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Public Citizen Comments Regarding Austin Energy's Request to the City Council to Purchase Gas-Burning Peaker Plants

Comments from Kaiba White, a climate policy and outreach specialist in Public Citizen's Texas office, delivered at the May 19, 2026, Austin City Council Work Session

Good morning. I'm Kaiba White, speaking on behalf of Public Citizen's Texas office. We are very concerned about the lack of transparency, financial impacts and public health and environmental consequences of the gas peaker proposal.

I've never seen a request to authorize a contract without revealing who the contract is with or how much it will cost. The contract was developed outside the competitive purchasing process and didn't give equal opportunity to other technologies, including long duration storage. This should be a serious concern for those of you seeking to improve trust with voters.

Austin Energy is designating all useful information from modeling peakers vs batteries and other clean energy solutions as competitive information to keep it from the public. Given that Austin Energy's conclusions about long-duration batteries vs gas peakers don't align with other analyses, we're asking you to require an independent analysis. Buying a lot of peakers when they're at their most expensive is risky for ratepayers. Natural gas price volatility is also a risk and has resulted in huge cost overruns that customers will be paying for over many years at other utilities.

The Resource Plan committed to only add gas peakers if there were no other options. Recent and upcoming battery contracts and changes to solar programs demonstrate that there are other options, but they need time to be implemented. And more batteries, solar, and demand response programs are needed. Austin Energy is cherry picking information and hypotheticals to try to scare you into acting quickly and give up on achieving carbon-free generation before it's first utility-scale battery is even online. That's not a good faith effort.

The truth is that these peakers won't keep the power on in another Uri situation. ERCOT would still require rolling outages. If you really want to help low-income residents keep their food from spoiling during an outage, revive the Solar for All program, which was supposed to put solar and batteries at low-income homes. Why is AE willing to spend a billion dollars on gas peakers, but not \$32 million for Solar for All?

Comments from Kamil Cook, a climate and clean energy associate in Public Citizen's Texas office, delivered at the May 21, 2026, Austin City Council Meeting

Dear Mayor and Council, my name is Kamil Cook I live in district 3, and am here in opposition to AE's plan to build new local gas peaker plants.



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There are many things wrong with this proposal and many residents have already voiced concerns relating to financial dangers, social equity, the environment, and questionable assumptions behind energy prices, but I am going to focus on the lack of real community input in this dangerously fast proposal.

AE announced 'community meetings' ahead of this proposal about a month ago. These meetings were proposed around the city--a good idea, in theory--but they were announced about a week prior to starting. This meant there was little if any actual community outreach before these 'community meetings' began.

I went to two of the three in-person sessions and there were very few people there that seemed to be from the surrounding community. Of the folks that seemed to be, almost everyone asked how could we comment on the site of new generation without knowing what the actual generation would be.

A gas plant is not a solar farm or a battery installation. The only clear and consistent community input was that people don't want to live near a gas plant. Period. Has this feedback been communicated to y'all from AE? Because that is what was clearly said.

One of the sessions was at Decker middle school, which as y'all probably know, is across the street from the Decker gas plant. A staff worker there said they didn't even know the meeting was happening. If some of the people at the site didn't know it was happening, do we really expect surrounding community to know? Clearly, these meetings were unsuccessful in actually reaching out to the surrounding community. And as a result, I don't think that a lot of people in Austin realize what's coming.

When your constituents, who will live near this plant, start coming to you saying they have no idea what's happening and are upset, it will be your fault for not holding AE to a higher level of accountability. Clearly AE knows that the community on the whole does not want more gas and that's why they sped up this process so much.

If you're going to pass this, which I hope you don't, please include an amendment that requires council approval for any site that's picked for these peakers. It's the least y'all can do to address the clear lack of public accountability for this entire process. Thank you.

Comments from Kaiba White, a climate policy and outreach specialist in Public Citizen's Texas office, delivered at the May 21, 2026, Austin City Council Meeting

Good afternoon. I'm Kaiba White speaking on behalf of Public Citizen. Austin Energy is making the case that building new gas peakers is a benefit for the environment. This is untrue for several reasons.



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First, once you account for methane leakage, natural gas power generation isn't any better than coal generation when it comes to climate change. I sent you all a short piece from RMI that makes this point. Please take a minute to read it. Don't be fooled by natural gas industry marketing. It's not a cleaner, greener alternative. And that's even before you consider the environmental horrors from fracking, which have resulted in serious fetal development problems and other health problems. Just because we don't see it here in Austin doesn't make it any less real.

Second, the new peakers will run at the same time as AE's existing peakers, making local air pollution worse on the days when it is already at unhealthy levels. Austin Energy talks about the peakers as an insurance policy, but the utility plans to run them when it's economic. If this wasn't true, Austin Energy would be willing to commit to not run them at the same time. So on hot sunny afternoons, Austin Energy is going to add nitrogen oxides to the air and increase ozone formation. Kids, the elderly and lower-income people who work outside will bear the brunt of this added pollution.

Third, a new peakers will run for 40+ years. An older, less efficient power plant will soon be pushed out of the market by batteries and cheap renewable energy. If everyone follows AE's logic, new gas generation would continue to be added forever and we'll never phase out fossil fuels. That's a path to runaway climate change and all the social, economic and environmental impacts that come with it. Austin can be part of the solution or part of the problem. It's your choice.

For these and other reasons, the Joint Sustainability Committee unanimously recommended against adding gas peakers.

To quote Lisa Martin from 2024, "Carbon-free is carbon-free. It means that there's no carbon. It's the supply and demand side of the equation."

We ask that you uphold the carbon-free by 2035 goal and vote no on gas peakers.