

Recommendations on Austin Energy Procurement of Utility-Enabled Distributed Solar and Program Design for Hard to Reach Customers

June 15, 2020

The Resource Management Commission (Commission) supports Austin Energy's work to enable expanded distributed solar programs and urges Austin Energy to move forward with implementation without delay.

The Commission created an Access to Solar Working Group to develop recommendations for how best to expand access to solar for hard to reach customers who are limited income, renters, live in multifamily housing or are otherwise underserved by existing solar programs. Austin Energy assembled a Utility Enabled Rooftop Solar for Underserved Markets team, which included two members of the Resource Management Commission, to participate in the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) e-Lab Forge workshop on September 16-18, 2019. Following the workshop, these two teams merged and met twice more to develop specific criteria for selecting host sites and program development. These recommendations are the result of consensus from that collective group.

The Commission recommends that Austin Energy issue an RFP that allows developers to select host sites for Distributed Community Solar Installations.

The Commission recommends the following criteria related to project selection:

- Minimum qualifications for proposed projects:
 - Ground mount proposals within the City of Austin limits must demonstrate that they are not using land suitable for agriculture.
 - Ground mount systems must demonstrate they are not using land suitable for housing.
 - Developer covers costs from (including) the transformer to the point of generation
 - Require an end of life plan for recycling solar panels and meet any federal requirements.
- Preferred criteria for proposed projects (When proposals are economically competitive Austin Energy will use these criteria to determine highest value.):
 - Plans that demonstrate a greater utilization of local workers compared to non-local workers are preferred.
 - Rooftop, carport, and other shade structure installations are preferred over ground mount
 - Faster development timeline
 - Prefer inclusion of MBE/WBE companies
 - Participating in local workforce development and/or diversity and inclusion program
 - Demonstrable policy or approach to reduce systems' life cycle environmental impact

The Commission recommends the following criteria be used to develop the energy user side of the program, and recognizes that lower cost power purchase agreements will serve to enable programmatic benefits:

- Subscription model
- Enable moderate and limited-income customers to participate without a cost premium to ensure equitable access to community solar programs.
- Ensure that moderate and limited income subscribers receive an allocation of the subscription offering that is at least proportional to their percentage representation of the residential customer base.
- Extra outreach, including through partnerships, to pre-subscribe hard to reach customers ahead of additional capacity opening.