Charting a New Course for a Just and Sustainable Future in Austin

Findings from the Eco-Change Exchange

Presented to the Austin City Council
August 6, 2009
August 6, 2009

Dear Mayor Leffingwell and Austin City Council Members:

On June 25 about 300 people and 40 organizations came to City Hall to welcome you as the new Austin City Council, to acknowledge your willingness to shoulder the task of leadership, and to send you a clear message. It is time to get serious about Austin’s choices within the context of global environmental and economic crises. Our intention was to:

Awaken the dream of Austin as a leader among sustainable cities, to weave our community relationships, and to chart a course, rooted in justice, to get us there.

It was a great night of community, conversation and visioning. Thanks to each of you who were able to participate. But a lovely evening at City Hall is only the beginning of our tremendous task to move forward with meaningful action. This report lays out clear steps Austin can take, indeed must take, if we are to endow our children with a vibrant, healthy, and beautiful city – one where our wealth is measured by the quality of our lives and the environment in which we live.

Whether we meet the coming environmental challenges is yet to be seen. We will only meet them, however, if we can forge a powerful alliance of the politically elected, the politically active, and ordinary, everyday residents.

We look forward to this new City Council dedicating the time, attention, and resources that this urgent situation demands.

Sincerely,

The Eco-Change Exchange Team
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Introduction

The Eco-Change Exchange was an extraordinary event, beyond our imagination. The power of our numbers, the wealth of our resources, the space—our city hall—all felt right. The energy, passion and commitment of the participants and the wisdom of the group and the process afforded us new insights into our community’s interests. Participatory democracy was not an idea but a reality, and the experience left us wanting more.

These findings include a summary of the opening remarks, key lessons from our process and lay out measurable steps with timeframes and budget implications. This document is a beginning, a roadmap that will evolve as time goes on. You, as Council Members, will face many choices in the direction that you take our City. We urge you to use this road map as your primary guide.

We look forward to ongoing collaboration with you. Working together creatively, listening to those who are most adversely impacted by the environmental and economic crises, and holding each other accountable will make Austin a true sustainability leader.

Building on Our Past

Nineteen years ago, on June 7, 1990, the Austin City Council was scheduled to approve a massive development on the banks of Barton Creek, upstream of Barton Springs. The developer was a multi-national corporation called Freeport-McMoRan. They were the largest discharger of toxic waste in the United States and ran a gold and copper mine in Indonesia by paying local military and police to keep native landowners away from their mines. They were represented that night in Austin by their CEO and ex-UT football player, Jim Bob Moffet, a power-broker lawyer named David Armbrust and by the ex-UT Football Coach Darrell Royal.

The hearing began at 4:00 p.m. on a hot summer’s afternoon. Citizens lined up to sign up to speak. We filled every seat in the council chambers and overflowed to sprawl along the walls of hallways; waiting through the night for our turn to speak. For every person in the building, there were a hundred more of us listening on KUT radio as we made supper, washed the dishes, and put the babies to bed.

By six o’clock the next morning more than 900 persons had signed up and spoken. The vote, wired to pass 14 hours earlier, was turned around by a unanimous resolution to deny. Whether or not that vote saved Barton Springs remains to be seen. What is not debatable is the depth of our passion and how our collective power can influence City policy and chart the course of our future.
Global Crisis

We have come a long way in the 19 intervening years. We now face challenges that extend both deeper and more broadly than preserving our sacred swimming hole. Globally, we face the challenges of peak oil and climate change, as well as the less talked-about but potentially more dire consequences of peak water and peak food. We have begun to see wild fluctuations in fuel prices that accompany a time when our global use of petroleum exceeds the capacity of oil fields to produce it. According to NASA data, the earth’s temperature has increased more than one degree in the last 100 years. That doesn’t sound like much, but the eight warmest years of record have occurred in the last nine years, and the warmest year on record was 2005.

Changing weather patterns affect rainfall and drought. The amount of fresh, available water per person on the planet has dropped by 40% since 1970, while global consumption of water is doubling every 20 years, more than twice the rate of human population growth. Nearly one-third of everyone in the world does not have access to clean water and 3 million people, mostly children, die every year from water-borne disease. One-half of all water used in the United States cools electrical power generation stations, tying electricity generation directly to water consumption.

The world is eating more food than farmers grow, pushing global grain supplies to their lowest level in 30 years. Oceans are depleted of fish and there isn’t much land left that can be converted to large-scale food production. Hunger is a painful reality for more than 850 million people, including 300 million children. Farmers around the world are going out of business while 5 major companies control the global grain market.

