

Candidate Questionnaire on Climate and Energy

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

Candidate Name: Danielle Skidmore

Candidate For: Austin District 9 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?

- 1. Embrace emerging technology and innovations.** To accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles, we need to continue to work with Austin Energy to increase availability of electric vehicle infrastructure for both the municipal fleet and the city at large. The city can and should continue to provide funding and resources to transition the fleet to electric vehicles where practical. I will also work proactively with Capital Metro to help achieve the Project Connect vision of electric high-capacity transit. More generally, for the sake of our environment, we finally need to go big on public transportation. That means embracing technology to ensure faster, safer movement around our city, but also going back to the basics: a robust bus service, and sidewalks that allow our citizens to walk (or roll) to where they need to be.
- 2. Overhaul public transportation.** To implement this transportation reboot in Austin, we need someone with both the technical skillset and political will to guide that process to fruition; we need someone with a long term vision that necessarily includes making policy changes to save the environment, such as going big on public transportation. If we want public transportation to be as big as it should be in Austin, we must give commuters viable alternatives to driving single occupancy vehicles and provide relatively inexpensive incentives to use transit. Movability Austin is doing good work in this area, but we need to expand the effort to give people economic incentives to change their parking habits.
- 3. Link land development and transit efforts.** Less driving means more living. I envision a walkable, bike-friendly Austin, with transit options that fit within or improve families' budgets and lifestyles. In order to realize a more sustainable Austin, we must create more affordable and market rate housing in walking distance to transit corridors. As we look at our key Project Connect transportation corridors and Capital Metro Remap high frequency corridors, our land development code should allow higher densities on the corridors and also for a stair-step transition of "missing middle" housing—parallel to these corridors. Our density bonus program should also be revised to ensure this new housing comes with real community benefits to affordable housing programs.

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?

The City should retain control over Austin Energy, but I do believe we could consider

an independent board with real expertise in the energy industry to supplement Council's leadership. I am proud of Austin Energy's leadership in sustainable energy production and think setting aggressive goals to reduce fossil fuel dependence is laudable. I will work with Austin Energy's leadership to balance these goals with affordability targets, with a focus on a robust public discussion of the cost and benefit data. More broadly, I also think it may be most cost effective to look at overall fossil fuel usage as a city, with targeted investments in our transportation infrastructure to reduce fossil fuel demand.

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.

I believe we must continue to expand access to multifamily and low income residents. Extending these benefits to these communities will require a shift in thinking in the incentive programs. As a resident of a downtown condominium with sub-metered electricity, I have not been able to easily participate in thermostat rebate programs due to the billing challenges. With respect to rooftop solar, similar challenges apply. Targeted outreach and programs for the HOA or property management could help expand the use of solar. The challenges are primarily billing/credit logistics and how to allocate this community benefit to individual units, and this could be addressed through the "virtual net metering" to program participants, as has been explored in California by their [PUC](#):

“There are economic and technical challenges to installing one solar energy system in a multifamily housing complex where each tenant's unit has a separate meter. This is true for affordable housing, as well as any multitenant environment. The VNM concept is designed to overcome the challenge of allocating benefits from a single solar energy system to tenants in multifamily housing whose units are individually metered. Under VNM, a single solar energy system sized to offset part or all of a building's total load can be installed for the entire complex, but electricity produced by the system can be credited to individually metered tenants and to common areas of the building. Essentially, the electricity produced by the system would be net-balanced against total building electricity consumption, as if the building had a single, or "virtual," master meter. Credits for solar energy system production would be allocated to all units (both tenant units and common areas) in a predetermined proportion. Staff recommends VNM credits could be allocated proportionally between tenant and common areas based on historical load data, and then allocated equally between tenants.”

Austin energy has a similar pilot program “Multifamily Shared Solar Pilot Program for Multi-Tenant Affordable Housing”, which should be expanded. Expanding Austin Energy credits to low income residents could be achieved in partnership with

nonprofits, perhaps a solar cooperative that could pool costs and resources to add solar to other affordable housing programs.

- 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.**

I absolutely support these investment programs. It is the duty of today's energy companies to actively facilitate our broader societal transition to renewables, and incentivize families to opt into them now by offsetting their cost to do so.

- 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?**

Great cities are serving as an example for the whole United States on these sustainability issues. When President Trump pulled us out of the Paris Climate Accord, mayors of cities committed to exert their local power by still upholding the tenets of the accord. Austin City Council can do the same, by taking the bold and necessary actions to help redefine our city's mobility patterns in a way that both benefits our residents and combats climate change... but we need a champion on Council with the vision and skillset to make that happen. By realizing a compact, connected city (less pavement, more people) we reduce our need to drive and the amount of greenhouse gases we're pumping into the atmosphere. This line of thinking will also help us accommodate more people in our city, in the instance of natural disasters that will surely increase as climate change intensifies. We need to make more room for people throughout Austin—remembering that we're not just talking about transplants from California or wherever, but new children being born in Austin all the time, and potentially future climate refugees. We just have to make sure that making that space comes with a real and tangible commitment to community benefits; affordable housing, and minimizing displacement of current residents in our communities.

As far as local and regional effects of climate change, the clearest example for Texas has been a quantifiable increase in the frequency and intensity of floods. As a civil engineer practicing in transportation and drainage engineering, the data (NOAA Atlas 14) reaffirms what we all see: it's raining harder and longer. This directly impacts the City of Austin by increasing the amount of land, and the number of homes that are located within a floodplain. It is terrifying to see many of my projects, designed for a "100-year" flood, see floods of equal or greater size a couple of times in the span of a few years. This flooding has affected my work and my life greatly in this way, and I know that I will be able to use my political position for environmental change once I'm in office.

Flooding has been a prevalent issue seen as a result of climate change specifically

in Austin. To reduce flooding dangers, we must continue to manage our development and near floodplains carefully. Austin does a good job of regulating floodplain development, but climate change is real. It's raining harder now, and more often. This means that our floodplain maps will continue to change as stream flood intensity increases. From a policy standpoint, that means we need to reduce the number of vulnerable properties impacted by flooding, using programs such as buyouts, where appropriate. The other piece of the flooding solution is to continue to support compact and connected cities, and to reduce sprawl. The redevelopment of existing impervious cover is better than expanding it; we must allow development to go up instead of out, which will help preserve more green-space in the process.

Drought is another impact of climate change seen within our city, and to survive future droughts, we must continue on our current path, where we've seen some good success with the Austin Water Utility, and I am excited to support the Water Forward Plan.