining reasonable rates, minimizing environmental impacts, prioritizing social equity, and providing a return to taxpayers.

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

We should purchase as much utility-scale solar as possible while the solar incentives are still in effect. The recent solar contract is at a price below the price for natural gas generation.

I'm passionate about finding cost-effective ways to expand the local solar program to allow more people to benefit from lower electricity rates and contribute toward our climate change goals. An expanded program should be implemented to provide local jobs with a career path.

I would also encourage other clean energy, such as wind power, in the generation resource mix, and programs for energy storage.

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

One of my top priorities will be to significantly expand the City's weatherization programs and solar energy generation (both distributed & central). Small investments in home weatherization & repair can yield large savings in energy, which benefits us all by lowering emissions & lowering overall energy purchased for peak hours, and directly benefits low-to-moderate income folks with lower bills. A successful expansion of the weatherization & home repair program would include those renting and owning their residences. We've got models to learn from: Austin Energy has completed case studies on our program through federal stimulus money, and Houston recently expanded their weatherization effort in East Houston. I believe that energy efficiency programs should be extended to customers earning past 200% of the federal poverty line-- instead, we should target low-to-moderate income neighborhoods and qualify all older stock residences in a neighborhood. A successful program directly reaches out to residents, block-by-block, improving entire neighborhoods at a time, so we can spend more money on weatherization and less on administrative costs. A higher proportion of our energy efficiency dollars should go to weatherization and repair. I've called for candidates that support a homestead exemption to support at least an equal number of dollars being dedicated to weatherization and utility relief.

Solar installation along with weatherization programs should be tied to apprenticeships for those in District 4 and other low-opportunity areas. Creating sustainable jobs out of our renewable energy efforts and energy efficiency programs can get more people connected to the environmental movement, and ensure that environmental priorities remain at the top of the agenda even with a new Council.

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?

I oppose Austin Energy becoming involved in new nuclear resources, and I do not support renewing the contract with the South Texas Project after the retirement dates. Nuclear power creates serious public health threats because of the radioactive waste from the plant and processing facilities.