

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?**

Affordability is uppermost on residents' minds, and I support effective measures to keep rates affordable and revenues healthy while reducing demand and moving toward more renewable energy generation, like West Texas solar, coastal wind and distributed solar. These technologies offer Austin an opportunity to move from older, polluting fossil fuels to clean energy sources.

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

While Austin Energy in the past was one of the most innovative, forward looking, cutting-edge utilities in the country, it seems to have slipped from that leadership position in recent years. Austin should be in the fore on incorporation of renewables, energy storage, and smart grid strategies. The Austin Generation Resource Planning Task Force sets the proper course, and those recommendations should be implemented. Any revenues AE earns should be a byproduct of creative and responsible management and operations, not an end to itself. Additionally, AE should be operated for the benefit of its owners, the citizens of Austin, and not large for-profit corporations whose objective is to maximize returns to distant shareholders.

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

Anthropogenic climate change is accelerating and we must take immediate action to – at the very least – slow its advance. Austin Energy should set the standard for how electric utilities can change their operations to address climate change.

- 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 do support the recommendations of the Resource Planning Task Force. One thing I specifically like about the AE-2020 plan is the recommendation to push more demand reduction, conservation and renewables to middle- and lower-income customers, which the Task Force plan also recommended. As we move forward implementing the Task Force's plan, we need to constantly ensure that affordability is maintained, especially for less wealthy residential customers as well as small commercial customers. More importantly, we will eventually need to adopt a revenue model based on providing service, not selling a specific volume of kwh. Done correctly, this will ensure the utility's future financial health and provide customers with reliable and affordable service.

- 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's water and electric utilities exist for the public good. The City Council should continue as the governing body of Austin Energy. As a council member, I would be fully engaged in the oversight role of AE. I recognize the very technical nature of the work – I served as commissioner on another very technical city commission, Water/Wastewater Commission – but it's not beyond the grasp of council members, especially if the professional staff at AE is open and transparent in its work. AE should be accountable to the public and the best way to do that is through Council.

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

More large scale solar, distributed solar and wind. As we move toward renewables and away from nuclear and fossil fuels, we will have to incorporate demand reduction/management and storage to ensure reliability and affordability.

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

Austin Energy must do a better job to identify high-demand/high use customers, determine the cause(s) of the high demand/use, and design programs to reduce the demand/use. Without demand reduction/management and conservation, greater reliance on renewables will be more of a challenge. We should focus first on low- and middle-income customers, who would benefit the most from lowering their energy bills and are least able to afford the upfront investment in efficiency. Additionally, the HVAC replacement program should end and funds shifted over to weatherization program. Paul Robbins's report on the cost of the program and the number of accounts in arrears is a wake-up call.

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?

We should not invest in additional nuclear generation capacity, nor should we be involved in STP beyond the scheduled retirement dates.