Bringing It Home to Austin

These global chickens are coming home to roost right here in River City. In Central Texas we are building four times as many single-family homes as we did 15 years ago and 25% more than we did in the last real estate boom. The Austin community continues to fling its development out over surrounding ranch and farm land.

Since 1994 the percentage of us who drive our own car to work has increased from 84% to 90% while the percentage taking the bus has dropped from 8 to 4%. On average each of us is driving 25 miles per day.

1 http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=33268
On June 24th 2,518 megawatts of power surged through the Austin power lines between 4 and 5 PM, beating the previous record set just last year.³ Austin Energy’s peak projection of 2,477 megawatts for the summer was overrun by record-breaking high temperatures combined with extreme drought conditions.

Groundwater pumping is outpacing recharge, and wells must be drilled deeper to access a smaller pool of water. Our drinking water supply is the same Colorado River water that is proposed to cool two additional nuclear generating stations at the South Texas Nuclear Project expansion.

We are landfilling nine pounds of waste per person per day in Central Texas, compared to a U.S. average of 5 pounds per person per day. The number of acres of farm and ranch land in every Central Texas County has decreased since 1994.

The world needs an “about face” on how we humans relate to food, energy, water, waste, land, and transportation. Our changes must be rooted in the principles of participatory democracy and must embrace the values of environmental justice. Our challenge, as a city and as a community, is to pull our heads out of the sand, get a firm grasp on the vision of what is possible, and work together to get us there.

We Want Our Sustainability Rooted in Justice!

In 1928, the City passed a Master Plan that located “undesirable industry” east of present-day IH-35 (East Avenue). They denied city service to people of color living west of IH-35. Even though this practice was declared unconstitutional in 1940’s, Austin continues to live with this shameful legacy of racism.

As a result over 90% of industrial zoning was placed in East Austin; the community has been fighting for years to clean it up. Successful efforts include the closing of the Tank Farm and Browning Ferris Industries (BFI) recycling landfill, as well as the more recent closure of the Holly Power Plant.

Today the fight continues, now with the focus on relocating the Pure Casting facility located in the heart of a residential community and across the

street from Zavala Elementary School. Pure Casting dumps over 220 lbs of toxic waste a month. Many of these toxic chemicals and metals are spewed into the air that school children and families must breathe every day. In addition, they are loaded and unloaded in the community on 18-wheelers, which adds more noise and air pollution and is dangerous for the children.

What the community is asking for is to use part of the $55 million in affordable housing bonds to purchase the site, relocate Pure Casting and build affordable housing. This property lies adjacent to property already owned by the city, and is a perfect site for more homes. Austin has already demonstrated the ability to build real affordable homes in the public and non-profit sectors, as shown by Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Group, Habitat for Humanity, and other groups that have used Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and other funds.

PODER has also worked to achieve the preservation of the Roy Guerrero Colorado River Park and Oak Springs Water Quality Preserve. Through an intergenerational model of leadership development, PODER is raising the next generation of community leaders to honor the world, and its resources, and to understand that democracy only works by participation.

East Austin communities have proved to be crucial to the citywide community, in both cultural wealth, and as a model of civic activism that we can all learn from.
Learning from Our Process

As part of that evening, each participant was asked to place a green dot on one urgent action item in each of the following areas:

- Environmental Justice
- Alternative Transportation
- Clean Energy
- Local and Sustainable Food Economy
- Participatory Democracy
- Responsible Land Use
- Water Stewardship
- Zero Waste.

The green-dot results must be evaluated within the context of the process in which they were generated. We were seeking the top priority in each area. Not everyone followed our direction and put multiple dots in one issue area or item. We did not have time to consider and digest complex policy and budget implications.

One clear lesson is that the **top dot-getters reflect strong messages to the City to lay the infrastructure foundation for sustainability.** We want renewable energy, bicycle and pedestrian transportation infrastructure, farmland support, and recycling services for all residences, businesses, and institutions. We want our city to invest more in smaller-scale solutions: roof-top energy generation, backyard composting, residential gray water reuse, community gardens, and farmers’ markets. Green dots reflect a big “NO” to the Chamber and industry-supported infrastructure models of toll roads and freeways, expensive water treatment plants, nuclear and coal-powered electricity generation and new landfills or trash burners.

The green dots tended to reflect the interests of White, formally educated, and privileged Austin residents. This bias can be seen in the total number of dots for Water Stewardship was 158, compared to 116 total dots for Environmental Justice. Despite the bias in the dots, we all agree that relocating the Pure Casting plant is a collective priority.

Those of us who participated that night looked at eight important areas and imagined our lives in the context of Austin as a sustainable city. We were excited and energized.

