

Candidate Questionnaire on Climate and Energy

350 Austin, Solar Austin, Earth Day Austin, Shades of Green

Candidate Name: Bobby Levinski

Candidate For: Austin District 8 Council Member

- 1. What are your top three priorities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Austin, and what actions would you take to implement needed changes?**

Answer: My top three priorities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would be (i) to shut down the Fayette Coal Plant (or, at least, the City's portion thereof), which produces the majority of the City of Austin's greenhouse gas emissions and a sizeable portion of the city's at-large; (ii) invest in dedicated right-of-way to make transit a more viable option for commuters, by improving speed and reliability, and thereby reduce emissions from reducing trips by single occupancy vehicles; and (iii) better integrate the water-energy nexus into our utility planning, so that we are both more efficient with our water and energy use, such as using graywater to pipe through our chiller plants (as an environmental attorney who has been a bit more focused on the water side of things, I think I can help quite a bit in this regard). I understand that there has been some ongoing legal conversations with regard to Fayette and our co-ownership of the plant with the LCRA. I think the first action I would need to take is getting up to speed on those conversations that have occurred with the City's counsel, and then do everything I can to help make the consolidation of our city's interest happen so we can shut down one of the units.

- 2. As mayor or council member, you will be a member of the Austin Energy Utility Oversight Committee. What will you do to make sure that Austin Energy takes the necessary steps to phase out its use of fossil fuels for power generation by 2030?**

Answer: I mentioned the legal conversations with the LCRA above, but beyond that, we need to putting the utility in a good place from both a financial and operational perspective to enable to the switch to occur. We aren't far off our goals, but it will require continued investment in renewable energy generation, and I'd like to build up the reserve fund a bit to help stabilize rates should the unexpected happen. We need to be well-armed with sound financials, so we can push back against the State's interference.

- 3. Despite declining costs of solar, many low income residents and multi-family housing tenants are challenged to participate in Austin Energy's existing rooftop solar programs. Do you think it is important to expand access to solar by developing targeted programs and policies at Austin Energy? Please explain.**

Answer: Yes, my immediate priority would be helping our school districts install solar so that we easing some of their costs, given their current budgetary constraints. As a policy advisor to MPT Tovo, I helped ensure our energy efficiency programs were

expanded to lower-income resident, because the savings that can result can have an enormous impact on a families month-to-month budget. I would love to help expand solar access for lower-income families, and partnering with multi-family complexes to provide savings to renters makes a ton of sense. Count me in.

- 4. Local, distributed scale solar installation has produced values to the utility, community and the local economy. Do you support the expansion of utility investment programs (including rebates) for installing solar locally within the Austin Energy territory? Please explain.**

Answer: Yes, distributed-scale solar is an economically sound investment for our utility in reducing transmission and infrastructure costs. It's no longer an idea for the future; it's a necessity now so we can have a future.

- 5. What specific role and responsibility do you see Austin taking in responding to local, regional and international impacts of climate change, including preparing for large numbers of people displaced by extreme weather events?**

Answer: I appreciate this question, because this is a topic that has been brought up to me by some of our first responders on the campaign trail. Our public safety needs our changing and growing, as we experience the consequences of climate change. For EMS, especially, I think there needs to be a broader recognition of the community health service they provide--especially during extreme heat and drought. And, of course, we have seen the other side of it, with flooding caused by extreme rain events. The most immediate conversation that our City must have is how we are treating drainage in our community. We need to revise the land development code to require that redeveloping responsibility control for drainage on their properties, and we need to invest in open space acquisitions upstream that can mitigate flooding consequences downstream.

With regard to being a regional steward, I think we learned a lot from Hurricane Katrina and Rita. I was working for council at the time, and I think we can all agree that the collective after-action report was that we were unprepared. We established the Office of Emergency Management and began to prepare better. We are in a much better place now to serve that role for our neighbors, but we of course need to stay on top of it.