

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?

Austin Energy is crucial to the health and well-being of the citizens and businesses of our community. However the utility is not operating with the level of efficiency needed to affordably and reliably deliver power to its customers. It is imperative that we take a deep-dive into the operations and financials of AE. The city council has approved rate increases that were associated with expenses other than rising fuel costs. Residential customers now have fees on their monthly bills that aren't associated with power or water. AE revenue has been used to fund things like festivals, community sponsorships and other unrelated activities. AE is also one of the largest users of water in the city. We need to move to more efficient energy sources that do not put such a heavy burden on a shrinking water supply. The city needs to put a very critical eye to AE's books and make sure that the utility is running efficiently and charging customers appropriately. This utility is tied to the livelihood of almost every person and business in our community. City council needs to be knowledgeable of AE's operations.

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

As stated above, the first step is getting a full briefing of the business operations of the utility, so I can understand the business is currently operating. I also would like a status report on the Resource, Generation & Climate Protection Plan. The purpose of this would be to get an internal perspective of how things are going. Walking in the door with a "this is what's going to change in here" attitude is not likely to get support from the staff – which is needed to make change happen. I would like to see a streamlined utility that runs efficiently, charges customers appropriately, and has plans for the future that support our changing population and environment. I have experience in developing operations systems as well as managing budgets and PNLs. I want AE develop an annual budget that doesn't have hidden pockets of money that are used to pay for non-utility items. AE also needs to have a plan for energy efficiency for low income customers and renters. This population is growing and they are very price sensitive. In addition to having programs to help home owners and businesses, AE needs to have some kind of program or incentive for renters. The utility needs to maintain a roadmap for the future that is based around providing reliable and affordable energy-efficient power to the community.

3. What is your position on climate change?

On some level climate change cannot be avoided. Throughout the history of the planet, Earth has gone through many extreme climate changes which have resulted in the end of life and the creation of new life. The planet is ever evolving and climate change is a part of that process. The modern world in which we live is creating pollution and negative environmental affects that are also changing our climate. I think that finding ways to decrease the negative affect that we have on this planet is important for the well-being of all living things. Temperatures are rising and water supplies are shrinking. Air, land, and water are polluted. We are an intelligent society, with the benefit of knowledge and tools. We need to reduce our negative impact on the environment as much as possible. This won't necessarily stop climate change, but it will impact the quality and quantity of natural resources that we have access to and the ability to continue to have access to those resources.

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 response to solar power has been positive in the community. I would like to see programs that increase access to solar and increase the use of solar in the generation resource mix. The use of natural gas is better than coal and nuclear, but it still has the ability to negatively affect our environment. I think we need to look at the different energy sources that are in the 2020 plan and see if there are opportunities to increase the percentage that is coming from renewable sources without financially impacting the community. We are already working towards limiting coal power but we should evaluate if there is an opportunity to further reduce (possibly eliminate) the use of coal. It's produces air and water pollution, and it has many costs associated with delivering the coal from Wyoming.

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?

City Council is tasked with the business critical responsibility of policy and budgetary oversight for Austin Energy; however, they have historically not given the appropriate amount of attention the AE's operations to successfully fulfill this responsibility. As a council member, I will make my role as board member a top priority. The efficiency with which Austin Energy operates should be of great interest to city council because 1) it's a valuable city owned asset 2) it uses 36% of the city's funds (the largest percentage) 3) affordable access to utilities is a top priority for our community. I currently serve on the board of the YMCA, and I know that level of responsibility that comes with the role of a board member. I will be an actively engaged board member who reviews AE data on a regular basis. I have experience in leadership at a billion dollar company, and I know that operations have to be monitored, evaluated and updated on a regular basis for the business to effectively service its customers. City council has a history of only paying attention to AE during budget work sessions or when discussing rate increases. Without a deep understanding of the business operations, those discussions can (and have) result in decisions that are not in the best interest of the community. It's crucial that we elect council members with the business experience necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of the AE board of directors.

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

I would like to see solar leasing program that allows solar to be more accessible to customers. There is solid potential for increased solar use in Austin; however the costs associated with installing the panels/control box can be out of reach for many Austin residents. We need to find options that make solar more affordable and accessible. I would also like to see a program that encourages/incentivizes rental property to use solar or other renewable energy resources. In District 4 more than half of our population is renters. Because the property owners are not paying the utility bills, they do not have a direct incentive to convert to solar/renewable energy. Finding ways of getting these rental properties more energy efficient benefits the renters AND the community.

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

I think energy efficiency programs should be a foundational part of Austin Energy's business model. These programs educate customers about the benefits of having a more energy efficient home/business. Ultimately, people are often motivated by money or savings. Having rebates and cost assistance programs helps people consider updating their home or business with more energy efficient appliances. These programs have a solid return on investment because energy efficiency positively affects the community. The entire community would benefit if AE used less water in the production of energy. For that to happen, we need more people and businesses to be more energy efficient. If we produced less trash, the entire community would benefit. AE's energy efficiency programs are an integral part of the community making these updates.

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?

Nuclear is not a reliable or efficient energy source. The amount of radioactive material inside of nuclear power plants makes it a dangerous and irresponsible to the community. Though we are not likely to suffer a tsunami like the one that damaged Fukushima Daini Nuclear Power Plant, the damage that the plant caused to the community is an example of why the use of nuclear power should be stopped. Two years after the incident, it was reported that radioactive water was still leaking into the Pacific Ocean. Nuclear power is irresponsible and should be discontinued.