

IN PASSING

How are Texas cities doing in their energy-efficiency efforts?

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To comply with the Obama administration’s proposed cuts in power plants’ climate-changing pollution, states will have various tools at their disposal in tailoring plans for their particular circumstances. One is increased efforts to advance energy efficiency.



Dallas Area Rapid Transit's Las Colinas Urban Center Station

Against that regulatory backdrop, a leading advocacy organization pushing greater energy efficiency issued its [annual scorecard](#) for municipal governments recently. Texas cities did pretty well as a group.

Among the 51 large cities that were ranked by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE), Austin was in the top 10 (with the ninth-best rating), Houston and San Antonio not far behind (at No. 13 and No. 17), Dallas was just below the top-20 tier (at No. 22) and El Paso and Fort Worth were in the bottom of the middle range at No. 35 and No. 37.

By comparison, the two ranked cities in Texas’ adjoining states, New Orleans and Oklahoma City, fared very poorly at No. 47 and No. 51.

The Washington-based ACEEE used the opportunity of the report’s release to beat its drum for energy efficiency, saying city measures to boost it “lower energy costs for consumers and businesses, increase (cities’) resilience and reduce pollution.”

The organization described the methodology behind the ranking exercise:

The report's metrics measure policies and programs that achieve one or more of the following: directly reduce end-use energy consumption; accelerate the adoption of the most energy-efficient technologies; provide funding for energy efficiency programs; set long-term commitments to energy efficiency; establish or enforce building performance codes or standards; reduce market, regulatory, and information barriers to energy efficiency.

Here are quotations of the ACEEE report's summary remarks describing the things in the six ranked Texas cities that the group found particularly praiseworthy and in need of improvement.

Austin

Best practices

- Municipal electric utility on track to achieve 2020 energy-demand reduction goal of 800 megawatts.
- Energy Conservation Audit and Disclosure Ordinance requires large buildings to disclose energy use and the least efficient ones to make efficiency improvements.
- Established strategies to mitigate urban heat island and target to increase tree canopy.

Areas for improvement

- Decrease minimum parking requirements and set travel-mode targets to encourage a switch from driving to other modes of transportation.
- Greater investment in natural-gas efficiency programs.

Dallas

Best practices

- Adopted policies encouraging energy efficiency in public building construction and local government produce procurement.
- High levels of transit funding.

Areas for improvement

- Increase resources for building energy-code compliance and adopt building benchmarking and transparency policies.
- Adopt programs and policies to plan for future district energy and CHP (combined heat and power) programs.

El Paso

Best practices

- The Livable City Sustainability Plan identifies energy-savings goal for local government operations.
- Strong efficiency measures for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater management services.

Areas for improvement

- Establish community-wide energy-savings goals and urban heat island mitigation goal and strategies.
- Adopt the latest residential and commercial energy codes, increase resources for code compliance and adopt building benchmarking and transparency policies.

Fort Worth

Best practices

- Participates in Better Buildings Challenge and benchmarks energy use in municipal buildings.
- Strong efficiency measures for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater management services.

Areas for improvement

- Adopt the latest residential and commercial energy codes, increase resources for code compliance and adopt building benchmarking and transparency policies.
- Encourage more compact communities, well connected to transit and a switch from driving to other modes of transportation.
- Establish community-wide energy-efficiency-related goal and regularly report progress toward it.

Houston

Best practices

- Energy benchmarking and retrofit strategy in place for municipal buildings.
- On track to achieve 2016 greenhouse-gas emissions-reduction target for local government operations.
- City advocates for additional energy-efficiency requirements and policy improvements for energy data access.

Areas for improvement

- Establish local government operations and community-wide energy-savings goals and regularly report progress toward achieving them.

- Increase resources for building energy-code compliance and adopt building benchmarking and transparency policies.

San Antonio

Best practices

- Adopted 2020 electric-savings target for municipal utility.
- Energy benchmarking and retrofit strategy in place for municipal buildings.
- Established strategies to mitigate urban heat island and target to increase city's tree canopy to 40 percent.

Areas for improvement

- Adopt the latest residential and commercial energy codes and increase resources for code compliance.
- Greater investment in natural-gas efficiency programs and improved access to energy data.

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