



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Resource Management Commission and Community Stakeholders

**FROM:** Debbie Kimberly, Vice President, Distributed Energy Services

**DATE:** May 21, 2013

**SUBJECT:** Report on the May 6th Energy Efficiency Community Stakeholder Meeting

---

### Executive Summary

As directed by Council Resolution No. 20120927-083, Austin Energy has hosted Energy Efficiency Community Stakeholder Meetings to solicit community feedback on how the utility can meet its 2020 800 MW goal in the most cost-effective manner possible. For a period of one year, the City Manager has placed a standing item on Resource Management Committee meeting agendas for stakeholders and the Commission to receive updates on progress as well as provide comment related to the energy efficiency process. The first meeting was held on February 9th and addressed a broad array of topics. A second meeting was hosted on May 6th and pursuant to stakeholder input from the first meeting, focused on how best to meet the needs of limited income customers (in particular those customers that have household incomes at 200%-400% of the federal poverty limits). Notwithstanding efforts to increase attendance, customer attendance at the meetings has been relatively light.

	<b>Saturday, February 9 Meeting 9 AM- Noon</b>	<b>Monday, May 6 Meeting 6-8 PM</b>
Invitees	117	175
Attendees (net of no-shows)	35	20
Austin Energy Staff	23	11

To provide context to the discussion at the May meeting, Austin Energy reviewed information regarding its current energy efficiency efforts as well as on the Customer Assistance Program. The stakeholders provided direct feedback and generated quality ideas connected to Austin Energy's role in meeting the energy efficiency needs of this large and unique population.

*Increased education and outreach.* Similar to the February stakeholder meeting, stakeholders noted a need for more outreach and education. Some of the stakeholders were unaware of current programs and felt that this particular customer group may also be uninformed. Additional

feedback from the meeting indicated a lack of awareness of the current rate-related affordability index that could limit overall spending on energy efficiency. Stakeholders' initial understanding was that Austin Energy could support an 'endless variety' of rebate programs. When the affordability index (maximum of 2% increase per year) was explained to the group, they suggested seeking other means of funding energy efficiency.

Stakeholders expressed the need for increased community partnerships with local social services groups and churches to best serve limited income customers. This outreach could evoke awareness of energy efficiency programs, provide education on the importance of energy efficiency, and increase understanding of utility bills as part of household expenses.

*Enhance engagement via multiple channels.* Ideas around customer engagement included incentives to lower use, prepaid meters, increased education, and more data research. Getting information to customers would be most effective by using a variety of channels, including an Austin Energy mobile phone app, flyers on buses, and information available at senior centers.

*Multifamily emphasis.* Over 50% of Austin residents are renters. The emphasis on multifamily programs that impact limited income customers was prevalent within the discussion groups. Major ideas were aimed at current program renovations and expansion of the multifamily program to better meet the needs of limited income customers. Specifically, participants noted a need to create a comprehensive multifamily program that does more than single measures, thus creating a larger impact. Stakeholders felt more education and awareness with this group is a particular need. While energy efficiency may not be a key factor for limited income renters when deciding on an apartment, awareness of the average utility bills would be helpful planning information.

*Data collection.* Staff also sought stakeholder input on a prospective draft Council Resolution that would direct the City Manager to collect data on multifamily properties receiving Austin Energy rebates at or above \$50,000. Stakeholder comments were somewhat limited, but general consensus suggested that additional data could be helpful. However, the majority of the stakeholders present questioned whether it was within Austin Energy's scope to collect and track data on rental rates. Some of the stakeholders believed there were other entities more appropriate to such information gathering. Some expressed concern that attaching rent data collection conditions to energy efficiency measures could be a deterrent to property owners pursuing efficiency measures. One stakeholder noted that apartment owners should be encouraged to pursue more than the minimal level of energy efficiency upgrades.

Detailed meeting notes are currently being transcribed and will be available on the Energy Efficiency Stakeholder Process webpage soon. For the purposes of this memo, a brief summary of stakeholder comments is provided.