Unfortunately, none of these ideas are new to the Austin community dialogue. We voted down participation in the South Texas Nuclear Project seven times before the Austin Chamber of Commerce managed to squeak by a bare majority.

Whether the item was new or old, every item represents an important part of at least one person’s vision of a sustainable Austin. If Austin were to aggressively implement all of the proposed actions, we could quickly become a leader in meeting the global challenges of climate change, peak oil, peak water, peak food, racism and environmental injustice. This document reflects our recommendations for immediate next steps on journey creating the infrastructure we need. We are grateful for your time and attention to this very important plan of action.
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In 1928, the City passed a Master Plan that located “undesirable industry” east of present-day IH-35 (East Avenue). People of color living west of IH-35/East Avenue were denied city services, forcing people of color east of IH-35. Even though this practice was declared unconstitutional in 1940’s, Austin continues to live with this shameful legacy of racism.

In today’s Austin, we believe no community is expendable and that we need to use the power of the city’s resources to remedy outstanding issues from this legacy.

Priority 1: Relocate Pure Casting, and don't build an incinerator for animals at Lavender Loop

Pure Casting in East Austin is polluting its neighbors every day, including the children at Zavala Elementary School; and Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department plans to build an incinerator at the East Austin animal shelter, over the objections of the neighborhoods and contrary to the Govalle/Johnston Terrace Neighborhood Plan. These two issues exemplify an historical and continued institutionalized environmental racism that we as an East Austin community still live with.

Next Steps

- Use part of the $55 million dollars of Affordable Housing Bond money passed in November 2007, to purchase the Pure Casting Site.
- Turn the purchased land over to affordable housing groups such as Habitat for Humanity or Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation to build affordable housing.

Priority 2: Build More Affordable Housing

Austin has a very large need for affordable rentals. In 2008, renters earning less than $20,000 per year - 44,700 renters—had just 7,150 affordable units in the market from which to choose. Just 1 in 6 renters earning less than $20,000 can find affordable housing. To buy in Austin, potential homeowners must earn at least $50,000 before one-third of attached units and just 16 percent of detached units become affordable.
At the same time, much of our affordable housing stock near transit centers and corridors is disappearing in places where redevelopment is causing gentrification. Pushing low-income residents out of the City Center forces them to be more dependent on automobiles, which exacerbates their financial troubles and our air quality problem. Building affordable housing near transit stations reduces these problems.

**Next Steps**

- The City of Austin owns hundreds of properties throughout the city which were acquired through various means. These properties should be made available for affordable housing development. The City should donate these properties for $1.00 to various affordable housing groups such as Habitat for Humanity or Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corporation to build affordable housing.
- The City of Austin should require high levels of on-site affordable housing in new TODs, priority transit corridors, and other areas where density bonuses are appropriate.

**Priority 3: Reverse the Industrialization of East Austin**

**Next Steps:**

- Relocate over 400 grand-fathered industrial and commercial service properties that negatively impacting area residents’ health and environment.
- Redevelop closed industrial and commercial sites with compatible and sustainable residential land uses.
- Advocate for conservation and parkland in non-traditional areas, including the Colorado River east of Longhorn Dam.

**Budget Implications**

All of these proposed activities can be accomplished within currently authorized budget and bonds.
Sustainable Transportation

Changing the way we think about transportation will be the foundation for Austin's sustainability efforts. Our current dependence on the automobile drives many of the decisions that are counter to sustainability. Automobiles—particularly those driven by single-occupant commuters—require more energy and land than other forms of transportation.

Tailpipe emissions make up roughly half the region’s greenhouse gas emissions. Alternative transportation—buses, trains, bicycles, walking, carpooling and vanpooling—is much cheaper to develop and sustain. Prioritizing alternative transportation for funding and quick implementation will be key to changing land use patterns that currently favor the automobile.

Traditionally, TxDOT, CAMPO, and city transportation planners have adopted a “predict and provide” approach. They assume that past trends of ever increasing vehicle miles traveled will continue for decades into the future. They strive to meet this predicted “demand” with sprawl-serving (and - inducing) roadway expansions. In recent years, however, vehicle miles per person traveled has leveled off, and even dropped. People are already driving less. We need to accelerate this trend of “driving less.”

**Priority 1: Reduce vehicle miles traveled.**

**Next Steps**
- Work for an effective light rail starter route and build momentum for a referendum.
- Target “demand reduction” strategies that reduce vehicle miles traveled. Prioritize infrastructure and support for telecommuting, improved and expanded public transit, car-sharing, van pooling, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities.
- Prioritize land-use decisions that emphasize walkability and centrally located affordable housing.

