

Questions for Austin City Council Candidates

1. What are your energy priorities for the city?

Austin is blessed to own its own electric utility and like a lot of blessings, this one carries with it some extra responsibilities. We are the 9th largest public power provider in the United States and my number one priority is the keep the utility reliable, solvent and competitive for all of Austin and for 400,000+ customers.

With this size, however, comes a global relevance, one reflected in the priorities of the community, and one reflected in my record. We must act assertively to reduce our reliance on carbon based fuels. This year I supported, and Council adopted, a generation plan that will balance all of those priorities and put Austin on a path towards renewable energy sources. In addition to cleaner energy generation, I remain an ardent supporter of the cleanest powers of all: conservation and demand side management. My commitment to this trend has not been limited to the public sector. In 2000 I was a founding member of the Austin Clean Energy Initiative, and as a Council Member, I also sit on the board of the Pecan Street Project. I helped ensure its success by launching Pecan Street Project, Inc. outside of city government, so it could operate as an independent nonprofit -- a multi-entity endeavor attempting to increase distributed generation, leverage the local roof top as a key energy source and promote evolution of the utility's business model to keep it viable and strong as conservation and solar energy displace traditional energy delivery and consumption models. In summary, my energy priorities are: clean, reliable, affordable.

2. Do you think Austin should aggressively pursue additional renewable energy, and if so, why?

Yes, as stated above, I plan to be guided by the generation plan as purchasing decisions arise for the City.

3. Would you support an efficiency rider to assure that Austin Energy maintains needed revenue while encouraging the use of renewable energy?

If we are serious about meeting our conservation goals, we need to do more than put an efficiency surcharge on a bill. A true and comprehensive re-work of the utilities business model is underway. We have already begun the process of a global rate review and a rate case is on the near horizon. I hesitate to cloud these conversations with some sort of interim "efficiency" surcharge at this time.

4. Do you support Austin Energy targeting its investments in ways that enhance economic investments in the city?

I do and have supported strategic economic incentive agreements such as Sun Power.

5. Will you commit to working against any involvement of Austin Energy in proposed nuclear power plants either as an equity partner or through a power purchase agreement?

I always keep an open mind and am willing to hear about proposals that help us reduce our dependence on coal; however, I have serious concerns about the costs and handling of waste where nuclear power is concerned. I have not been presented with a proposal at this time, and what little I have heard about a new participation proposal seems too costly to warrant consideration.

6. In order to reduce threats to water availability, air quality, health and the climate, will you commit to reviewing whether to shut the Fayette coal plant down by 2020?

600MW comes out of our share of the Fayette coal plant. Before selling our share, I would need to understand where that much base power is going to come from. From a clean air stand point, too, selling the plant it is not enough; there is no environmental gain from selling off our ownership stake so that another utility can simply take over, enjoy the cheap base power and continue to pollute. Austin is fortunate to own its electric utility. I remain open to looking at any proposals that are presented on this subject.