

# Candidate Questionnaire on Climate and Energy

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

**Candidate Name:** Vincent Harding

**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?**

Expand transportation opportunities so that we as a city can move away from the one person one car model, which is unsustainable and a massive emitter of greenhouse gasses. We have to ensure that this expanded transportation is equitable and accessible, so that people don't feel it is necessary to own a vehicle, which can also be a barrier to employment and affordable living. Secondly, commit to and continue to expand our local solar options. More incentives for local and rooftop solar, which could include incentives for developers to include solar in their projects. Look at a program that includes solar for any future City of Austin developments, from affordable housing to public works projects. Thirdly, make sure we are on target to phase out the use of coal and natural gas plants as our energy source. Whether by increased investment in battery capacity, city owned renewables, or purchasing more renewable energy, we must commit to phasing out the current fossil fuel sources we use.

**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?**

It is important that we maintain and continue to commit to our goals to phase out the use of fossil fuels for power generation, whether it be the Decker Power Plant or the Fayette Coal-Fired Power Plant. As a council member, I would ensure that Austin energy is meeting our set goals and deadlines. If they are not meeting deadlines as set, I will push for the council to be more aggressive in it's push to phase out fossil fuels.

**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. A main tenet of my campaign is equitability, and leaving low income residents and those in multi family housing out of existing solar programs is a problem. Climate change affects us all, and too often it is the poor and marginalized who have to pay the highest price when it comes to environmental degradation. Over 25 percent of residents in District 1 live in poverty, so we cannot force these residents to adopt something they cannot afford. If it is possible to incentivize low or no cost solar development in District 1, perhaps with public private partnerships or non-profit sources, I would welcome the opportunity.

**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. We need to continue to expand local solar with incentives. The FY 18-19 budget has \$5,000,000 line itemed for local solar, and we need to maintain that program going forward. If we are not hitting our goals, such as 100 MW by the end of 2025 for local solar, look at expanding that program.

**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 we do in many areas, we can lead by example. Climate change affects everyone, everywhere. If the city can get to 100% renewables, and can do so in a cost effective, and equitable manner, we can lead other cities in doing so as well. Austin can create the blueprint that other large cities can use to fight climate change. At the same time, we are already seeing, and will continue to see the effects of climate change. We are currently voting for a bond that deals with flood water management, directly as a consequence of intense storms. It will be better and healthier for our city in the long run to lead the way in this arena, because climate change cannot be solved on an island. We must show the other Texas cities what can be done, and guide them in doing it as well. As for preparing for displacement, we have to look to the future. The decisions we make now must be looking, 20-30 years ahead. Whether it be housing, transportation, or energy, if we look ahead and anticipate these challenges, we won't look back at now as we look back at 20-30 years ago,