**Priority 2: Fund world-class bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure, including public showers.**

**Next Steps**
- Implement the entire Bicycle Master Plan adopted by the City Council in June of 2009. This decision would cost $254 million over the next decade, about the price of a couple highway interchanges with flyovers.
- Use currently available millions of dollars in bond
and grant money available now to kick-start more bike lanes, bikeways.

- Remove barriers to cycling and implement programs to help commuters, such as showers in public and private buildings and safety training.
- Work for a transportation bond next year that includes significant money for bicycle infrastructure including a shower pilot program

**Priority 3: Oppose TxDOT Highway Expansion Plans for State Highway 45 SW and U.S. 290 West.**

**Next Step**
- Continue to oppose SH 45 Southwest and work to defeat it.

**Budget Implications**

Items with budget implication include infrastructure and support for alternative transportation facilities. The $245 million to implement the adopted Bicycle Master Plan should be allocated as quickly as possible. Currently available bond money should be tapped for alternative transportation infrastructure construction. The transportation bond election scheduled for next year should include significant funding for bicycle infrastructure.
CLEAN ENERGY

Austin Energy is by far the largest enterprise in the City of Austin. Budget: $1.38 billion annual budget compared to the City’s operating budget of $621 million. The utility has become a critical funding mechanism providing about $95 million per year to the City’s General Fund. But because Austin Energy has grown piecemeal over many decades, a snapshot of the community-owned utility today shows a picture dominated by fossil-fuel power plants and many undesirable ramifications of their ownership – rapidly escalating expenditures for fuel and new equipment, our largest source of carbon emissions and other toxic pollution, a major water user and waste producer. Rapidly growing electric utility expenditures have become one of the most secretive parts of the City Budget.

SIEZE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

Between now and October 15, 2009, City Council will finalize a new electric utility master plan through 2020 that will shape our community economically and environmentally. The scale of the decision is immense, dictating how $20 Billion will be spent, equivalent to $50,000 per electric customer in Austin. Our City’s leadership on climate protection – clearly undercut by our continued ownership of a coal plant – hangs in the balance. City Council leadership is needed, together with the voice of the people, to re-cast our community-owned utility for the future. If Austin can’t change the energy business we own, what can we expect of the rest of the world?


Next Steps

- Prioritize energy efficiency and renewable generation over fossil and nuclear generation both in budget and in action.
- Maximize use of low-cost energy efficiency and clean energy.
- Commit to a concrete divestment plan from the Fayette Coal Plant within 5 years.
- Expand opportunities to add rooftop solar and wind turbines throughout the city.
- Fund a responsive solar rebate program and spark an innovative, local clean energy/solar economy.
Priority 2: Reform the business structure and rate design for the utility so that efficiency and renewables are preferred over burning fossil fuel in City-owned power plants.

Next Steps
- Change the utility’s General Fund Transfer to derive from a fixed fee rather than the volumetric fee used today. Currently money for the General Fund is tied to increases in energy use, customer costs and pollution.

Priority 3: Transparency.

Next Steps
- Provide the municipal utility citizen-owners an opportunity to meaningfully voice their preferences on specific options for an Austin Energy Generation Plan.
- Articulate a clear policy for citizen access to information and the process for citizen involvement in major utility decisions in the future.

Budget Implications

The City’s General Fund and electric utility are intimately connected. The electric utility master plan directly and significantly affects the cost of living and doing business in Austin. Reallocating Austin Energy’s proposed fossil fuel investments to higher priorities presents the single largest opportunity to save money. It would also limit the City’s long term liability for construction cost overruns like those of the South Texas Nuclear Project. Delaying investments also saves money.
Local and Sustainable Food

Our overall goal: To improve our community's physical and economic health and protect our environment by making safe, nutritious, locally- and sustainably-grown food available to all residents. Good local food improves community health, and strengthens our local economy, food security and homeland security. Returning organic waste to the soil sequesters carbon and builds the foundation for all life on the planet.

NOTE: In addition to implementing these items, the City should monitor and follow the recommendations of the newly created Sustainable Food Policy Board.

