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NEWSLETTER

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JULY/AUG 2022

Austin's Electric Rate Increase Proposal

(Editor's note: The basis for this article comes from a piece written by Bill Oakey on his website: <https://austinaffordability.com/>. Bill is a retired accountant, ex-City Electric Utility Commissioner and a familiar face at council chambers advocating for Austin residents. He has spent years as a consumer advocate and taxpayer watchdog analyzing various reports, budgets and data sources related to escalating costs for Austin residents; working for reforms and policies to make Austin more affordable.)

On Friday July 22nd, KXAN-TV News aired a story about our oppressively high summer electric bills. The historic triple-digit heat has led to soaring bills that are straining family budgets at a time of record high inflation. But Austin Energy has a surprise for us lurking around the corner. They want to pile on a new base rate increase!

In the news interview, Bill Oakey pointedly explained that Austin Energy will be sweeping up the highest peak season profits in their history from May through September. This will pour tens of millions of extra dollars into their coffers, well above their current year's budget. The City Council will have every reason to nip the rate increase in the bud, as well they should.

In the same segment, Austin Energy responded with what Mr. Oakey feels are misleading and faulty arguments, namely that the city doesn't make any profits as the extra revenue is returned to the City, and while the city will earn extra revenue, it will also have additional expenses with "the high cost of energy."

Oakey's response is that the full costs of fuel and ERCOT power purchases are already passed through to us, the customers. That charge appears on the Power Supply Adjustment line on our electric bills. The summer demand surge will undoubtedly push the charge higher. The fixed monthly amount is modified each year in November. And that while it is true that Austin Energy's revenue transfers to the City's general fund are not the same as a private business profit, we're talking about a revenue surplus - a windfall. In a recession or a time of high inflation, the revenue surplus can be used to keep customer rates stable. Imagine this historic seasonal windfall with a new base rate increase stacked on top of it. That would generate even more tens of

See *Electric Rates* continued on page 2



How the City of Austin's Plan to "Relax" Compatibility Impacts You

By Community Not Commodity

First came CodeNEXT, the citywide rezoning plan that Austin officials were shamed into withdrawing in 2018.



Then came the infamous "transition zone" initiative, which the city council tried to pass without notifying local residents. It met its end after a Travis County court found the council acted illegally, a ruling that was affirmed by an appellate court earlier this year.

Now it looks as though Mayor Steve Adler and his allies have acquired a new target: Austin's longstanding compatibility standards. On June 9, the city council approved a middle-of-the-night proposal to "relax" the standards near new Vertical Mixed Use (VMU) developments, and council members plan to take broader action this September—perhaps weakening compatibility citywide.

Here are answers to a few of the most frequently asked questions we've received since the June 9 vote:

What are compatibility standards?

Compatibility standards are zoning laws that regulate the height and setback of large buildings next to residential neighborhoods, preventing structures with wildly different sizes from being built side-by-side. The City of Austin adopted compatibility standards in 1986 to ensure that new commercial or multifamily developments wouldn't tower over existing homes by providing modest buffers.

How do Austin's current compatibility standards work?

Under our current compatibility standards, structures 60-120 feet tall may not be built within 300 feet of single-family homes or townhomes, and structures more than 120 feet tall may not be built within 540 feet. The application of these standards varies slightly based upon the square footage of the developments in question.

How is the city council attempting to change compatibility standards?

The council's June 9 proposal allows land developers along certain transportation corridors to erect buildings up to 90 feet tall just 100 feet from the property lines of existing homes (that's 440 feet closer than our current standards allow, an

See *Compatibility* continued on page 2

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CNA Contact Information

P. O. Box 9505, Austin, TX 78766
www.crestviewna.com

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Monday of every month at 7:00 PM at the
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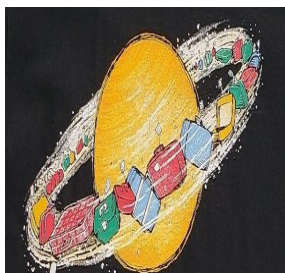
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spoken. We have freedom of thought, but
nothing pushes us toward creative thinking.

