

November 17, 2025

RE: Retain new staff positions for Climate Action and Resilience in FY26 Budget

Dear Mayor Watson and City Council Members,

We urge you to prioritize keeping the two new positions for the Austin Climate Action and Resilience office in the FY 2026 budget. The Energy Program Manager and the Sustainability Program Manager are vital to make progress on the city's climate goals and will ultimately save the city money.

The impact of these two positions on the budget is minimal, amounting to \$124,276 from the General Fund and \$104,274 from other sources. Given that these positions will help the City save money and utilize its resources more strategically, it would be more prudent to allocate space in the budget for this minor expense than to cut the positions.

The Climate Action and Resilience office hasn't received new staff positions in years, despite the scope and responsibilities of the office expanding. Even with these two new positions, the office will still have unmet staffing needs; however, these two will help fill the most urgent gaps.

The Energy Program Manager is needed to lead the effort to install solar energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements at City facilities. These upgrades will reduce energy consumption, thereby saving the City money and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Capturing the financial savings in a revolving fund will enable the City to continually make informed investments that reduce energy use and emissions at its facilities. It will address a long-standing problem of deferring needed maintenance at City facilities. This position will allow the City to align its practices with the adopted goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan and the Austin Energy Resource, Generation and Climate Protection Plan, both of which identify local solar and energy efficiency as key strategies to reduce emissions and affordably meet local energy needs. This work is extremely time-sensitive because of the expiring federal solar energy tax credits.

The Sustainable Program Manager is needed to develop and implement environmentally sustainable purchasing policies, procedures and programs at the City. The City of Austin's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions is in the products and materials it purchases. A significant section of the Austin Climate Equity Plan, which focuses on reducing emissions by adjusting purchasing policies and practices, has languished due to a lack of staff to complete the work. The City has considerable purchasing power and should utilize procurement as a tool to achieve city goals and support businesses that prioritize environmental protection and public health in their manufacturing processes. This strategy will enable the same public funds to achieve two or more goals simultaneously. The Sustainable Program Manager would be fully dedicated to this work.

We urge you to ensure that the Energy Program Manager and the Sustainability Program Manager remain in the final budget for fiscal year 2026.

Thank you for your service and for your continued leadership in Austin's pursuit of net-zero emissions goals.

Sincerely,

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