Priority 1: Increase our locally-grown food supply

Next Steps

- Enable, support, incentivize, and promote local, organic and sustainable private-yard and community food gardens
- Financially support water access and spigot installation for community gardens.
- Provide a water utility rebate for residents that replace turf grass with organic gardens.
- Change city code to easily allow food gardens and urban farms on city-owned land whereby the city covers the liability for these community gardens.
- Public Education campaign to promote food growing and purchasing of local food.
- Provide developer incentives to build in communal garden spaces into both commercial and residential development plans.
- Support PARD budgets sufficient to support community gardens in parks.
- Support food farms and farmland through tax relief, zoning protection and agricultural water rates / rebates. Examine the benefits in Woodbury County, Iowa, of providing tax rebates to farmers transitioning to organic farm methods as a basis for implementing a similar program in Austin.
  i) Provide water rebates or discounts for agricultural use
  ii) Encourage communication between City and County governments to coordinate zoning in support of local farmers.
  iii) Provide developer incentives to support local farms, i.e. use transfer of development rights or offer tax breaks to preserve valuable agricultural land.
Priority 2: Increase the contribution of the local food producers to grow our local food economy

Next steps:
- Remove regulatory barriers to allow for the sale of produced goods on site for yards, community gardens or urban farms.
- Implement purchasing guidelines that give preference to vendors who will supply local and/or organic food when establishing City-related contracts.
- Promote local food as local business by developing one or more permanent Public Food Marketplaces and giving local food manufacturing promotional and incubator support.
- Work to provide economically stable and dependable distribution channels for locally produced food through institutional purchases.
- Support food farms and farmland, particularly organic through tax relief, zoning protection and agricultural water rates/rebates. Look at Woodbury County, Iowa, which gave tax relief to organic farmers thus encouraging small farm development that was not happening.

Priority 3: Integrate food priorities into the master plan development and other strategic planning for the City

Next Steps:
- Acquire at least one permanent public food marketplace (possibly along Lady Bird Lake) modeled after San Francisco.
- Do feasibility studies to identify the best sites (with a chance of being sustainable) to create more farmers’ and community markets along urban transit routes and in more neighborhoods.
- Initiate policy for a citywide composting operation (rescue food and organic waste from the landfill).
- Actively promote a new Solid Waste director over the next month that has experience in diverting organics from our waste stream.
- Encourage edible tree plantings throughout the City and incorporate permaculture principles throughout the City’s Master plan process.

Budget Implications

Water utility funds would be tapped to provide water and rebates for community and yard gardens. City staff time would be used to develop a local food public education campaign. The Parks and Recreation Department budget should be increase to fund community gardens in parks. The General Fund would be tapped to fund a permanent food market, for feasibility studies to identify market sites and would be affected by providing farm tax relief.
RESPONSIBLE LAND USE

Taken together as a suite of concerns, the Responsible Land Use priorities direct the Council to govern consistently and focus on integrating land use with transportation, green jobs, climate planning and affordability. Sustainability moves the community past single project or single issue development policies to a more integrated, holistic land use strategy.

Priority 1: Support sustainable land use, neighborhood planning, and alternative transportation in core transit areas while upholding and enforcing SOS and waterfront overlay districts, and requiring a super-majority for PUDs over the aquifer, while supporting neighborhood plans.

The first priority represents an integrated mix of high-level policies and the rules that typically govern specific decisions. This priority also underscores the tight linkage between land use and alternative transportation. Sustainable land use would sponsor projects that feature renewable energy, efficient water use, re-use already developed land and that are affordable to the majority of Austin citizens.

Alternative transportation is any transportation other than single-occupant automobiles. Core transit areas are those that have or will have enough density to support multi-passenger transportation forms like rapid buses, trolley, light rail or commuter rail.

Next Steps
- Protect the Aquifer while promoting targeted density increases in the urban core aligned with existing neighborhood plans and other already codified community planning agreements.
- Work with urban and neighborhood activists to identify key transit corridors where the City can increase density with minimal local impacts.
- Require six rather than just four votes to pass decisions that affect our most sensitive watersheds.

Priority 2: Oppose Wildflower Commons PUD and other up-zoning in the Barton Springs Watershed

Next Steps
- Turn down the Wildflower Commons PUD immediately and spend no more valuable community resources in an unnecessary debate.
Priority 3: Continuing the focus on linkage between land use and transportation.

Next Steps
- Set aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals within the Climate Protection Plan.
- Include alternative transportation strategies within the Climate Protection Plan.
- Add money for open space acquisition to next year’s transportation bond package.

Priority 4: Coordinate and Improve City Sustainability Efforts

Next Steps
- Appoint a Sustainability Director reporting to the City Manager with cross-department budget authority.
- Dedicate a significant portion of each relevant City department’s budget to sustainability endeavors.

Priority 5: Support a green jobs economy.

Next Steps
- Develop and implement an aggressive green job creation strategy similar to but larger than the City’s previously highly effective effort to create a “tech” economy. Use the City’s emerging technology and economic growth staff to coordinate the efforts of the public and private sectors.
- Insure that workers and environmental rights are respected in new jobs.

Priority 6: Plan Waller Creek from the headwaters to the lake and include affordable housing.

