

**Austin Sierra Club
Questionnaire for Austin City Council candidates 2008**

- 1. How do you propose to meet Austin's future energy demand? How will you work to get Austin closer to being the renewable energy capital of the US?**

In 2001 I was a co-founder of the Austin Clean Energy Initiative because I believed then, as I do today, that Austin is a natural home for clean energy innovation and can and should be recognized as a national center of the renewable energy sector. We are in a strong position to successfully compete for the title of "Renewable Energy Capital." Our City-owned utility is one of the "greenest" in the country and features one of the top performing renewable energy programs in America. We also have the Austin Climate Protection Plan in place to make City operations carbon-neutral by 2020, and to encourage community partners to achieve carbon-neutrality, as well. Last year, Austin sponsored a plug-in hybrid vehicles campaign that generated national attention, and the City has already set ambitious goals for transitioning its fleet to hybrids. We have a successful and widely-imitated Green Building program in place; our program was the first for any U.S. city. We have active and involved citizens who care about preserving our environment, creating a strong multi-million dollar consumer market for clean energy products and services. UT Austin offers world class research, and we have the incredible benefit of organizations like the Texas Renewable Energy Industry Association and the Clean Energy Incubator, both working to help young clean energy companies succeed. To move us forward in the renewable energy sector and to help meet Austin's future energy needs, my decision-making on the City Council would always prioritize the generation and distribution of renewable energy over coal or nuclear. I would push to continue to improve the City's residential and commercial energy efficiency programs, to help us conserve more. I would champion efforts to expand and streamline residential and business recycling programs. And, I would work directly with community groups to promote strategies and economic policies that help energy entrepreneurs succeed in our community.

2. Nuclear energy: There is still no safe way to store radioactive waste, and with nuclear plants there is always a risk of terrorist attacks, serious accidents or even a meltdown. A recent study confirms that nuclear plants are expensive to build, and rarely finished on schedule. In 1981 Austin voters voted to sell our 16% interest in the STNP but there were no buyers to be found. Now we are being asked to help pay for expansion of the STP. What is your position on this issue?

I am against the City's involvement in the expansion of the STP, and supported the City Council's decision not to pursue it. Until science and industry create a safe and cost-effective way to generate nuclear energy, I am opposed to it.

3. Will you further increase water conservation – and if so, how – to delay the need for WTP#4?

Generally speaking I am for doing more, now, to achieve ambitious conservation goals so that we can invest less, later, in necessary infrastructure. With that said, I cannot, however, commit to increasing the City's current water conservation goals as a means to delay the construction of WTP #4 without knowing more than I do about the facts and assumptions that underlie the debate, and particularly about the disagreements I've heard over Austin's projected water usage over the next decade. If I'm elected, however, I can and will commit to make it a top priority to ensure that Austin is pursuing a smart, effective long-term strategy on water conservation and on the related timing of construction of water infrastructure.

4. What will you do to ensure that future residents of Austin (and not only in downtown and older neighborhoods) will be able to walk or bicycle safely, or take transit for necessary trips such as shopping, to work or to school?

My philosophy is that multi-modal transportation planning must be central to every decision that the City Council makes, from single-site zoning decisions to large-scale land-use policies. I will promote more community education about land use and planning to encourage more walkable, transit-friendly neighborhoods. Creating and maintaining viable bicycling infrastructure citywide is largely a function of funding, and if elected I would explore options for devoting more resources to the task. I think there are also symbolic victories we can achieve in Austin to help promote the idea of bicycling as a viable form of transit, such as completing the cross-town central city Lance Armstrong Bikeway. I know there are lots of great bicycling advocates and groups in Austin - not to mention some successful local bicycling entrepreneurs, and even a bicycling mega-star - and I would expect to turn to them for the best ideas about how to "Keep Austin Biking."

5. Are subsidies/incentives for businesses ever appropriate, and if so, under what circumstances?

When fee and tax waivers are used judiciously and in compliance with strict, transparent criteria for measuring success, they can be effective tools for helping us achieve shared community goals, including equity, affordability, and sustainability. Generally I am opposed to incentives for exclusively retail enterprises, but can imagine some circumstances where it might be appropriate (i.e., green building or integration of recycling collection into design of retail space).

6. The city has adopted the goal of zero solid waste. What challenges do you anticipate on the path toward this goal, and how will you meet them? What specific steps will you take to implement the goal?

As stated above, if elected to the City Council, I would champion an expansion and streamlining of residential recycling programs to help Austin achieve the important goal of zero solid waste. I would also explore efforts to increase recycling among businesses. As with the previous

question regarding the relationship between water conservation and WTP #4, there is an obvious relationship here between our success at implementing a zero-waste initiative and the necessity of investing in future municipal infrastructure like landfills. Wherever possible, I'd rather be successful at conserving. Convenience and public awareness are essential for success on the path to zero solid waste, so I will also ensure public outreach and broad community involvement are parts of any implementation plans.

