



JOINT SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation No 20230524-6

City of Austin Support for Energy Innovation and the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

Whereas, the scientific consensus is clear that human activities are primarily responsible for accelerating global climate change, and that the climate crisis now represents one of the preeminent threats to global civilization; and

Whereas, changes in our climate are already being felt in Austin and throughout our state, with prolonged drought punctuated by unpredictable torrential downpours and flooding, more frequent extreme heat events, wildfires, stronger winds, and warmer water temperatures that can result in increasing severe storms and rising costs that are taking an unsustainable economic toll on the State and working people; and

Whereas, our entire community is being impacted by the health and safety risks of fossil fuel expansion, particularly those who also face socioeconomic and health inequities, including low-income families, those experiencing homelessness, people of color and indigenous peoples, youth, seniors, those experiencing mental and physical disabilities, and people with pre-existing health conditions; and

Whereas, our youth and future generations have the most to lose from a lack of immediate action to stop fossil fuel expansion as they face major and lifelong health, ecological, social, and economic impacts from prolonged and cumulative effects of climate change, including food and water shortages, infectious diseases, and natural disasters; and

Whereas, the City of Austin recognizes that it is the urgent responsibility and moral obligation of wealthy fossil fuel producers, governments, NGOs, and the business community as a whole, to lead in putting an end to fossil fuel development and to manage the decline of existing production; and Whereas, on August 8, 2019 the City Council unanimously approved a resolution declaring a climate emergency and called for an immediate emergency mobilization to restore a safe climate; and

Whereas, the City Council adopted the Austin Climate Equity Plan, which includes the bold goal of equitably reaching net-zero community-wide greenhouse gas emissions and achieving 100% of electricity power supply through clean, renewable, and zero carbon emission energy sources by 2040; and Whereas, the Paris Climate Agreement is silent on coal, oil, and gas, an omission with respect to the supply and production of fossil fuels (the largest source of GHGs) that needs to be collectively addressed by other means; and

Whereas, global governments and the fossil fuel industry are currently planning to cumulatively produce about 120% more emissions by 2030 than what is needed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and avert catastrophic climate disruption, and such plans risk undoing the work of local communities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and Whereas, the Austin Climate Equity Plan includes the strategy to “Adopt new energy and building codes that address future EV charging needs and enable a more equitable approach by simplifying the charging network and lowering barriers to entry for installing EV charging”, but no code amendments addressing new EV charging needs have been implemented; and

Whereas, the Austin Climate Equity Plan includes a goal to “Achieve net-zero carbon for all new buildings and reduce emissions by 25% for existing buildings while lowering all natural gas-related emissions by 30%” and net-zero carbon buildings cannot be achieved unless they are all electric; and

Whereas, the fossil fuel industry is doubling down on construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure, including more than twenty major facilities along the Gulf Coast, which would deepen our reliance on fossil fuels and expose communities to untenable risks to public health and safety at the local and global levels; and

Whereas, the fossil fuel industry is making large investments in plastic production to utilize more oil and gas and large consumers, such as cities, can play an important role in reducing demand for plastics, which is reflected in the Austin Climate Equity Plan strategy to “Strengthen the City of Austin’s Sustainable Procurement Program to serve as a model for others locally and nationally”; and

Whereas, statewide elected officials and the legislature repeatedly espoused misinformation about renewable energy and the state electric grid’s reliability and have introduced legislation to unfairly favor the expansion of natural gas power production and unfairly blame renewable energy as the culprit for the grid failure during Winter Storm Uri; and

Whereas, the economic opportunities presented by a clean energy transition far outweigh the opportunities presented by an economy supported by expanding fossil fuel use and extraction; and
Whereas, the City of Austin government recognizes the importance of measures taken to decarbonize the local economy and uplift frontline communities as important long term solutions; and

Whereas, a new global initiative is underway calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that would commit countries to ending new fossil fuel exploration and expansion, phase out existing production in line with the global commitment to limit warming; NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED that the Joint Sustainability Committee of the City of Austin recommends that: Austin City Council endorse the call for a global Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and request the federal government to develop and enact a federal Climate Emergency Plan and Declaration of a national climate emergency to create millions of jobs transitioning to a 100% clean energy economy, phase out fossil fuel production, and invest in communities on the frontlines of environmental injustice;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in order to implement the goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan: The Joint Sustainability Committee recommends the City Council direct the City Manager to:

1) ACEP Council Updates: Adjust the frequency of Austin Climate Equity Plan updates and reporting implementation progress to City Council to a monthly routine to reflect the urgency of meeting the goals and deadlines outlined in the Plan.

2) Climate-aligned Performance Evaluation Criteria: Integrate climate-related evaluation criteria into regular performance evaluation processes for City of Austin upper-level management, including City Department executives, to increase accountability among City leadership.

3) Leverage Federal Funding Sources: Conduct an analysis of how to maximize utilization of funding provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), with a specific focus on the following:

a) Direct Austin Energy to develop multiple options for increasing low-income rebates to supplement IIJA funding and cover additional costs associated with electric appliance / heat pump system upgrades,

b) Direct Austin Energy to develop multiple options for increasing access to distributed energy resources for energy resilience, including site-level solar energy resources and battery storage for low-income households,

c) Facilitate access to financing and other funding resources to help businesses and individuals transition to non-fossil-fuel energy sources.

4) City Budgeting Process: Reform the City's budgeting process to ensure City Departments integrate ACEP-aligned budget items into budget proposals and final budgets.

5) Fayette Coal Plant: Research funding sources and other tools that will enable Austin Energy to retire the Fayette coal power plant. All carbon emissions contribute to the global scale of climate change, therefore a plan for the future of the Fayette coal power plant must prioritize the permanent retirement of the plant. The City Council directs the City Manager to present options to the Electric Utility Commission and the Austin Energy Utility Oversight Committee no later than June, 2023.

6) Electric- and EV-ready Code Amendments: Initiate code amendments, including implementation of the Resource Management Commission's Resolution Supporting Electric-Ready and EV-Ready Amendments to the Energy Conservation Code, to reflect broad public support of electric-ready buildings on a timeline to be effective on September 1, 2023.

7) Sustainable Contracting: Develop an updated sustainable purchasing and contracting requirements for the city to reduce its use of plastic, Styrofoam, and disposable products as much as possible.

8) 2023-2024 Budget Priorities: Identify and prioritize any resources needed to implement the Austin Climate Equity Plan and incorporate ACEP-aligned budget items into the FY 2023-2024 budget allocation

Date: May 24, 2023

Motioned By: Richard Brimer

Seconded By: Christopher Campbell

Vote: 13-0

For: Anna Scott, Kaiba White, Charlotte Davis, Rick Brimer, Chris Maxwell-Gaines, Yure Suarez, Alice Woods, Jon Salinas, Melissa Rothrock, Rodrigo Leal, Heather Houser, Chris Campbell, Diana Wheeler

Against: None

Abstain: None

Attest:



Zach Baumer, Joint Sustainability Committee Staff Liaison