Next Steps
- Council is directed to develop wisely along Waller Creek and to balance development with protection of the entire Creek.
- Guarantee residential housing options that are available to all income levels.
- Use this rare opportunity to add parks, public space and alternative transit options in the downtown area. Investigate the highest use of city owned and/or controlled property in reclaimed floodplain to ensure these goals.

Budget Implications

The primary budget implication is appointment of a sustainability officer and allocation of a significant portion of the City’s budget to sustainability endeavors. All other budget effects, including an aggressive green job strategy, and support for parks and public space, would be funded from this allocation.
WATER STEWARDSHIP

Austin is in the midst of extreme drought. Global warming predictions indicate hotter and drier weather here in the years to come. Colorado River lakes and Edwards Aquifer spring flows are dropping. While Austin has done some work on water conservation, we are a long way from being the most water efficient city in Texas. We must act now to reduce our water use in the hot summer months and throughout the year. And we must shift our relationship with water from water seller to water steward.

Priority 1: Stop spending on Water Treatment Plant 4

Austin Water Utility wants the City Council to plunge forward on building the proposed $849 million water treatment 4 and distribution system before the City undertakes the comprehensive planning process, which should help determine if the plant will be needed. Current water use trends show that we do not “need” an additional water treatment plant for more than a decade. With aggressive conservation efforts, we can save money and delay any new plants well beyond a decade.

Next Steps

- Stop spending on the costly Water Treatment Plant 4 construction project until a clear demonstration is made that the facility is necessary through the Comprehensive Plan Process.
- Implement aggressive conservation programs to flatten or lower summer water use.
- Evaluate long-term water demand through the Comprehensive Plan.
- Should the Council determine that new water capacity is needed in the future, hold a citizen vote to authorize any necessary revenue bonds.

Priority 2: Direct the Austin Water Utility to use conservation to its most cost effective level.

The most affordable long term water source in Central Texas is conservation, saving money, water, and reducing greenhouse gases from treating and pumping water.

Next Steps

- Set goal of making Austin the most water efficient city in Texas. We are currently well behind several other Texas cities in water use per capita. Set a goal of meeting and then beating the state recommended standard of 140 gallons per person per capita per day.
- Increase water conservation funding by one-third, including public education and outreach programs.
- Hire an independent auditor and consultant to review conservation programs and suggest further strategies for water conservation.
• Make Austin the rainwater collection capital of Texas.

Priority 3: Use City permitting and infrastructure funding to encourage ecologically and economically sustainable water practices.

Shifting attitudes and philosophies of water management won't come overnight but we can start the process now to make new homes and buildings water independent.

Next Steps:
• Change land development and building codes to allow and encourage gray-water reuse, composting toilets, waterless urinals, green roofs, and air conditioner condensate re-use.
• Require developers to pay all water infrastructure costs up-front.
• Require rainwater collection for new commercial development.
• Require new City facilities to capture and use rainwater, use waterless urinals, and use air conditioner condensate.

Priority 4: Protect Barton Springs flows from drought and pollution.

Barton Springs is the jewel of Austin. Groundwater pumping from surrounding communities threatens its flow in severe drought, damaging habitat for the Barton Springs salamander and affecting recreational swimming.

Next Steps:
• Use City technical and legal expertise to reclaim groundwater pumping rights for Barton Springs flows.
• Purchase land and conservation easements in the contributing and recharge zones for the Barton Springs/Edwards Aquifer to prevent development preserve recharge features.
• Allow the public to vote on bonds to purchase groundwater rights to protect spring flows at Barton Springs.
• Use Austin Water Utility water sources to relieve groundwater pumping, in qualifying systems, during extreme drought.

Budget Implications

Delaying construction of water treatment plant 4 will save over $110 million in the proposed budget, and each year of delay saves $14.3 million. Further, without the cost of Water Treatment Plant 4, proposed water rate increases can be scaled back. Expanding the inverted block water rates will increase water utility revenues and can delay water rate increases for lower-volume users. Budget increases are requested for water conservation, infrastructure rebates, land and conservation easements, to develop a more aggressive conservation programs and for public education.
ZERO WASTE

Recycling has become a daily ritual practiced by over one million people in the Austin Metropolitan Area. Yet, recycling alone will not end our dependency on landfills and incinerators, nor reverse the rapid depletion of our natural resources. As Central Texas’ population and consumption rate rises, our one-way system of extracting virgin resources to make packaging and products that will later be buried or burned is not sustainable.

