

AGENDA



Thursday, November 8, 2007

**Austin Energy
RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL ACTION**
Item No. 2

Subject: Approve a total of \$300,000 in cash awards to: the University of Texas (\$250,000); Texas A&M University (\$30,000); University of Texas (\$10,000); and Morgan State University (\$10,000) for proposals submitted to the National Research Ideas Competition to develop innovative and efficient methods by which urban forest and utility structures may co-exist.

Amount and Source of Funding: Funding in the amount of \$300,000 is available in the Fiscal Year 2007-2008 Operating Budget of Austin Energy.

Fiscal Note: There is no unanticipated fiscal impact. A fiscal note is not required.

For More Information: Ester Matthews, Director, Austin Climate Protection Plan 322-6041 and Austan Librach, Director, Emerging Transportation Technologies 322-6351.

Boards and Commission Action: Recommended by the Electric Utility Commission.

Prior Council Action: 2/19/2006 -- Council passed Resolution NO. 20060209-0019 calling for the research competition.

Austin Energy and the National Research Ideas Competition (NRIC) Jury request that the City Council approve payment of cash awards totaling \$300,000 to four universities responding to the NRIC guidelines as prepared by AE staff.

The City Council directed AE to conduct a National Research Ideas Competition aimed at college and university Schools of Architecture with the goal of securing a systems approach to integrate utility lines with urban trees, promote the planting of street trees, and protect existing mature urban trees while maintaining excellent electrical system reliability.

AE initiated the competition on September 15, 2006 and received letters of intent to participate in this competition from seven colleges and universities located throughout the country. From the period November 2006 to February 2007 city staff conducted Q&A sessions with all interested participants and arranged tours of the AE service area. By February, four teams remained in the competition.

On June 1, 2007 reports from remaining four teams were submitted to the National Research Ideas Competition jury for review. The jury panel consisted of AE staff, representatives from cable and telecom providers, members of Austin's citizens' task forces, and representatives from national urban planning organizations.

A jury panel consisting of the following six (6) individuals was assembled on June 7th to conduct a process to evaluate, score and select the winning teams:

- o Laura Toups representing CNU
- o Todd Thetford representing AT&T (formerly SBC)
- o Steve Oliver representing AIA
- o Carolyn Palaima representing the COA Tree Task Force

- o Bob Seaver representing Austin Energy
- o Scott King representing Austin Energy

The NRIC jury recommends the following cash awards:

1st Place \$250,000 Prize: University of Texas, School of Architecture and Planning, "People, Power, Progress."

2nd Place \$30, 000 Prize: Texas A&M University, Department of Landscape and Urban Planning, "EM Power."

3rd Place \$10, 000 Prize: University of Texas, School of Architecture and Planning, "MUST & Cradle."

4th Place \$10,000 Prize: Morgan State University, Institute of Architecture and Planning

The jury also sought to identify an approach from the winning team that could be implemented as a pilot project or projects in Austin. They recommended the following two pilot projects:

1. Based on research data and as permitted by existing AE budget, it is recommended that a pilot addressing the issue of tree/line conflicts be undertaken in an older neighborhood by using taller poles and shielded primary cable. This will allow for minimum trimming to protect from physical damage to the cable but should not require any large-scale trimming.
2. It is recommended that a pilot program be undertaken to use the urban underground utility applications identified in the winning UT proposal and apply them to a test area. A significant part of the purpose of the pilot should be to identify cross-departmental coordination needs and conflicts and to test mechanisms to minimize those problems. Additionally, the pilot should develop a creative "tool box" approach to solve design challenges in the urban environment that achieves "buy in" from all affected COA departments. A portion of the tool box should be a public education/participation program including a catalog of the total expense to the public and landowners of implementation.

For Pilot 1, AE will choose an area and install the methodologies recommended, as the budget permits.

For Pilot 2, it is requested that the City Manager or her designee identify a future city project—either roadway reconstruction or major water or sewer line replacement—and apply a cross-departmental "tool box" approach to coordinating the work with all affected city departments.