Joan Baez

The scientific
theory I like
best is that the
rings of Saturn
are composed
entirely of lost
airline luggage.
Mark Russell



Compatibility, continued from page 1

80% reduction in compatibility). The measure also strips parking requirements from those developments, pushing new residents and their guests to park on neighborhood streets. If the council takes further action this September, compatibility standards could be weakened or dissolved for property owners all over Austin.

Is the city council's plan legal?

The council failed to notify affected property owners of the impending changes—meaning thousands of Austinites could lose the protections provided by compatibility standards without even realizing the matter is under discussion. The lack of notice leaves these new regulations vulnerable to legal challenge by an affected property owner.

What can concerned residents do?

Stay engaged between now and September, when council members are scheduled to address the compatibility issue again. We also encourage you to contact Mayor Steve Adler and your representatives on the city council. Ask them not to “relax” our community’s compatibility standards by 80%, and demand you be notified of regulation changes which affect your home.

(Community Not Commodity is a local organization that advocates development polices that support community values over developer profits. For more information go to

<https://communitynotcommodity.com/who-we-are/>)

Electric Rates, continued from page 1

millions of extra revenue - every year. There are suspicions that the City wants to dodge the Legislative property tax cap with higher general fund transfers.

Additionally, the rate increase proposal would shift some base rate costs away from big businesses, onto residential ratepayers. And it would upend the residential rate tiers, pushing higher costs onto low and middle-income folks. Oakley feels this is a slap in the face in a city with extreme income inequality and an affordability crisis, plus high inflation.

What can you do? Contact the mayor and council members and let them know how you feel about this issue.

(To read Bill's original post or subscribe to his Blog, visit his website as shown at the beginning of this article.)

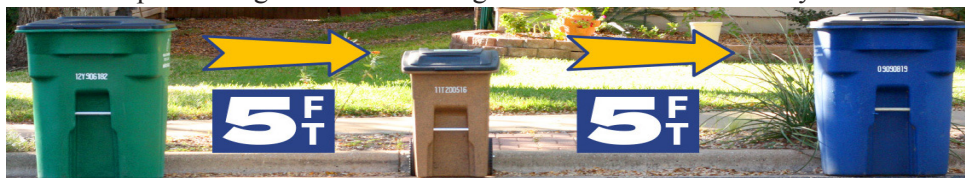
City Announcements

Utility Bill Discounts - Waivers and Discounts for Eligible Customers

Residential customers on low or fixed incomes who participate in certain state, federal, or local assistance programs can benefit from the City of Austin’s Customer Assistance Programs (CAP) utility discounts. CAP Utility Bill Discounts can help reduce utility bills an average of \$650 a year. Waivers and discounts include a discount on your total electrical usage, Electric Service Customer Charge waiver, Water Tiered Fixed Charge waiver, Drainage Fee 50% discount and more. For more information, contact City of Austin Customer Care at 512-494-9400 or visit coautilities.com/go/cap.

Austin Resource Recovery Adjusting Cart Set-out Time To 5:30 AM

As Austin continues to see record-breaking temperatures, Austin Resource Recovery is now asking customers to place their carts at the curb no later than 5:30 a.m. on their scheduled collection day, effective through the end of the summer. This change allows operators, or sanitation drivers, to begin collecting recycling, composting, trash, large brush and bulk items one hour earlier, helping to prevent them from performing collections during the hottest hours of the day.



See City Notices continued on page 7

So You've Got COVID. Here's What To Do

No matter how careful you are being, (And let's face it, many people have stopped being that careful. How many people do you see wearing masks and social distancing in the grocery store?) Omicron is so contagious that even if you follow recommended precautions, you still might get it. So while it's still important to try to keep COVID-19 out of your household — since you never know when someone could end up seriously ill — here's what to do if you or someone you live with does get it.

