

AUSTIN NO KILL COALITION
2014 City Council Candidate Questionnaire

1. Since February 2011, Austin's open-admission municipal animal shelter has saved 90% or more of all impounded animals, making Austin the largest "No Kill" City in the United States. But success in the past does not guarantee success in the future, and there is always room for improvement. How important is the City's "No Kill" status to you? If the issue were to come before the Council again, will you commit to maintaining the City's resolve to be a "No Kill" community? Why or why not?

Very early in my service on the Council, as I heard from countless Austinites who care deeply about animals, I came to appreciate how important No Kill is to this city. I'll never forget the countless hours the Animal Advisory Commission and others invested in shaping the No Kill plan, how the community turned out to support it, the excitement at the time we first achieved No Kill, and those first few months afterward when there were still doubts as to whether we could sustain it.

I'm proud that we're still the largest No Kill City in the U.S. It's an important testament to the people of Austin, who care so deeply about animals that they have been determined to lead the nation on this issue that every city faces. I'm fully committed to maintaining our resolve to be a No Kill City; it's become part of Austin's identity.

2. In 2007, the City Council voted to build a new animal shelter in East Austin but only upon the condition that an adoption center remain on the old Town Lake Animal Center site. The Council has repeatedly voted that it wishes the current tenant of the site, Austin Pets Alive, to remain on the site, but the building is old and deteriorating. Given that APA saves three to four thousand animals from Austin Animal Center each year (15-20% of AAC intake), and given that APA is willing to build a new, state-of-the-art shelter on the site at no cost to city taxpayers, will you commit to supporting APA signing a long-term agreement with the city to build and operate a new, streamlined shelter as its headquarters on the site with a two-acre footprint (cutting in half its current footprint of four acres)? Why or why not?

I strongly support a long-term agreement with APA to build and operate a new, streamlined shelter on the TLAC site, and the idea of a 2-acre headquarters facility seems reasonable to me. Since the TLAC site is on dedicated parkland, I expect we will need to have a public hearing on this.

To respect the public hearing process, I generally try to avoid committing to a particular position before I've heard the input at the hearing. I can say, though, that at this point I'm inclined to support APA's position. APA has been an invaluable partner in our No-Kill efforts, and a new facility on the TLAC site strikes me as a fitting way to demonstrate the importance of both No-Kill and APA in this community

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3. In 2010, the City Council passed a “No Kill” plan for the City of Austin that has produced dramatic, measurable, and positive outcomes for Austin’s shelter pets. The “No Kill” plan took a balanced approach aimed at both increasing “live outcomes” and decreasing shelter intake through proven and cost-effective policies and programs. However, some persons in town who oppose Austin’s “No Kill” efforts want the City to instead pass a mandatory pet alteration law or a costly tax on owners of unaltered pets---even though such laws have proven ineffective across the country, are nearly uniformly opposed by national animal-welfare groups, and have frequently led to increases in shelter intake, killing, and animal-control costs. Do you support the current balanced “No Kill” approach embraced by the Council and “No Kill” advocates? Or, are you willing to risk the progress Austin has made by imposing a mandatory alteration law?

I do support the current balanced No Kill approach embraced by the Council and No Kill advocates. Given the progress we’ve made on No Kill, I don’t see any reason to depart from the Implementation Plan at this point. I have not supported a mandatory alteration law in the past, and I haven’t been hearing as much input about it lately as I used to.

4. The largest category of “savable” animals still not making it out of Austin Animal Center alive are high-energy large dogs in need of behavior training. These dogs often take the longest time to be adopted, and they are also often surrendered to the city shelter due to apartment or neighborhood housing restrictions that discriminate based on breed or size. Would you be willing to explore ways to change housing restrictions so that they are based on an individual animal’s behavior rather than on its size and apparent breed? At the least, would you be willing to condition city contributions (such as money or land) to residential developers on an agreement that they not discriminate based on an animal’s breed or size? Why or why not?

I’d be glad to explore ways to change housing restrictions so that they’re based on an individual animal’s behavior rather than on its size and apparent breed. One approach I’ve discussed with a number of people, including members of the Animal Advisory Commission and APA, would be to work with the Austin Apartment Association and animal advocates on a clause for insertion into standard leases that would allow dogs of any size or breed if they have been approved by a trained behaviorist.

An approach like that would likely be more effective than placing conditions on city contributions to housing, since we don’t often contribute money or land to residential developers. In those situations where we do contribute money or land (typically for affordable housing projects), I would be interested in considering conditions prohibiting discrimination based on an animal’s breed or size.

5. What pets, if any, do you have? Where did you get them from?

I don’t currently have a pet. For years I had the best cat ever, Laka, who I inherited when her owners – who lived in the same old house as me downtown – moved to Chicago and couldn’t take her. Laka passed away when she was about 12 due to cancer, and her ashes are still on a shelf in my living room with her photo on it.

I look forward to having another cat someday when my life settles down. I expect I’ll get him or her from the Austin Animal Center, or from Austin Pets Alive.