

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

Candidate Name: Ed Scruggs

District: 8

Email: Ed4Austin8@gmail.com

Phone: 512-565-0502

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 immediate challenge regarding Austin Energy is protection of the asset and fighting the threat of state imposed deregulation. It is apparent there are forces looking for an opportunity to either control or seriously influence our energy policies. We simply cannot allow this to happen.

Over the next decade AE faces challenges adapting to an ever changing regulatory environment and what will become a conservation based marketplace.

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

Being the city's most valuable financial asset, we must work diligently to build a modernized, efficient and financially stable AE – that also has the ability adapt to a changing marketplace and to meet our stated policy goals.

District 8 is essentially split between customers of AE and PEC (such as myself). This has allowed customers like me to benefit from services (such as street lighting and 3-1-1) that are paid for out of AE general fund transfers. Most PEC customers inside the city are unaware of this and their views of AE are skewed by media reports and second hand, misinformation. We need to work to correct that and emphasize how the utility benefits all citizens.

AE customers within the district are most concerned about affordability and recent rate / fee increases. In the current environment of rising property taxes and general unaffordability – increasing utility bills are devastating to some and increasingly agitating for others. Failure to meet affordability targets leads to a general sense of dissatisfaction with AE and the city in general, making it more difficult from a political perspective to move forward with our financial and policy initiatives.

3. What is your position on climate change?

It is apparent that climate change is at the center of many of Austin's most severe environmental challenges; from lowering lake / aquifer levels to severe flooding, increased fire danger and prolonged periods of warmer temperatures.

The current level of severe climate change is man made – fed by increasing levels of CO2 in the atmosphere. It may seem like I'm stating the obvious, but our state

leaders (and an uncomfortable percentage of the public) continually refuse to acknowledge scientific fact in the face of repeated, alarming predictions of how severely Texas will be impacted in coming decades.

It's critical that every candidate in every city council race go on the record with this point – because it offers critical insight as to basic understanding of scientific research and the significant policy challenges we face over the next decade.

With action on climate change stalled by political infighting on the international, federal and state levels – it is increasingly up to local governments to take the lead on this front.

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 supportive of the goals outlined in the Task Force Report. As outlined above, it is critical that we use our abilities as both a local government and energy producer to take a leading role in addressing climate change.

Primary to my support is the stipulation that we continue to meet established affordability rate targets. I personally would like to see the target expanded to include not only rates but utility fees, because in the end the ratepayer does not differentiate between the two – so why should we?

There is much riding on our ability as a city and a utility to affordably meet these goals. In order to accomplish this we must be mindful of the financial health of the utility asset and promote efficient management and financial practices. This includes examining specifics of the general fund transfer and whether amending current obligations can improve the ability to implement our policy objectives.

The AE 2020 plan includes many laudable goals, but seems somewhat dated considering the advances that have taken place in recent years (including the recent deal for the new West Texas solar facility). I believe it is possible to push well past the renewable production targets outlined in the report and we should be able close Fayette prior to the targeted date – especially if we meet increased renewable targets and achieve useable advances in storage technology.

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?

To begin, I favor local control of AE and the continued oversight by the city council. We need that control over the rate structure and energy policy as well as influence over contributions to the general fund. That being said, my role as a council member, acting as an AE board member, is to bring a balanced perspective to the table. In a sense, council members serve in a standard business advisory capacity while also acting as consumer advocates. These are somewhat challenging dual roles – but something I believe we would not have under deregulation or even under an independent board.

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

I am a firm backer of doubling our production of renewable energy (wind and solar) over the next decade – with an increasing emphasis on local, rooftop solar. To accomplish this our solar rebate programs must be continued and strengthened. We must also advocate for the ability to allow AE customers to pay for their solar systems over time, either as part of a lease agreement or as a percentage of their utility or tax bills. Our commitment to “community solar” should also expand.

It may be ambitious, but we should ultimately strive to see solar panels atop every school, library and public office building within the next decade.

We should look closely at the progress of energy storage technology and related research. I am open to investing in collaborative technology research programs (in a fiscally responsible manner) in order to allow us to meet overall renewable energy objectives.

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

Customer energy efficiency programs are essential (especially during the current affordability crisis) and we must commit to their continuation and expansion. As part of our commitment to all ratepayers, we should also strive to be as efficient as possible in the administration of these programs, saving the most energy in the most fiscally responsible manner. I am confident we can find the right balance and aid those in need.

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 personally have issues with renewing a reactor of this age for an additional 20 years – and off hand would oppose continued involvement after 2028. Granted, we have 14 years before reaching that date – and we will need to continually re-assess our generation policies, waste disposal technologies and regulatory environment before making a final decision.