7. Mayor Wynn, Council Member McCracken and RECA have all proposed plans for new downtown transit facilities/parking garages. What do you think should be done, if anything?

Downtown parking is a major problem that needs a big solution. As we continue to work to make downtown Austin home to more residents (and, hopefully, making some of our most sensitive rural areas home to fewer residents), I think we've got to take meaningful steps to protect downtown's quality of life, and that includes dealing with downtown traffic congestion (which is caused in large measure by a lack of available parking). We should be prioritizing mass transit solutions when it comes to traffic problems, but until it becomes clear that rail or rapid bus service offer any real amount of near-term relief to traffic congestion in the central city, I am generally supportive of the idea of building more parking infrastructure downtown. I understand that the RECA parking structures proposal includes a downtown rubber-tire circulator tram, which is a concept I am interested in, although I want to learn more about how the proposal would be financed. Any ideas should be fully integrated to support bus, car sharing, biking, and pedestrian activities, too.

8. Despite a lot of talk, water quality in Barton Springs has deteriorated significantly in the past ten years. What will you do to protect Barton Springs?

If elected to the City Council I will be a consistent advocate for the strict enforcement of the SOS ordinance and will work with the rest of the City Council and the community at large to advance policies that result in the net reduction of pollutants flowing into the Barton Springs watershed. Barton Springs Pool is the "soul of the city," and the fight to protect the quality of water in the Barton Springs watershed is representative of the larger fight to protect and improve water quality everywhere.

9. Do you think the process of city government is open enough, and if not, what do you propose to do about it? How will you change the fact that most citizens perceive that City Hall is not listening to them but to big business?

The responsibility of engaging people at City Hall falls on Council members. The Council sets the tone with respect to the way City staff involves citizens, as well. I will actively seek input. You will continue to see me at meetings, town halls and forums of community groups after I am elected not just while I am campaigning. I decided to challenge the incumbent in Place 3 specifically because of her reputation for inaccessibility. I see accessibility as the most

important aspect of a Council member's job. The best way to change the perception that City Hall is not listening to citizens but instead to big business or special interests is to prove that perception wrong through action. I will make my calendar public and work to see that online resources are more readily available so that anyone interested in following City action can do so.

10. Briefly describe your understanding of the term *sustainability*, whether you think it should be a goal for Austin, and if so, what further actions you would propose for the city to achieve it.

Sustainability means different things to different people, but to me it means minimizing required input (i.e., water and energy) and minimizing resulting output (i.e., waste and pollution), so that a community can power itself with the smallest ecological footprint possible. Yes, I believe Austin should strive to be a sustainable city. Besides the actions previously discussed, I would work to actively increase public involvement and awareness across all initiatives related to achieving sustainability. Too often people operate in individual silos which prevents maximum impact from any single initiative. I would also explore the role of Chief Sustainability Officer for the City and find ways to ensure sustainability planning is taken seriously from an operations perspective city-wide, from department to department.

11. Some of these questions have been recycled from previous years' questionnaires, as the problems in Austin have changed little over time. What will you do differently?

Achieving agreement on every issue is unrealistic, as is solving every problem; however, knowing how and why our City is responding to changing circumstances is a must, no matter which side of any argument you may represent. Empathy and honest communication are critical components for achieving the trust necessary to build lasting coalitions and strong working relationships. We need a leader on our City Council who hears the voices and concerns of people from all sides of any argument and who translates those perspectives into action and creative solutions. I have a track record of being that kind of a leader. My background is different from others on our City Council, and I expect that to drive different results if I am elected to serve.

12. What else should we know about you; in other words, why should the Austin Regional Group of the Sierra Club endorse you?

I hope the Austin Regional Group of the Sierra Club will endorse me because I care about the environment and because we share many of the same values and priorities. I will be a more effective advocate for our shared goals than the incumbent because I have a proven track record of actively seeking broad input and cooperatively creating solid working relationships necessary to get things done. I believe in protecting the quality of our air and water. I want to help protect our watersheds, especially our urban creeks. I support strategies to conserve water, reduce waste, reduce carbon emissions, and promote recycling. I also want to protect our open spaces, including the BCCP and watershed protection lands. And, as I noted above, I enthusiastically support the idea of Austin becoming the "renewable energy capital." One last

thing you should know: I am running a “green campaign” by using recyclable signs and materials, carpooling whenever possible, and purchasing carbon credits with campaign funds to offset our energy consumption. These are small gestures, but they are illustrative of how I do business.