

#5

February 1, 2007

Mayor Will Wynn and
Austin City Council Members
P O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767

Dear Mayor Will Wynn and Austin City Council Members

The letter sent by Mayor Wynn is much appreciated, and we want to take this opportunity to thank you for strong leadership nationally in addressing global warming. We are also grateful to Austin Energy for their leadership role in pursuing renewable energy and efficiency.

So we were disappointed to learn of Austin Energy's plan to build a coal-burning power plant. We recognize that what is under consideration today with Item #5 on the agenda is considering a land purchase in Matagorda County, and that no decision has been made yet as to whether a gasification type (IGCC) coal plant would be built. We further understand that if built, such a plant would include carbon sequestration. However, we strongly urge you not to embark down this path and urge you to reject Item #5. Coal has no place in Austin's energy future.

Certainly, we need to do everything we can to curb global warming and the threats that appear to be increasing from its impacts, ranging from sea level rise, to increase in pests and disease, agricultural impacts, and droughts and severe storms.

We believe that the best possible route that Austin Energy can take is to continue our leadership role, and show the world that efficiency is our first and best energy choice, along with renewable wind, solar and biomass energy. A recent study by Optimal Energy, *Power to Save*, found that 80% of Texas' projected energy needs can be met through increased efficiency.

Austin's award-winning green building program remains voluntary at this time. Instead of looking to buy land, let's take time out to figure out what gains could be made through making green building a requirement for new homes and businesses in our community. It's possible that this measure alone could compensate for the 300 MW of power that would potentially be generated by the coal-burning power plant under joint consideration with City Public Service in San Antonio. We need time to look at all options. If the Dallas suburb of Frisco can require that homes be 30% more energy efficient, certainly Austin can also do so.

No matter what kind of technology any new coal-fired power plants may use, "clean coal" or conventional, extracting and transporting the millions of tons of coal remaining in American soil would come at a high price. Mining additional coal would damage America's land and water resources. Mining enough fuel to supply current and planned coal-fired power plants would require opening new mines. Currently producing coal mines in America report that they have around 18 billion tons of recoverable reserves, which would last less than 18 years at current consumption rates—and fewer years at higher rates of consumption.

Overall, the Energy Information Administration estimates that the U S has enough coal resources to last for over 200 years at current rates of consumption (270 billion short tons). About 120 billion tons are located close to the surface, and 150 billion tons are underground. Over 75 percent of America's coal reserves are located in Montana, Wyoming, Illinois, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Accessing these coal reserves would involve building strip mines or underground caverns in places that currently supply clean water, areas for recreation, fields for growing food, or towns where people live. Coal mining causes a variety of serious and harmful impacts

Coal mining contaminates water supplies. In 2004, coal mines reported the release of more than 13 million pounds of toxic chemicals to landfills or directly to streams, including emissions of ammonia, arsenic, chlorine, chromium and lead. Coal-mining waste, acids and toxic metals can kill stream life and make water supplies undrinkable.

Water contamination also arises from wastes generated by the processing and combustion of coal. Across the country, coal ash and sludge is dumped into landfills and old mining pits, where it can leach toxic materials into the groundwater. Every year, coal-fired power plants in the U.S. generate 130 million tons of ash and sludge, containing toxic substances including chromium, arsenic and nickel. About half of these plants dump their waste in surface ponds—only 26 percent of which are lined to prevent pollution from escaping.

A land purchase in Matagorda County, would no doubt be located near the South Texas (Nuclear) Project and its transmission lines. There is a possibility that a future city council would choose to expand the nuclear plant with such a site, a possibility we certainly would not favor. Purchasing land would lead to some kind of project there in the future, and it doesn't appear likely that it would be a solar or wind project. Spending the money would lead to arguments later that we need to build some kind plant since the land has been purchased. In this way, it commits us to an energy path before we've had a chance to fully examine all the alternatives.

We respectfully urge that Austin City Council not approve the purchase of land in Matagorda County, and that we wholeheartedly and actively pursue more energy efficiency, a new generation of measures to save energy. Austin has been able to avoid building a coal plant, a costly investment, in the past through an aggressive program with energy audits and rebates. This is the kind of leadership we know that Austin Energy is capable of, and the kind of leadership we support.

Please vote no on Item #5 and arrange for open public dialogue regarding environmental and economic concerns before proceeding further on such an important matter. There is no rush to buy land for a project so far into the future. We also urge that you act to require green building codes for new homes and businesses, and to prioritize meeting those Austin solar commitments and goals that have not yet been achieved.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
Director, Environment Texas

1009 West 6th Street, Suite 208
Austin, Texas 78703

Karen Hadden
Director, Sustainable Energy and Economic Development (SEED) Coalition
1801 Westlake Dr. #209
Austin, Texas 78746

Tom "Smitty" Smith
Director, Public Citizen's Texas Office
1002 West Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701

Jeff Brooks
Advocate, Texas Public Interest Research Group (TexPIRG)
1009 W. 6th St., Suite 209
Austin, Texas 78703

Bee Moorhead
Executive Director
Texas Impact/Texas Interfaith Power and Light
221 East 9th Street #403
Austin, Texas 78701