### Meeting Participation and Feedback

The May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting consisted of:

- Total Invitees: 175

- Total RSVP: 21
- Total RSVP attended: 16
- RSVP No-Show: 5
- Walk-Ins: 4
- **Total Attendees: 20**
- AE Staff: 11

The 20 participating community stakeholders met at Austin Energy to discuss the energy efficiency needs and limitations of limited income customers. Stakeholders represented various groups such as:

- Austin Apartment Association
- Austin Board of Realtors
- AE Customer Assistance Program/Financial Support Plus 1
- Citizen/Environmental Advocate
- City Council Member Aide
- Energy Contractors
- Green Building Authority
- Health and Human Services
- Houses of Worship
- Neighborhood Planning
- Resource Management Commission
- Texas Legal Services

#### Discussion Questions and Stakeholder Comments

The meeting began with a description of the customer demographics and details of current Austin Energy programs that serve limited income customers. Planned and future project programs were also discussed to provide stakeholders with a background of Austin Energy (AE) efforts. The participants were then asked a series of questions. Responses were discussed among the group. The following are the questions with a sample of the raw participant responses.

*How do we best address the needs of the currently un-served and underserved?*

- No pay increase but utilities increase, inform religious communities- education about services is energy efficient
- Raise awareness
- Improve website
- Data on income of energy efficiency (EE) program participants
- Affordable Housing
- Reduced rents
- Rent credits
- Section 8-need average cost of bill, need more outreach

*What programs should we consider for this customer group?*

- Great stuff that already exists
- Comprehensive upgrade to multifamily (MF) to replace single measures-do everything while you are in the unit
- Dovetail of current programs but none of major appliances
- One stop shop
- Get contractors to practice whole home approach-education to contractors

*How do we enhance customer's engagement in these programs?*

- Anything to incentivize lower use
- Prepaid meters
- Reward system
- Anything to get people to think about use
- Meter Use Bingo
- Feedback and Info
- Add additional \$1 to big event tickets

*What are alternative funding sources for these programs?*

- Crowd Source
- Texas Gas Service partnership
- Tax Increment Financing (TIFs)
- Public Private Partnerships

*How do we balance tenant and property owner benefits and costs?*

- Is it AE's job to collect this data or is there a more appropriate group to do this?
- Are we putting an onus on AE that should be somewhere else?
- Public policy that AE provides grant to MF to drive people out
- Give us the baseline data
- Voluntary Landlord agreement to maintain rent levels after EE retrofit
- Wants to see "section 8" type business processes to assure rate payer/city tax dollars are cost effective to the citizens of Austin
- Additional research is needed to educate public how utility dollars are supporting the local economy and building towards a more sustainable Austin

*What are your recommendations to improve education and outreach?*

- Messaging to senior citizens
- Visual
- Need Logo change, name recognition, need a mascot-something to inspire action
- Need an App
- Flyers on bus
- People with disability advocate
- Senior citizen advocate, AARP
- Enhance outreach to churches

*What are some ways we can create energy-related behavioral change?*

- People chose rent prices but need to educate on utility bills per apt complex
- Commitment on bill to reduce energy use
- Educate customers on their bill; make more user friendly
- Energy Saving Contests
- Have a PTA program at schools on saving energy at school and homes as well
- Market to the kids at school
- Targeted marketing campaigns for SF and MF business markets. Leveraging other City services to communicate community-wide conservation initiatives

#### Continuous Action

Austin Energy will continue to provide monthly updates to the RMC and stakeholders on the progress made as a result of the input from the stakeholder meetings. Our next steps are to update our dedicated web page to provide relevant information pertaining to the stakeholder process and to begin developing plans for our next stakeholder meeting. We will continue engaging our stakeholders through email and information posted to the web.

Our next meeting is planned for late summer. Details will be provided in subsequent RMC meetings.

Thank you for your time, support, and input. I welcome your questions and comments as we proceed through this year-long process.