

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
December 15, 2017

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Austin Making Moves On Solar Energy For All

Austin City Council approves West Texas solar contract to push city past 50% renewable energy and new incentive for East Austin community solar project

AUSTIN, TX - Yesterday, the Austin City Council approved a 150-180 megawatt (MW) utility-scale solar contract in West Texas, as well as a new incentive for a 2.5 MW community solar project in East Austin.

The West Texas solar contract was approved on a 9 - 1 vote, and the East Austin incentive was approved on a 9 - 1 vote shortly before midnight during the Council's last regular meeting of the year.

With the West Texas solar contract, which could be the lowest-cost solar deal in Texas to date, Austin Energy will be getting more than 50% of its electricity from renewable energy in 2020, and have at least 780 MW of utility-scale solar under contract. Austin Energy reported that the solar deal will actually lower residential and commercial energy power supply costs by more than 1% when the solar power plant is operational.

The East Austin community solar tariff includes a provision that up to half of the community solar farm will be available for residential customers who qualify for the Customer Assistance Program (CAP), offering them a more affordable solar rate than the normal rate.

"These two actions are a win for ratepayers and a win for the environment," said Cyrus Reed, Conservation Director of the Sierra Club's Lone Star Chapter. "Austin Energy is increasing its use of renewable energy resources in an equitable way that will save people money, which is the trajectory we want to continue on as we transition to a clean energy future."

The Sierra Club lauded the Austin City Council and Austin Energy for working with stakeholders to meet the objectives of the 2017 Austin Energy Generation Resource and Climate Action Plan, as well as for listening to the long-standing concerns and demands of community organizations and members about making renewable energy accessible.

"We've heard time and time again from many working class people of East Austin, Dove Springs, and Colony Park that they want clean energy, but not if it means an additional cost on bills they can barely keep up with," said Dave Cortez, Organizer with the Sierra Club. "Paired with home weatherization improvements, this local solar tariff will save our low-income neighbors money on their bills and demonstrates that the Austin Energy team is willing to listen to and act in response to community demands for equitable clean energy."

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