

# BUILDING A NATIONAL CLEAN-TECH HUB IN OIL COUNTRY

## Austin Chamber Partners with Utility and University to Recruit Clean Energy Talent and Investment

In recent years, Austin, Texas has become a booming clean energy hub in an unlikely place – a state long famous as a national center for oil and natural gas production. With a tech-savvy workforce, a leading research university, and a forward-thinking utility, Austin is rapidly attracting new energy businesses and capital from around the country. The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce is at the forefront of this growth, supporting entrepreneurs and innovators, and establishing Austin's clean energy reputation nationwide.

With its own director of Clean Energy, the Austin Chamber is a true agent of change, playing a part in nearly every major clean energy project in the city. The Chamber co-founded and helps shape a pioneering smart grid demonstration project, advises The University of Texas' Clean Energy Incubator, and works closely with local officials to craft clean energy policy. Due, in large part, to the Chamber's expert recruiting, clean-tech job growth in Austin now rivals even that of San Francisco.<sup>1</sup>

**“Clean energy is an economic driver in Austin. The semi-conductor industry grew here starting in the 1980s. Now we’re leveraging this high-tech workforce and research base, and using them to recruit the nation’s top clean energy entrepreneurs.”**

— Jose Beceiro,  
Director of Clean Energy, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce

### Modeling Tomorrow's ELECTRICITY SYSTEM

In Austin's historic Mueller neighborhood, some 600 homes are helping to transform the future of America's power grid. Advanced meters collect data on the energy use in every home, helping the local utility, Austin Energy, reduce waste and increase reliability. More than a dozen companies are involved in projects in the Mueller neighborhood, testing new technologies

for energy storage, plug-in electric vehicles, and smart appliances that change their energy use based on peak usage times.

For the Austin Chamber, this pioneering smart grid demonstration is both an invaluable recruiting tool and a testament to the Chamber's leadership. Working with city officials, the local electric utility, The University of Texas, and other groups,

the Chamber co-founded an independent nonprofit in 2009 to drive efforts to create this advanced energy test bed. Pecan Street Inc., now headquartered at The University of Austin, uses federal grants to implement and analyze new technologies. Meanwhile, the Chamber uses Pecan Street's projects to attract some of the nation's top innovators – smart grid companies eager to test their new technologies in a real-life setting.



*Austin's cutting-edge clean energy demonstration neighborhood*

<sup>1</sup> The Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program (2011). Sizing the Clean Economy: A National and Regional Green Jobs Assessment. Retrieved from: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/07/13-clean-economy>

# Attracting Innovators and Entrepreneurs: HOW THE CHAMBER DID IT

## 1 PARTNERED WITH THE UTILITY TO CREATE A CLEAN ENERGY POSITION

The Austin Chamber leveraged close ties with Austin Energy, the nation's eighth-largest community-owned utility, to secure funding for a new staff position focused on clean energy. Jose Beceiro, now Director of Clean Energy, works closely with Austin Energy, The University of Texas, city officials, and other stakeholders to attract clean energy companies.

## 2 SUPPORTED UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

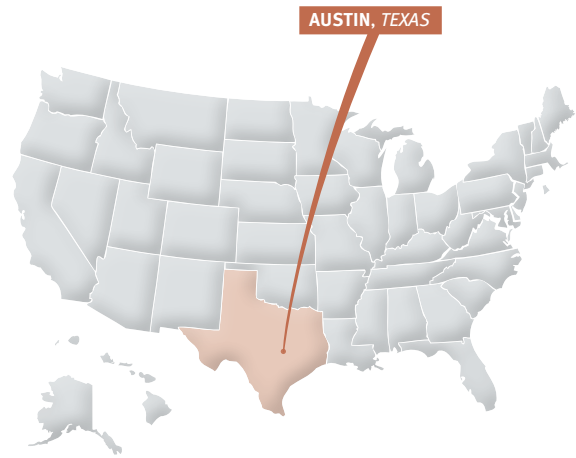
The University of Texas at Austin has conducted energy research for more than 100 years. After familiarizing itself with researchers and their clean energy projects, the Chamber tapped the university's network to recruit energy companies that were seeking help with research, development, and commercialization of their products.

## 3 FOSTERED INNOVATION THROUGH A CLEAN-TECH INCUBATOR

The Chamber also focused on building local innovation through The University of Texas' Clean Energy Incubator. Jose Beceiro serves on the board for the incubator, helping to vet applicants. Many of these start-ups have become successful enterprises and chamber members.

