

# Candidate Questionnaire on Climate and Energy

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

**Candidate Name:** Mariana Salazar

**Candidate For:** Austin District 1 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?**

Carbon emissions cause catastrophic and extreme weather events, and in Austin, we see the effects of climate change in flash floods, droughts & rising heat. To reduce carbon emissions, as a council member, I will support reducing usage of fossil fuels, reducing the reliance of single occupancy vehicles, and reducing waste in landfills.

- Energy from fossil fuel sources is one of our largest carbon emissions causing climate change. Texas leads the nation in wind power production and we should harness that energy. At the same time we should do it in a fashion that is affordable and makes energy accessible to owners and renters alike. Smaller cities like Georgetown are going fossil free, we can too. [Austin Energy's Resource Generation and Climate Protection Plan studies the possibility of going carbon free by 2030.](#) I look forward to their findings and working with the community, Austin Energy and my fellow Council members to find a way to transition away from fossil fuels by 2030.
- Automobiles are our next largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from carbon combustion. In our transportation planning, we need to build better public transit to reduce our reliance on single occupancy vehicles and vehicles miles traveled and electrifying our transportation to use more electric vehicles in the city fleet & electric buses by CAPMETRO. We should increase opportunities for teleworking, carpooling and vanpooling to reduce the number of vehicles emitting harmful gases. In our land use planning, we need to reduce sprawl and develop in a compact manner to allow for shorter commutes and allow our green spaces to flourish that help clean our air and water.
- The third area of focus should be reducing waste in the landfills. Landfills emit carbon dioxide and methane. I would work towards designing programs that make Austin reuse, recycle and compost to reduce our carbon footprint at residential, commercial and industrial scales.

**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?**

Energy from fossil fuel sources is one of our largest sources of carbon emissions causing climate change. While we should work towards that goal of phasing out fossil fuels, we should do it in a fashion that is affordable and makes energy accessible to owners and renters alike. Smaller cities like Georgetown are going

fossil free, and for then is much simpler as they only have to deal with one contract/supplier. I will work to ensure Austin takes the necessary steps to phase out its use of fossil fuels by:

- **Supporting the closing of the coal-fired Fayette Power Plant**  
Burning coal for energy causes air pollution that leads to negative health impacts like respiratory disorders. Coal plants also use a large amount of water which is a limited resource in Central Texas. I support the [2025 Plan](#) directing Austin Energy to “strive to retire its share of the Fayette Power Project as soon as legally, economically and technologically possible. While Austin Energy should continue to talk with LCRA about retiring Units 1 and 2 as soon as economically and technologically feasible, Austin Energy will explore negotiation with LCRA for control of one unit to chart a path toward an early retirement of Austin Energy’s share of Fayette starting in 2022.”
- Holding Austin Energy accountable for implementing the [Austin Energy Resource Generation and Climate Protection Plan](#).
- Ensuring we continue to have a municipal electric utility company which enable us to have high renewable energy power supply (higher than California) and enable us to keep residential rates low, including rate that low-income customers can pay.

**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 recognize that installing solar panels is not cheap and it’s hard for low-income families to be able to prepay it when the payback period can be as much as 10-12 years. I also recognize that we all benefit from solar power regardless of who owns it. I support expanding access to the community solar programs - beyond the Palmer Events Center and La Loma - to a much broader audience so more customers can sign up to have solar power. Austin Energy has developed programs like [Green Choice](#) for our community to participate in the wind energy program and a [community solar program](#) for our community to participate in solar energy production. The design of this program allows owners but also multi-family housing tenants to participate. AE also has various [customer assistance programs](#) that aid low income or other vulnerable populations. These are great examples of programs we can expand upon.

**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 would want to learn more about it's trade off, costs and alternative investments, but in general, I would support the expansion of utility investment programs for installing solar locally within the Austin Energy territory.

**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?**

Austin has been a leader in climate protection locally and both regionally. I am proud of [Austin's affirmed commitment to the Paris Climate accord](#) despite the Federal Government withdrawing support.

Moving forward I support:

- Continuing to be a leader in climate change
- Energy storage
- Growing our housing supply so we can make austin a place that people can continue to move to and keep it affordable so we can welcome climate refugees.
- Planning better emergency preparation together with friends and neighbors across the state, including having identified spaces in advance where climate refugees can seek shelter right after a weather event.

Due to climate change we will see increasing events of heavy precipitation. Coupled with development that has allowed an increase in impervious cover, Austin will see more intense and frequent flash floods. We have seen the Memorial Day flooding, Halloween flood and witnessed what Houston went through with Harvey. To avoid loss of property and lives due to such events we should explore:

- Implementing green stormwater infrastructure like rain gardens, bioswales etc. to increase runoff infiltration.
- Reducing impervious cover by growing in a compact manner, changing sizes and designs of parking lots, reduce parking requirements, and making other land use changes that allow us to reduce negative impacts of floods.
- Implementing buyout programs for properties in the floodplain.
- Acquiring land or conservation easements on property in critical areas in the watershed to maintain the infiltration capacity and reduce flood impacts downstream.

And while events of heavy precipitation increase, they will be interspersed with longer bouts of drought and increasing average temperatures, with more days above 100 F.

- We need to protect our water supply that is surface water reservoirs that lose more water to evaporation in the summer than used by the city of Austin as a whole. We can do this by diversifying our water supply source using alternate waters like rainwater harvesting, stormwater harvesting, graywater and blackwater at building, community and city scale. We can also have new storage options like aquifer storage and recovery to limit loss of water due to evaporation.
- Drought and increasing temperatures also lead to negative impacts on our

environment and ecosystem. We should plant more drought resistant landscapes that can weather the climate impacts of Central Texas.

- Droughts and increasing temperatures increase the risk of wildfire. We have seen the devastating effects of wildfires in Bastrop in 2011. We need to follow best practices in property management and have a really well designed emergency management program to respond to such situations.