**Zero Waste** is a new way of looking at our waste stream. Instead of seeing used materials as garbage in need of disposal, discards are seen as valuable resources. A pile of "trash" represents jobs, financial opportunity, and raw material for new products. In January 2009 Austin became the first City in Texas to pass a Zero Waste Strategic Plan. With that plan as our guide, Austin Eco-Change Exchange has identified the following next steps to making Austin a Zero Waste Community.

**Priority 1: Expand the recycling ordinance to include all residences and businesses, institutions, festivals, bars, restaurants, and apartments with less than 100 units.**

**Next Steps**
- Pass the green event ordinance that has already gone through public input and passed the Solid Waste Advisory Commission. This ordinance was initiated by Mayor Leffingwell and should be revised and back in front of council within **three months**.
- Expand the multi family and business recycling ordinance to all residences, businesses and institutions within the **next year**. Make sure both ordinances include a compliance system.

**Priority 2: Get organic materials out of our landfills by promoting and providing incentives for neighborhood, community, backyard, and curbside composting. Require the use of mulch at all new development sites.**

Compost improves soil and food quality, reduces water consumption, and sequesters carbon. In the landfill, organic material decomposition creates methane, a powerful greenhouse gas and contributor to climate change.

**Next Steps**
- Rebate home compost bins – this is a line item in the solid waste budget. Require a short tutorial and competence test to get the rebate and alleviate concerns about poor compost and the associated annoyance. **3 to 6 months**.
- Fund a Master Composter program. **6 months**
- Allocate city owned space for community compost piles. **1 year**
• Allocate funding for a public/private pilot program for commercial and residential curb-side compost pick-up and processing. **1 year**

• Initiate a citywide composting operation to rescue food and organic waste from landfills. Reject all proposals to incinerate organic waste. Direct the climate protection task force to examine carbon sequestration in organic and conventional cropping systems and the impacts of burning versus composting, versus land filling. Implement a feasibility study for integrating home and restaurant food waste into current composting operations at Hornsby Bend, Texas Disposal Systems and others. **1 to 2 years**

• Ensure the closure of Waste Management landfill by City representation at the TCEQ hearing. Join the appeal process if TCEQ approves the permit to expand. **1 to 3 months.**

**Additional Priorities**

• Use public input and transparency in the search for the new (Zero) Solid Waste Services Director, the Greenstar contract, and a new Materials Recovery Facility.

• The Assistant City manager has released a document that includes zero waste priorities and public input in the search for a new SWS Director. Allow citizens to suggest candidates to add to the pool. **3 to 6 months**

• Renegotiate the Greenstar contract to save both carbon emissions associated with materials transport and utility ratepayer dollars. **3 to 6 months**

• Build a city-owned or contract with a local Materials Recovery Facility. **2 years**

• Instruct the City Auditor to calculate a per plastic bag cost to City of Austin rate payers. Based on the audit outcome, institute either a plastic bag ban or a 95% reduction requirement for retail businesses. **3 months**

• Working with the Solid Waste Advisory Council, Rick Cofer, Keep Austin Beautiful and local businesses, implement a program to reduce Styrofoam use, phasing into an eventual ban or 95% reduction requirement. **1-2 years**

• Fund a comprehensive Zero Waste public education campaign, including AISD and other educational institutions. Include in this education efforts information about why we cannot continue to bury or burn our trash. The Solid Waste Department already does education and outreach; zero waste can be integrated those materials at little cost. **6 months**

**Budget Implications**

All items proposed here would be funded through current FY2010 budget allocations. An existing city staff person for one month will be required to develop educational materials.
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

The Eco-Change Exchange calls for participatory democracy. Governmental transparency and a Council responsive to public input are musts for effective government. When residents are engaged and fully contribute to City decision-making, decisions that affect our future are on firmer, more sustainable ground.

Priority 1: Reaffirm policies for meaningful public review, participation, and input in decision-making processes

Next Steps
- Honor the City Charter by requiring a vote of the majority of citizens to authorize bond expenditure proposals, including utility bond proposals, providing adequate and balanced information.
- Create an open government task force or commission that interfaces with city departments and advises the Council on policies to improve transparency. Codify an overarching directive for resident involvement in all policy development that contains significant public impact.
- Respect and value the input of Citizen Board and Commissions and ensure that their composition reflects the expertise and diversity of the broad community.
- Clarify ambiguous parts of the City code and practice, including the legal status of future land use maps or FLUMs, and the legal standing of Neighborhood Groups.

