

## **Community Letter in Support of a Clean Energy Plan for Austin Energy**

February 14, 2024

Dear Mayor Watson and City Council Members,

Our organizations, which represent Austinites throughout the city and in every council district, collectively support a full transition to clean renewable sources of electricity at Austin Energy (AE). We ask you to adopt an updated Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan (Resource Plan) that establishes a clear roadmap for our utility to eliminate its existing coal and gas-burning generation by replacing it with non-polluting technologies, including local solar, batteries, energy efficiency and other fully clean and renewable solutions.

As you know, AE recently put forth a proposed update that includes construction of a costly power plant that will burn methane gas. Adding fossil fuels to its portfolio is the opposite of what the members of our organizations want. The Austin City Council must reject any proposal that contains new gas-burning generation.

Climate change is a defining issue of our time. It is both global and local.

Austin is already stressed by climate change impacts like excessive heat, water scarcity, flooding and wildfires. Austin can't solve the problem on its own, but we can be part of the solution. That's the vision of the Austin Climate Equity Plan (ACEP) and its greenhouse gas emission reduction goals. Those goals call for a rapid reduction of emissions year over year to one day arrive at net-zero. Austin is already behind on meeting these goals. Near-term reductions are needed, and any addition of pollution sources is incompatible with the ACEP.

The Austin area also faces worsening air quality, putting it in jeopardy of being designated a nonattainment area for ground-level ozone by the Environmental Protection Agency. Ground level ozone is harmful, particularly for children with asthma, and it causes and exacerbates other respiratory cardiac diseases, including asthma, and is particularly harmful to children and the elderly. Austin has a window of opportunity to reduce emissions and avoid a costly nonattainment designation. Adding a significant pollution source will make that impossible.

Furthermore, Austin Energy must address its impacts on East Austin, an area of the city that is already home to a disproportionate amount of the city's pollution sources. Both of Austin Energy's gas-burning power plants, which include several generators at each site in Districts 1 and 2, are located here. The Resource Plan you approve should emphasize

eliminating existing polluting facilities and replacing them with clean energy technologies, not adding to an already unjust burden on East Austin residents.

AE's proposed gas plant would increase greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. Even in the unlikely scenario that AE later switches to burning 100% green hydrogen at the plant, it would still contribute significantly to ground-level ozone. If AE burns a mix of methane gas and hydrogen in the plant before switching to 100% hydrogen (like the utility has proposed), emissions will be much higher than from burning methane gas alone. This plan is not compatible with a healthy Austin community. We urge you to reject AE's proposal to build additional gas-burning power plants. This was the way of the past, but it should not be Austin's future.

AE's continued operation of its portion of the coal-burning Fayette Power Project is an ash stain on our city's reputation. We urge you to act with increased urgency to identify and implement a funding mechanism that will allow AE to affordably and quickly retire its portion of Fayette. Given that Fayette accounts for about 25% of our community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, this is the top priority for local climate action. It's time for Austin to wash our hands of dirty coal.

AE has demonstrated considerable success building a clean energy portfolio that includes utility-scale wind and solar, local solar, energy efficiency and demand response. The utility deserves praise for what it has done to this point. Still, there is a lot of work ahead and much more that can and must be done. Adding energy storage to the mix is essential for facilitating the phase-out of fossil fuels. City Council should support a Resource Plan that directs AE to scale-up and expand existing clean energy programs and invest in energy storage.

Sincerely,

*Kaiba White*  
*Public Citizen*