Step 1: Confirm that you have COVID

If you are showing signs of a virus (fever, headache, congestion, sore throat, gastrointestinal issues) and you have a decent supply of at-home antigen tests, go ahead and take one as soon as you feel ill. But if it is negative, do not use that test as proof-positive that you can go out and interact in society thinking it's just a cold as a lot of antigen tests come back negative within the first two days of symptoms. For those



who are symptomatic and test negative the first time, go ahead and take a second test on Day 3 or 4, as that is when most of the positive test results come in.

If you don't have access to multiple at-home tests, isolate immediately and save your test for the third or fourth day. If you don't have access to home tests or they aren't in your budget, check out free community testing sites in your area. If you test positive on a rapid test, it's not necessary to go out and get a PCR test.

Step 2: Let people know and cancel your plans

One of the first (and the best) things you can do for your community is inform all the appropriate people that you have COVID-19 — including everyone you've interacted with. Even though you and your household may just have mild symptoms, others you have been in contact with may be more at risk. If you found out via an at-home test, you should also let your doctor and local health department know. Your health care provider might need to intervene with treatments. Reporting positive test results to your local public health department helps experts understand the prevalence of a new disease in the communities, how vaccines are holding up and

potential hospital staffing needs, etc. Here is the website for self-reporting to Austin Public Health:

https://austinpulichealth.formstack.com/forms/self_report_at_home_covid_test_results

At this point you should not go out except to seek medical care or to get a breath of fresh air, but away from other people.

Step 3: Consider seeking medical care if you are high risk or have serious symptoms

Many people experience omicron with cold or flu-like symptoms, and there may be no need to rush off to a doctor with a runny nose that you can treat at home. Focus on getting rest and plenty of fluids. Still, there are some circumstances when you should seek medical care with Omicron. If someone in your house is at high risk, it's a good idea to reach out and make that person's care team aware in case any action needs to be taken.

When should you head to an emergency room or urgent care? If you feel you can't get enough air, are having severe gastrointestinal distress where you can't keep up with the fluid losses or if you are experiencing any confusion or change in mental status because this is an indicator that your brain isn't getting enough oxygen or blood flow. Pay extra attention to babies and young children. Make sure they are hydrated (they have regular wet diapers), and monitor their breathing. Any signs of respiratory distress means they aren't getting adequate oxygen.

Step 4: Have a game plan

Ideally, this would be Step 1, but you can still do it. Think about how you will deal with the situation if you or a family member contracts COVID. What are your employer's expectations if you come down with COVID-19? Plan for child-care disruptions. What treatment options are available? How will you isolate to limit exposure to other family members? Who will pick-up some of the responsibilities you usually handle? Children often respond better if they are included in developing and understanding the need for these measures.

Step 5: Make sure you are COVID free and get back to life as usual

If your symptoms were mild, the CDC says you are fine to go back out into the world, masked, after five days if your symptoms are improving — including being fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducers. But continue to wear a mask at least another five days. It would be best to get a negative result on a rapid test before you go out in public unmasked. If you were seriously ill with COVID-19 or are immunocompromised, then wait at least 10 days and discuss your situation with your doctor.



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It's Summer and It's HOT Out There!

Ways to protect yourself and your pets and plants from the heat.

Not only does the intense heat take it toll on humans, but pets, wildlife, gardens and trees can all suffer immensely from those 100+ degree temperatures. Here are some reasons to be concerned and what you can do about it.



Humans and Heat

For many people, warm weather is a time for fun-filled outdoor activities. However, hot weather and outdoor activities don't always mix well, especially during periods of extreme heat—times when temperatures are substantially hotter and/or more humid than average. Extreme heat can cause people to suffer from heat-related illness, and even death. People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to properly cool themselves. Older adults, young children, people with chronic medical conditions and people who use alcohol or certain prescription or recreational drugs are at high risk for heat-related illness and death. More than 700 people die from extreme heat every year in the United States..

