

For Immediate Release
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Solar Reaches Major Employer Status in Austin, But For How Long Is Up To City Council

A survey done by Solar Austin at the beginning of 2012 shows there are at least 615 full-time solar energy jobs in Austin. These jobs include manufacturing, R&D, solar installation, financial and engineering consultants. Adding standard jobs multipliers the total direct and indirect employment supported by the Austin solar industry is 1,180 to 2,190 jobs.

“This shows what can happen when the City of Austin supports clean energy,” said Carey Ibrahimbegovic, co-owner of Greenbelt Solar. “This commitment has been ongoing for the last 12 years, and it is paying off,” said Ibrahimbegovic.

Mark Begert, Executive Director at Meridian Solar Inc., said he worried that there is no strategy to encourage this to continue. “The utility is discussing options to *reduce* solar funding. To get 21st Century clean-tech jobs, we need to be going in the opposite direction.”

Begert was joined at a press conference releasing the survey by Heliovolt Founder and Board Chairman Dr. BJ Stanbery and by ImagineSolar President & CEO Michael Kuhn.

“Many of these jobs are at family-wage scale,” observed Kuhn whose company trains workers on solar electric system design and installation. “Solar electric system installers make \$36,000 a year. Solar manufacturing jobs average \$50,000 a year. Solar engineering can pay \$75,000 and more annually.”

In 2004, Austin Energy began a rebate program to promote rooftop solar panel installations. It was the first program of its kind in Texas. Austin has since founded and funded institutions that develop new clean energy technology and businesses resulting in clean-tech start-ups, spin-offs, and expansions.

Smith challenged “The question is: what is our strategy to capitalize on this commitment and take it to the next level? We want Austin to be a renewable energy industry cluster in the same way it has electronic manufacturing and software clusters. *We want thousands of jobs in renewable energy, not hundreds!*”

The group points to Austin’s south where San Antonio’s public utility CPS, has begun funding solar rebate programs that have overtaken Austin’s.

“Austin has been working on the idea of a clean energy business cluster for over a decade, and we’re proud to be an innovative part of that,” said Stanbery whose company manufactures thin film solar modules. “We need a strategy to capture and foster this employment sector, or Austin will lose it to those that have one.”

The job figures in Solar Austin’s survey did not include the 240 local job years of employment created by the 30-Megawatt solar park at Webberville east of Austin. The group says the job potential for rooftop solar is even greater.

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