

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?

During the next few years, the City will face the ongoing challenge of expanding our portfolio of renewable generation while staying within our affordability goals. We will evidently be outside the comfort zone of city management and Austin Energy staff, so it will be up to the Council, the Electric Utility Commission, and community stakeholders to keep the pressure on to sustain our forward progress.

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

I envision the City Council listening to the Austin community, getting a clear sense of the community's aspirations for our electric utility, and bringing those aspirations to bear on the direction of the utility. Because our utility is municipally owned, we have a responsibility to ensure that the utility's policies and practices are consistent with our community's values.

As a representative of District 9, I'll have a particular responsibility to ensure that the utility's policies are well aligned with the interests of the district. For example, given that District 9 has over 300 multi-family structures of 10 units or more, I'll be particularly interested in ensuring that residents of multi-family structures are able to participate in our progress on distributed solar.

3. What is your position on climate change?

Climate change is real, it's impacting us today, and it's due in large part to human activity, especially our continued burning of fossil fuels. Climate change will continue to cause more extreme changes in temperature and more extreme weather-related events. I sponsored the April 2014 [resolution](#) setting a community goal of net zero CO2 emissions because we need to take action now and set a path for all of us to play our part. I have also led initiatives on climate adaptation and climate resilience, because we need to be better prepared as a community for the changes that will occur.

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 implementation of the recommendations in the report developed by the Austin Generation Resource Planning Task Force. That's why I sponsored the recently approved [Affordable Energy resolution](#), which integrated a number of the Task Force's recommendations. I have some questions about the energy efficiency and weatherization goals set out in the task force report, so I'm looking forward to the work of the Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force, which should help shape our progress on those programs.

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?**

As a member of the board of directors of Austin Energy, I have a fiduciary duty to act in the best interest of the utility, and to put the needs of the utility above my own. And as a council member, I have a duty to exercise my responsibilities in a manner that serves the interests of the city as a whole.

It's up to the Council to set the future direction of the utility, taking into consideration the complexities of the utility industry. We also need to ensure that utility staff are implementing the policies that the board has put in place in a financially responsible manner.

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

Austin Energy's generation resource mix should rely heavily on wind (both West Texas and coastal) and solar (both utility-scale and distributed). Our generation resource portfolio will likely include the biomass plant for some time, but I do not see it as a major part of our resource mix over the long term.

I have led several initiatives that have helped shape our resource mix. In August 2011, I sponsored a [resolution](#) directing the City Manager and Austin Energy to report back to Council on the strategy related to reaching adopted policy goals for solar generation in Austin. In October 2013, I sponsored a local solar [resolution](#) endorsing the Local Solar Advisory Committee's recommendation of a 400 megawatt

solar program, and calling for 50% to come from local sources and at least 25% to come from customer-owned solar. And most recently, I sponsored the [Affordable Energy resolution](#) that endorsed a number of Generation Task Force recommendations, setting a goal of 600 MW of new utility-scale solar by 2017 and increasing the goal for local solar from 100 MW to 200 MW by 2020, with at least 100 MW being customer-controlled (behind the meter) solar.

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

Austin Energy has had some form of energy efficiency program in place for decades, for good reason: the cheapest megawatt of energy available is the megawatt we don't use. I have undertaken a number of measures to ensure that we take energy efficiency programs seriously. In 2011 I sponsored a [resolution](#) directing Austin Energy to report on its progress toward meeting the goal of 800 MW of peak demand savings by 2020. Additionally, during the rate redesign process, I pushed for a line item that could be adjusted in order to increase funding for EE programs, without having to go through a full rate case again. And I support the 2014 Generation Planning Task Force recommendation to increase the energy efficiency goal to 1,200 megawatts by the end of 2024, with 200 megawatts of the goal being met by demand response strategies.

Progress on energy efficiency will be essential to meeting our goal of reaching net zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (and sooner if feasible), as set out in the climate protection [resolution](#) I sponsored in April of this year. To reach that goal, it'll be critical for homes and businesses to continue with retrofits and make new buildings more efficient through our code. That will require stepping up all of our energy efficiency efforts, including rebates and weatherization.

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?

Austin Energy's portion of the South Texas Project has provided relatively affordable and carbon-free energy for our community for many years. Many questions remain, however, about the safety and viability of extending the life of the plant, and about the disposal of waste from the facility. And based on the recent prices we've seen for renewable energy, it would be hard to justify a renewed investment in nuclear energy, even if other issues could be addressed. I would expect to have a full evaluation of any future investment that large in the context of the energy market and our load needs, but given all the issues involved, I don't foresee a persuasive case for Austin remaining involved in the South Texas Project reactors after their currently scheduled retirement dates of 2027 and 2028.