Your body deals with heat in two main ways: Your body transfers the heat to the ambient air because it is less than the body temperature, and through perspiration. The evaporation of perspiration is what cools the body. As the heat rises, the ambient air makes that transfer of body heat less efficient. If the humidity is really high, it prevents us from evaporating that perspiration from our skin, and that precludes us from lowering our body temperature. In Texas, heat exhaustion can happen within 10 minutes of being outside, especially if you do not take measures to protect yourself before you go outside.



When temperatures are extremely high, take steps to protect yourself and your loved ones:

- Stay in an air-conditioned indoor location as much as you can. If your home does not have air conditioning, go to a public place such as a shopping mall or public library—even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.

- Pre-hydrate. Drink plenty of fluids even if you don't feel thirsty. But avoid caffeine, very sugary or alcoholic drinks as these actually cause you to lose more body fluid.
- Schedule outdoor activities carefully.
 - * Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing and sunscreen.
 - * Pace yourself and rest often in a shady spot so that your body has a chance to recover.
 - * Try to limit your outdoor activity to mornings and evenings when it is cooler.
 - * Wear a wide brim hat to help protect your scalp from sunburn.
 - * Walking with an umbrella can protect your skin from harmful UV rays by 77% (up to 90% if it is black) and can reduce the temperature beneath them as much as 11 degrees.
- Take cool showers or baths to cool down.
- Use a “buddy” system if you are working or engaged in outdoor activities to monitor the condition of your co-workers or friends and have someone do the same for you.
- Never leave children in cars.
- Rely more on colder meals such as salads and use your microwave instead of your stove or oven. Hot heavy meals add heat to your body.

Know the signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. These include a body temperature of 103 degrees or higher, confusion, nausea, fainting or losing consciousness, headache and dizziness. If you suspect heat exhaustion, move to a cool shady place, put wet cloths on your body or take a cool bath and drink small sips of water. If you suspect heat stroke, do the same but do not drink water, and call 911 as this is a medical emergency. Immediate medical attention is needed to prevent possible permanent damage to your brain and other vital organs that can result in death.

For an easy-to-read, printable chart that details the levels of heat related illnesses and what to do if you experience them, go to <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/warning.html>

Stay safe out there!

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Protecting Pets

Not only does the intense heat take its toll on humans, but pets, wildlife, gardens and trees can all suffer immensely from those 100+ degree temperatures. Here are some reasons to be concerned and what you can do about it.

Never leave your pet in a car even with the car running and air conditioner on as temperatures inside a vehicle can rise rapidly to dangerous levels and you may not return as quickly as you anticipated. Even with temperatures as low as 85 degrees and with a window slightly open, the temperature inside a car can reach 102 degrees in 10 minutes and 120 degrees in 30 minutes. Such temperatures can result in irreversible organ damage or even death.

Remember that it's not just the ambient temperature, but also the humidity that can affect your pet. Animals pant to evaporate moisture from their lungs, which takes heat away from their body. If the humidity is too high, they are unable to cool themselves and their temperature will skyrocket to dangerous levels—very quickly. If your dog's temperature is over 104, they may be suffering from heat stroke. Other signs of heat stroke are heavy panting, glazed eyes, a rapid heartbeat, difficulty breathing, excessive thirst, lethargy, fever, dizziness, lack of coordination, profuse salivation, vomiting, a deep red or purple tongue, seizure and unconsciousness. Animals are at particular risk for heat stroke if they are very old, very young, overweight, not conditioned to prolonged exercise, or have heart or respiratory disease. Some breeds of dogs—like boxers, pugs, shih-tzus and other dogs and cats with short muzzles—will have a much harder time breathing in extreme heat. If you feel your pet is suffering from heat stroke, move your pet into the shade or an air-conditioned area. Apply ice packs or cold towels to their head, neck and chest or run cool (not cold) water over them. Let them drink small amounts of cool water or lick ice cubes. Call your veterinarian or take your pet directly to their office as heatstroke is serious in any animal and requires immediate emergency attention. Your pet may need intravenous fluids or another treatment to combat the symptoms.

