

Candidate Questionnaire on Climate and Energy

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

Candidate Name: Natasha Harper-Madison
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?

Currently, emissions are permitted by our city's land use and transportation patterns which are fundamentally unsustainable. Electric cars and other technological solutions can help, but we can achieve a much greater reduction in carbon emissions by stopping sprawl and building a compact, connected city with walkable, transit-accessible communities.

1. We need a new, simplified land development code that encourages our growth to transition from a car-centric design to a people-centric design and facilitates pedestrian friendly streets and public transportation.
2. I will work to improve transit service by making riding the bus more accessible and a more attractive option to all Austinites.
3. I will work with the development community to increase close proximity co-working options near all types of new housing and included on property as amenities driven development in multifamily development projects.

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?

I will be diligent and intentional about monitoring the future planning of Austin Energy by way of RMC and other energy specific boards and commissions appointments and open communications. Additionally, I look forward to working alongside local climate reality leaders to deploy the most effective strategies to achieve this goal. Lastly, it's of the utmost importance that we recruit and engage the youngest and brightest minds in our city to innovate alongside veterans who have been fighting this fight to free ourselves from fossil fuel power generation for decades.

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.

Absolutely. No one benefits from energy savings more than low income consumers,

who allocate a much higher portion of their income toward energy than middle and high income earners. However, there are barriers to low income residents accessing these long term cost savings, like high-upfront installation costs, housing type, and lack of information and time.

Low income Austinites live in a variety of housing types, many not suitable for solar installation like multi-family housing and older homes, and more than half of Austin Energy customers are renters and have limited access to rooftop solar. Policies should address the range and not just one segment of housing type. We need to further invest in community solar farms that partner with the Customer Assistance Program (CAP) to power the homes of low-income residents at a discounted rate - no solar installation required.

Additionally, we need to collaborate with community partners and providers to create a successful community outreach program that is promoted citywide to ensure greater buy-in and program enrollment.

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.

As previously mentioned, I absolutely support the expansion of utility investment programs within Austin Energy territory. Investing in programs like Community Solar provides access to clean, renewable, energy to all our resident regardless of housing type or income.

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?

As a climate reality leader, I understand and fully appreciate the dangers of our rapidly changing climate. It is important to recognize that I also appreciate the finite resources we have as a city, including our ability to respond to impacts of climate change. As a city, land-use is arguably the most pervasive force driving the degradation of our ecosystems. Our outdated land development code mandates unsustainable land use and transportation patterns that increase emissions and exposure to flood hazards.