

# 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?**

As with many areas of the City, affordability is the most significant challenge facing Austin Energy. Throughout my first term, I have been vigilant in protecting ratepayers and successfully fought off a proposal for a 12% electricity rate hike. I have also led on the implementation of more reasonable payment plans for those who have fallen behind on their utility payments, which both helps the families in need and ensures the utility receives payments for usage. I voted to reaffirm the City's commitment to the affordability goals: keeping Austin

Energy rates among the 50% lowest of Texas utilities and limiting the annual rate increases to no more than 2% for any customer class. And, I am devoting attention to reviewing energy efficiency programs, which can offer significant savings to Austin's residents by reducing bills and can defer or eliminate the need for the utility to invest in additional power. The Generation Plan Update Task Force has demonstrated a strong economic-based case for investments in solar energy as being the cleanest and most financially prudent option, and I believe fulfilling our newly-reset renewable energy goals is important to long-term sustainability and affordability.

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

Austin Energy needs to (1) reduce its dependency on coal, nuclear, and fossil fuels; (2) increase its investments in solar and wind; and (3) strive to meet new demand with energy efficiency. I have supported policy decisions and contracts that further these goals. In the years ahead, Austin needs to continue our forward progress, which is why I sponsored a focused stakeholder process exploring how the utility could expand its energy efficiency programs, and, in response to the suggestion of community members, I sponsored the creation of the Generation Plan Update Task Force this spring. The Task Force was charged with reviewing the Generation Plan and recommending more aggressive goals and new strategies for achieving them. The council recently adopted actions based on these recommendations, including goals to eliminate CO2 emissions from all city-controlled generation resources by 2030, meeting 50% of all energy needs through the use of renewable resources by 2020 (65% by 2025), and accelerating the procurement of solar energy to replace power from the Decker Creek Power Plant. On a related matter, I regard it as critical to these goals that City Council continue to govern Austin Energy, and I helped

successfully fight the effort to turn over the utility's governance to an unelected, independent board in 2013.

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

Austin is already suffering from the impacts of global climate change; severe droughts, wildfires, and flash flooding. To confront climate change, Austin must establish itself as a leader by setting strong goals to reduce our community's greenhouse gas emissions and implementing the recommendations of the Climate Protection Plan. I co-sponsored the resolution making Austin the first major city in the nation to endorse new safeguards from unchecked carbon pollution from power plants. And, the City is currently engaged in addressing policies to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050; I voted for that goal and am committed to carry forward the recommendations that result from that process.

**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?**

Yes, I sponsored the creation of the Generation Plan Update Task Force, and I support their recommendations. The Council has already acted on their key recommendations, including our goals to eliminate CO2 emissions from city-controlled facilities and on investments in solar / renewable energy (described above). I am also leading on expanding energy efficiency program access to low income individuals and increasing our energy efficiency goals.

**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?**

I regard it as critical to meet our energy and affordability goals that the City Council continue to govern Austin Energy, and I helped successfully fight the effort to turn over the utility's governance to an unelected, independent board in 2013. Austin Energy must remain accountable to Austin voters, and it is the duty of the City Council to ensure that the utility is headed in the right policy direction and has the appropriate oversight.

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

I am supportive of the Task Force's recommendation that solar energy be the new default generation resource through 2024. And, I voted for the policy goals The council recently adopted actions based on these recommendations, including goals to eliminate CO2 emissions from all city-controlled generation resources by 2030 and meeting 50% of all energy needs through the use of renewable resources by 2020 (65% by 2025). New renewable energy resource generation must also be accompanied by significant improvements in energy efficiency programs (see below) and a comprehensive strategy for the development and use of distribution-level and transmission-level storage technologies.

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

Energy efficiency programs reduce energy costs and can improve affordability for Austin's residents. I sponsored a resolution several years ago that brought together stakeholders to suggest strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of Austin's energy efficiency programs; I sponsored a subsequent resolution to track rental rates at multifamily housing to ensure that apartments receiving incentives weren't then raising rents to a level that offsets energy cost savings. At the August 28 council meeting, I sponsored a resolution directed at creating policies that will increase energy efficiency program offerings to low- to moderate-income customers and creating a Low Income Consumer Advisory Task Force to further our efforts toward ensuring that we have the most effective and far-reaching programs possible. The task force will be making recommendations on identifying appropriate funding levels for low-income weatherization programs; developing options for low and low-moderate income customers to participate in renewable generation resources; evaluating air conditioner rebates and equipment-related programs; suggesting incentives and code changes that could encourage energy efficiency measures in apartment complexes and smaller rental properties; and establishing a demand reduction goal for low income and low-moderate income households as a percentage of the energy efficiency and demand response goals for 2024. My office will remain actively engaged in the process, and I will continue to lead on promoting energy efficiency programs.

- 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 should not invest in more nuclear reactors. Austin Energy's focus should be on solar and wind energy and improvements in energy efficiency. One of the primary concerns with nuclear energy is the demand on the state's limited water resources. Given climate change and future climate projections, we must face the reality that water is going to continue be in limited supply. Austin's share of the South Texas Nuclear Project requires the usage of 1.85 billion gallons of water annually. I am prepared to let the City's involvement in this nuclear power plant retire without renewal.