High temperatures mean you should limit your pet's exercise. Adjust intensity and duration of exercise in accordance with the temperature. On very hot days, limit exercise to early morning or evening hours, and be especially careful with pets with white-colored ears as they are more susceptible to skin cancer, and short-nosed pets, that typically

have difficulty breathing. Asphalt gets very hot and can burn your pet's paws, so use the park to walk your dog on the grass if possible. Always carry water with you to keep your dog from dehydrating.

Pets respond differently to heat than humans do. Dogs, for instance, sweat primarily through their feet. So when your pet is outside, make sure they have protection from heat and sun and plenty of fresh, cold water. In heat waves, add ice to water when possible. Tree shade and tarps are ideal because they don't obstruct airflow. A doghouse does not provide relief from heat—in fact, it makes it worse. You may consider

keeping your pet inside more, especially during the hottest parts of the day. Don't forget to double check places like sheds or garages before you close the door to ensure your pet doesn't get locked inside since enclosed structures can get extremely hot.

Sometimes, power outages happen in the summertime because of blackouts or summer storms. During these times, the air conditioning isn't working, and the

temperature inside the home can rise rapidly. Don't rely on fans to cool off pets, as they do not act as effectively as they do with people. Consider having frozen water bottles on hand (put a towel over them and see if your kitty wants to snuggle up next to them) or use a cool, wet towel on your cat's fur. A cooling mat for pets can also be a good option.

Watch over Wildlife

Many wild creatures can live for extended periods of time without food but... they need water much more regularly. Having convenient supplies of clean water can make a huge difference to the survival of local wild species such as birds, bees, butterflies and small mammals during times of extreme heat and drought such as we are seeing during this summer. Many of the smaller creatures we might find around the home or office are not very wide-ranging and can become dehydrated due to lack of proximity to water. Hot conditions and prolonged drought throw wildlife off their normal routines and put them at risk. But you can help that situation and make a real difference to animals and plant life in your area. Here are a few simple pointers.

The easiest way to provide water for wildlife is to just put out a birdbath and to keep it filled with fresh water. One of the things you can do for birds and other creatures in your yard is to add a water drip feature to your birdbath. These drip features work so well because birds have weak scent glands

See Summer Heat continued on page 6

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but a heightened sense of hearing. Some people create a drip feature by hanging a bucket or plastic milk jug (with the top unscrewed) with a miniscule hole over the birdbath so that water drips down into the bath throughout the day. Specially designed drip tube that hook up to a garden hose, birdbath” bubblers,” water “wigglers” and other devices that can be purchased will cause water to move in the birdbath, attract wildlife and also keep mosquitoes from breeding. Mistlers spray mists over plants or birdbaths. Birds like them to cool down and pollinators like it because of the tiny water droplets they leave on flowers. Butterflies and bees will be especially appreciative.

Ideally you should place your birdbath in the shade near a shrub or tree, as birds like to approach from a place of safety. Place sticks or a stone in the containers to act as a ramp for exhausted smaller animals as way out if they fall in. And providing some shallower containers at lower levels and ground level will be attractive to different birds and animals. Don’t be surprised to see your water levels disappear daily as grateful wildlife regularly empties them!

Using a generous amount of mulch to cover garden beds not only helps your plants, but also helps insects, worms and other invertebrates. Watering plants in your garden will help to keep them healthy with natural moisture and the droplets are a favorite of bees and butterflies. And if you are really feeling like a water conservationist, you can collect a bucket or two of water (minus any soap!) when you shower to give to the wildlife.

Drier conditions make worms tunnel further into the soil,



becoming scarce for the wildlife that usually feasts on them. To compensate, additional food should be left out to make sure suitable nutrition is provided throughout the summer for the parents and their chicks.

Don’t forget the hummingbirds that rely on nectar from plants. Summer conditions can dry up natural supplies that a good hummingbird feeder can help replace.



Take Care of Trees

Trees use water during photosynthesis and lose water during transpiration. Drought conditions can lead to tree decline, making the tree more susceptible to pest problems.

HOW TO WATER ?