## 4 TRAVELED TO OTHER CLEAN ENERGY HUBS FOR RECRUITMENT

Jose Beceiro and other Chamber staff members traveled to industry conferences nationwide, building relationships with clean energy companies in the Silicon Valley, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. By highlighting Austin's skilled workforce, university, progressive utility, and energy-conscious citizens, the Chamber so far has recruited 20 clean-tech companies to move to the city.



## 5 ENGAGED IN DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS

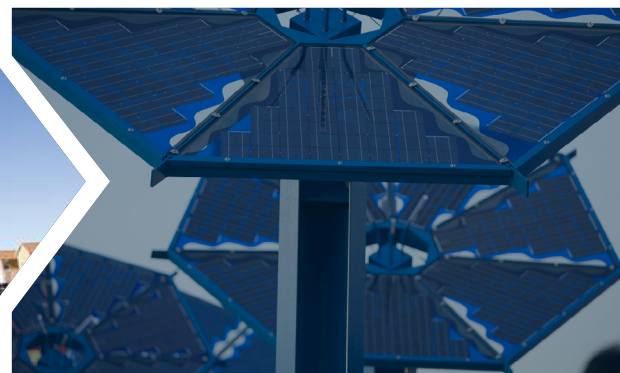
In 2009, the Chamber helped establish Pecan Street Inc., a research consortium on smart grid technologies. This has become the nation's largest smart grid demonstration project, with 600 homes and more than a dozen participating companies. The Chamber now uses Pecan Street Inc. as a recruitment tool for smart grid companies.

## 6 ADVOCATED FOR CLEAN ENERGY POLICY

The Austin Chamber, through its network within the local business community, pushes for clean energy policies that will benefit Austin's economy. In 2010, the Chamber lobbied the Austin City Council to require that Austin Energy keep its energy rates affordable while increasing renewable energy generation. Most recently, the Chamber urged the U.S. Congress to extend the federal wind energy Production Tax Credit.

**"We're building Austin's clean energy economy by recruiting companies at the top. And we're also partnering with The University of Texas to build from the bottom up, supporting entrepreneurs through their Clean Energy Incubator. Both strategies are key for us."**

■ **Jose Beceiro,** ■  
*Director of Clean Energy, Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce*





# LESSONS LEARNED

## ACT NOW AND LEVERAGE YOUR ASSETS

### ☑ **Identify your community's best assets. Leverage them in clean energy recruitment.**

Even if your city lacks a leading university or progressive utility, you can highlight your workforce, existing industries, and infrastructure in recruiting clean energy companies. For example, if your town is strong in steel manufacturing or heavy machinery, it may naturally attract wind turbine manufacturers. Similarly, if you are located in an agricultural area, recruiting biofuel companies may be your best point of entry into the clean energy market.

### ☑ **Don't wait around for your state legislature or the U.S. Congress to take action.**

As the Austin Chamber learned, passing renewable energy policy in a heavy oil and natural gas region was a challenge. For several years, the Chamber pushed for the Texas state legislature to adopt a bold solar program, as both Arizona and New Mexico had done. After these efforts failed, the Chamber switched its focus to developing a solar cluster in Austin through research, development, and recruitment. If your state is slow to pass clean energy policies, focus on building local resources alongside your utility, economic development partners, or city officials.

### ☑ **Ensure that clean energy is implemented in a smart, business-friendly way.**

The Austin Chamber worked with the Austin City Council to adopt an "affordability matrix," ensuring that the utility continues to bring clean energy into its portfolio, but increases rates no more than 2 percent per year. This protects the business community from rate hikes and has made clean energy economically sustainable.

## LEARN MORE

See how the Austin Chamber markets its city as a clean energy hub:

[austinchamber.com/do-business/key-industries/clean-energy](http://austinchamber.com/do-business/key-industries/clean-energy)

Read about Pecan Street Inc., Austin's pioneering smart grid demonstration site:

[pecanstreet.org](http://pecanstreet.org)

For information on the Clean Energy Incubator at The University of Texas at Austin, visit:

[ati.utexas.edu/entrepreneurs/focus-areas/clean-energy](http://ati.utexas.edu/entrepreneurs/focus-areas/clean-energy)

To speak with the Greater Austin Chamber about its clean energy initiatives, contact:

**Jose Beceiro, Director of Clean Energy,**  
(512)322-5611 or  
[jbeceiro@austinchamber.com](mailto:jbeceiro@austinchamber.com)

 [facebook.com/AustinChamber](https://facebook.com/AustinChamber)

 [@AustinChamber](https://twitter.com/AustinChamber)