Priority 2: Begin community dialogue on looming and existing environmental problems, including drought, global warming, and energy depletion

Next Steps
- Direct the City Manager to implement a public participation process for future resource management planning.
- Establish procedures to compile, publish, and update basic sustainability measures:
  - Pounds of solid waste per person per day and pounds diverted to recycling;
  - Water consumption per person per day, compared to the state goal of 140 gallons;
  - Vehicle miles traveled per person per day;
  - Electrical consumption per person per day; and
Greenhouse gas emission rates per person per day.

- Austin measures should be compared to similar measures in other Texas, national, and international cities committed to implementing sustainability programs.

**Priority 3: Engage residents on the Comprehensive Plan and other important issues using an Envision Central Texas-style model**

**Next Steps**

- Ask for community input on how best to engage residents on the Comprehensive Plan.
- Based on community input, develop and implement a public participation plan, including a schedule for public input.

**Priority 4: City Website Redesign**

**Next Steps**

- Immediately implement available public information access via current City system capabilities, starting with Council meeting calendars.
- Monitor the website/AustinGo project to ensure that the values of transparency are reflected in decision-making through the creation of an Open Government task force or Commission.
- Set a responsive time schedule for website/AustinGo redesign in conjunction with community input.

**Priority 5: Single Member Districts**

**Next Steps**

- Appoint a task force, representative of the diverse and growing city, to develop and recommend a process for redrawing district boundaries at each census.
- The task force should identify proposed district boundaries pending the publication of the 2010 census.

**Budget Implications**

The primary budget implication would be the requirement to honor Austin’s City Charter by requiring a majority vote on all revenue bond authorizations. This requirement would delay bonds scheduled for authorization before an election could be held. Other budget requirements would be staff allocation for public information, transparency, data, and education projects, and an increase in the amount of funds allocated for the public input portion of the comprehensive plan process (currently $1.4 million, which is likely insufficient).
Timeline for Progress

3 months
- Relocate Pure Castings and use bond money to build affordable housing on the site.
- Oppose SH 45 SW and US 290 construction/expansion.
- Incorporate phase-out plan for Fayette Coal plant and replacement with renewable energy in Electric Utility Master Plan.
- Implement the recommendations of the newly created Sustainable Policy Board
- Stop spending money on WTP #4
- Turn down the Wildflower Commons PUD
- Increase water conservation spending in the budget by 1/3
- Hire an independent auditor and consultant to review conservation programs and suggest further strategies for water conservation
- Pass the Green Events ordinance.
- Oppose the Waste Management landfill expansion permit at TCEQ.
- Incorporate citizen input into the decision of hiring a new Solid Waste Services director.
- Ban plastic bags and Styrofoam or impose a 95% reduction requirement.
- Based on community input, develop and implement a public participation plan for the Comprehensive Plan using an Envision Central Texas-style model.
- Immediately implement public information

6 months
- Work for an effective light-rail starter route and build momentum for a referendum.
- Expand the recycling ordinance to include all residences, businesses, institutions, festivals, bars, restaurants and apartments with less than 100 units.
- Fund a Master Composter program and provide rebates for home compost bins.
- Renegotiate the Greenstar contract to save on carbon emissions associated with material transport and costs.
- Fund a comprehensive Zero Waste public education campaign.
- Create an Open Government Task Force or Commission that interfaces with City departments and advises the Council on policies to improve transparency.
- Implement aggressive water conservation programs to reduce peak summer water use.
1 year

- Include significant money for bicycle infrastructure and a public shower pilot program in next year’s transportation bond package.
- Change the Electric Utility’s general fund transfer to derive from a fixed-fee rather than a volumetric formula used today.
- Include significant money for open space acquisition in next year’s bond package.
- Create a Sustainability Officer with broad powers and cross-department budget authority.
- Use City technical and legal expertise to reclaim groundwater pumping rights for Barton Springs flows.
- Allocate city-owned space for community compost piles
- Begin a pilot program for curbside composting.
- Establish procedures to compile, publish, and update basic sustainability measures.
- Change city code and development permitting to encourage and require water efficiency in new buildings.

2 years

- Target “demand reduction” strategies that reduce vehicle miles traveled, such as alternative transportation infrastructure, telecommuting, car-sharing, van pooling, and improved bicycle/pedestrian facilities.
- Expand opportunities to add rooftop solar and wind turbines throughout the city.
- Initiate a city-wide composting organization to rescue food and organic waste from landfills for composting.
- Build a city-owned or contract with a city-located Materials Recovery Facility.
Thank you again for your time and attention to this important plan.

We will do our part to educate, negotiate and mobilize our communities as active leaders in the creation of Austin as a Sustainable Leader.

We will be counting the leadership of the City Council as well!

The Eco-Change Exchange Team

Much more information, like the slideshows, raw data, photos from the event and more can be found on our website:

www.ecoxchange.us