Trees should be watered before they show symptoms of leaf curling or leaf detachment due to a lack of moisture. The best way to water trees is gradually with a soaker hose or by trickle or drip irrigation. Sprinklers are less efficient, but they are easy to use. Use an organic mulch to conserve moisture and apply water over the top of the mulch. Do not concentrate the water at the base of the tree. Most of the fine feeder roots of trees are located several feet from the trunk. Excessive watering at the base of the tree can lead to pest problems and root diseases.

WHERE TO WATER

Watering should take place beneath the crown of the tree and extending a few feet beyond the drip line of the crown. Trees need not be watered closer than 3 feet to the base of the

See Summer Heat continued on page 7



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trunk and not much beyond the drip line. These are the areas generally beneath the foliage and shaded by the tree. Be sure that the water slowly soaks into the soil and does not run off. Grass and other landscape plants adjacent to trees will also benefit from deep-soaking water. Young, recently planted, ball-and-burlap trees also require frequent watering. Since water moves downward more than sideways, application of water should be directly over the planting area or the root ball.

WHEN TO WATER

The best time to water is during the evening hours and at night. Trees have a chance to replenish their moisture during these hours when they are not as stressed by hot temperatures. Watering at night allows effective use of water and less evaporative loss.



HOW MUCH WATER AND HOW OFTEN?

Water use by trees increases with increasing temperatures. Trees surrounded by pavement or adjacent to other energy-absorbing, increased-temperature surfaces can be 20 to 30 degrees warmer than normal soil surfaces. For every 18- to 20-degree increase in temperature, the amount of water lost by a tree nearly doubles.

Trees should be watered once or twice a week in the growing season if there is limited rainfall. A few, high-volume waterings are more beneficial than many light and shallow waterings. Light waterings encourage shallow rooting, which can lead to more damage during lengthy drought. Once watering begins, it should be continued throughout the drought period when precipitation is limited.

In Memoriam

Crestview resident Melissa Ann Popowski passed away suddenly on May 26th, 2022. Melissa obtained her B.S. degree in Biology at Long Island University. Continuing in academia, Melissa earned her Ph.D. degree in Cellular & Molecular Biology at UT Austin before heading back east to do her post-doctoral work at Rockefeller University in New York City. At the time of her death, she was working as a Disease Area Manager at the CardioVascular Resource Group.



Melissa played soccer growing up, learned horse riding and was a voracious reader. She liked the mountains, the ocean, and loved animals; especially all the pets she had. Melissa and her husband Praveen met, married and settled down in Austin. Their finest moment was the arrival of their son Aadi in 2018. Melissa was graceful, positive, and her smile lit up any gathering she walked into. She was as effortlessly charming as she was endearingly goofy. Everyone who met Melissa was fond of her.

Our condolences to her family and many friends.

City Announcements continued from page 2

Austin Animal Center Provides Fire Stations With Scanners for Lost Pets

Austin Animal Center has partnered with the Austin Fire Department and Parks and Recreation Department to provide each of their locations with a microchip scanner. If you find a lost pet, take it to the closest location to be scanned. If they are chipped, you will be given the contact information for the microchip company who will get in contact with the owner.

Thank you, Crestview!



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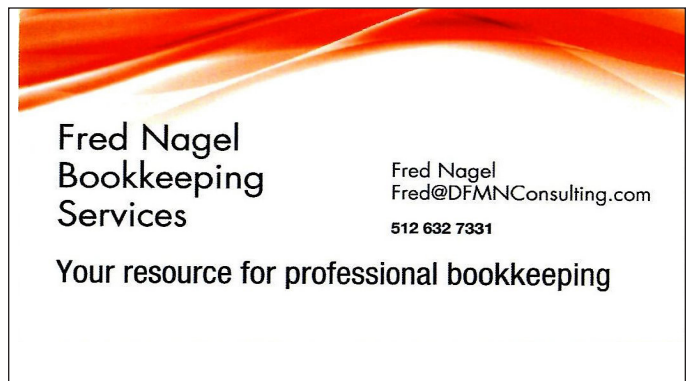
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