



# Georgetown renewable energy growth

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In 2017, the city of about 50,000 became the largest in the U.S. able to claim it ran on 100% renewable energy. But after customer bills spiked last year, its utility department is facing an overhaul.

This is the second of a four part series based on Utility Dive visits to cities that produce more renewable power than they consume. All four installments can be found [here](#).

GEORGETOWN, TEXAS -- Texas won't be boxed into a stereotype.

Booming progressive cities sprawl across the central and eastern parts of the state, pushing commerce further out into vast suburbs. Populations drop dramatically in the northwest corner where highway networks fade to broad stretches of land dotted with cattle, crops and resource extraction.

Natural gas and oil pump jacks bob obediently below the looming slow churn of wind turbines. The two sit unassumingly side-by-side, unaware of the billion dollar war their steady production wages.

Demand for reliable, predictable energy pricing for commercial customers led Georgetown, Texas, to contract for 318 MW of wind and solar, making it the largest city in the U.S. to be 100% renewable capable and driving the city and its conservative mayor Dale Ross into environmental infamy in April 2017.

"See, this just proves Republicans can do environmentally-friendly things as well as Democrats," Mayor Ross told Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., at the senator's fourth annual national town hall meeting in December of last year.

But the city's clean energy success was marred just a year and a half later by high energy prices, the product of over-purchasing energy in anticipation of new demand and selling that excess on the market at a loss. Surging power bills led to a political tug-of-war across a city whose mayor prides himself on basing policy on "facts and what's best for the people we serve" rather than "partisan politics."

Oil and gas-backed groups such as the Texas Public Policy Foundation mocked the city, after big names like Al Gore had tapped the city as a darling of the environmental movement.

"Mayor Ross can get on television. But can he fix a pothole?" Texas Public Policy Foundation Vice President Chuck DeVore asked in a 2018 Forbes op-ed.

Under the partisan debris is the story of a city whose earnest efforts to appeal to its red district's fiscal and progressive sides led to a lawsuit against its solar provider, leaving its future power mix unclear.



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Despite criticisms that carelessness led to the contract failures, the city's story began very cautiously in 2010, when the small, liberal arts Southwestern University contracted with Georgetown for 100% renewable power.

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