

# Candidate Questionnaire on Climate and Energy

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

**Candidate Name:** Rich DePalma

**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?

### **Priority One - Reduce GHG in from cars and trucks.**

Strategies include:

- (i) Go beyond the the 2016 Fleet Electrification Study and Plan recommendations prioritizing light duty cars, SUVs, trucks, and equipment. The current plan of 330 plug-in electric vehicles by 2020 is not aggressive enough given the size of the city's fleet (even the smaller amount of cars and SUVs). Financial challenges is understable but unless the city is locked into existing contracts on the remaining light duty cars, then the City should release a Request for Information that details its entire fleet (including year, model, make, mileage, existing contractual obligations) and seek information on what the private sector market would offer. The City must leverage purchasing power to replace the fleet at a higher rate. Currently, the fleet refresh/replacement schedule is only done in small numbers and definitely not at a level to warrant deep discounts. We need an analysis that includes the financial impact from moving away from traditional municipal lease to purchase agreements to straight lease agreements. The analysis should include maintenance costs comparing against a three year lease scenario versus total cost of ownership. For the remaining fleet, we must transition to alternative fuel as quickly as possible.
- (ii) Invest in a robust transit infrastructure. It is imperative that we move residents from cars to other forms of sustainable transportation methods. This includes light rail, bus, commuter rail, electric shuttles, autonomous vehicles, bikes, e-bikes, e-scooters and possibly even ferry.

### **Priority Two - Reduce GHG from Residential and Commercial Electricity Consumption.**

Strategies include:

- (i) Retire the Fayette Power Plant. Coal is the largest producer of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States and the city must close Fayette. The community needs to identify and implement a way to pay off all the costs associated with closing the plant.
- (ii) Continue to Move Toward Renewable Energy Options. The city must continue to pursue a mix of entering into Power Purchase Agreements for utility scale solar and wind farms along with localized rooftop solar. The Austin Energy Community Power program is an exciting opportunity for renters and others who do not have the ability to incorporate solar on to the property to receive the benefits of rooftop solar. I believe there is another opportunity to work with a third party operator for a lease purchase solar rooftop program. This program would be implemented by a third party (who can receive the tax credits and manage the program) and heavily

coordinated with Austin Energy and Development Services who will help with program implementation. A successful program will address issues associated with upgrading existing electrical boxes and roofs. The program could allow for a lien on a property where in the event of a sale, the remaining loan is paid off. If structured correctly, this program could operate in a similar manner to an Energy Savings Performance Contract where solar, any needed infrastructure, and other energy improvements could be locked into the loan which is included in the utility payment. This would provide flexibility for a homeowner whose roof and electrical system is solar ready but also provide a solution to a homeowner who has an aging roof and electrical system. In the later instance, the program could help low income owners keep their home.

(iii) Energy Savings Performance Contracting. Perform a directed engineering study on all City of Austin facilities and pursue an energy savings performance contract to address lighting, solar panel installation, energy controls, and other mechanical systems. This should have been done years ago. We should not be using bond money for energy efficiency projects when it can be done through an ESPC.

### **Priority Three - Large Scale Carbon Capture Program.**

The City of Austin with its partners (such as TreeFolks where I am board president) need to fully implement a comprehensive urban reforest and carbon capture program. The City's urban forest has an estimated four million tree deficit since the 1970s. A robust carbon capture program that includes our headwaters, creeks, Eastern Travis County, and other parts of the city will help reduce our carbon while also cleaning our water and building our green stormwater infrastructure. The pilot program is currently stuck in Austin's bureaucracy. I have been a part of this project and it is a passion project for me. I will aggressively pursue it as a city council member.

## **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?**

Step One - Work with my renewable energy advisor, Kaiba White of Public Citizen to determine the latest options.

Step Two - Direct the City Manager to Release an Request for Information for Innovative Solutions, Services and Materials directly relating to meeting the 2015 Austin Community Climate Plan and assess responses.

Step Three - Implement the Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan to 2027 (2027 Plan).

Step Four - Implement the more aggressive steps in question one.

Step Five - Review the 100% Carbon-Free Energy by 2030 model requested in the 2027 Plan and assess additional options.

## **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.**

Yes, it is important. I support expanding the community solar program along moving toward a solar program (with possible layered funding from other programs) that would assist low-income individuals in adding solar to their homes where the roof, electrical, lighting and possibly mechanical also need to be upgraded. The details of this program are provided in the answer (ii) of question of 2 above.

- 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.**

Yes. The cost of local, distributed scale solar installation is more expensive than utility scale solar farms but utility scale solutions also come with a cost of using land that is likely undeveloped. We must find the right mix.

- 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?**

In August 2017, when Hurricane Harvey hit the South Texas Coast, I was present as a member of the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Facilities and Bond Planning Advisory Committee to see first hand at LBJ High School the coordinate response our City, County, and AISD had in assisting our neighbors along the coast impacted by Hurricane Harvey. I was impressed with the response but there were improvements that needed such as as mobility, recreation for kids, full restrooms, and better information exchange. Our city government has a role in actively assisting with emergency rescues, local housing, school placement, food, transportation, medical attention, and even job placement for those displaced by extreme weather events. It is a moral responsibility.

- 2007 - HomeDepot Electricity Usage Analysis submitted to Austin Energy that was conducted to promote energy conservation in the lighting departments at Home Depot and Lowes.
- 2010-11 - Developed the idea of adding solar to St. Catherine's Church and then chaired the committee that installed a \$250K, 32.67 kW Solar Carport.
- 2015 -17 - Served as an at-large appointment on Austin ISD's Facility and Bond Planning Advisory Committee (FABPAC) where I successfully pushed for:
  - i. LEED certification at the campuses (as did others),
  - ii. green school yards (Dr. Cruz and I),
  - iii. inclusion of the Parks Department and Watershed Department to leverage resources and expertise,
  - iv. an Energy Savings Performance Contract that will provide update outdated lighting, windows, controls and fixtures with energy efficient solutions using energy savings to pay for it,
  - v. the purchase of solar through Lease Purchase Agreements (still pushing), and
  - vi. protecting environmentally sensitive land at the Blunn Creek Headwaters Tract and the Travis Country Prairie Land Tract (worked with Travis Country and South River City Citizens (SRCC) for aprox. six months on the effort along with Trustee Cindy Anderson, Trustee Kendal Pace and CFO Nicole Conley on those projects).