

AUSTIN NO KILL COALITION

2014 City Council Candidate Questionnaire (Delia Garza District 2 responses)

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?

Austin is arguably the most animal friendly city in America in large part because we are no-kill. I believe this achievement has become a core part of Austin's culture, and should be actively protected by our future Council. Finally attaining no-kill in Austin was a hard fought battle that we're able to maintain thanks to dedication of so many in our community that continue to work tirelessly to save as many animals as possible and because Council has maintained their commitment to the cause. If elected, I'll ensure that we only take steps forward from this point on by supporting our existing policy and any future policies that strengthen our no kill efforts, and by ensuring that every budget season we're providing the necessary resources to meet our needs.

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?

Absolutely. I believe that Council made the right decision by including Austin Pets Alive in the Lamar Beach Master Plan to ensure that they're able to continue their services on this site. The Austin Animal Center is a good facility, but that center alone can't meet all of our adoption and animal care needs because of capacity and because it's not in a convenient or visible location, falling off of many people's radars as an option for adopting a new pet. Austin Pets Alive already provides immense services to the City without financial compensation, and we should view their willingness to build a shelter on their own dime to enable them to continue to save the hardest to adopt pets from the City's animal shelter as an incredible gift to the City, our residents, and our animals. The community has also made clear their interest in Austin Pets Alive remaining at the TLAC site by showing up by the hundreds at City Council meetings to show their support for Austin Pets Alive being included in the future of this site. Ensuring that Austin Pets Alive is able to continue their services is critical in our effort to maintain no-kill, and I will fight tirelessly throughout the Lamar Beach master planning process to ensure that the City maintains its commitment to having an adoption site on this land and that Austin Pets Alive is able to continue their work.

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?

Increasing the availability of spay/neuter services is a critical component of no-kill to prevent additional homeless animals, but I believe a mandatory ordinance is the wrong approach based on some of the arguments noted above. The greatest deterrent to having an animal fixed is lack of financial resources, and the City is already investing significantly to ensure that anyone interested has access to free or low cost spay/neuter services. We must also expand our efforts to increase live outcomes with more offsite adoption events and creative marketing to help the animals in the City’s care find forever homes. The balanced approach in the City’s current no-kill policy has proven to be a success over several years, and I believe we should continue on our current path which uses a multipronged approach to achieve the highest live outcomes possible.

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?

As I stated above, I’m supportive of policies that will strengthen our no-kill achievements in Austin. I think there’s definitely an opportunity to start with a pilot program in any future projects where the City has some form of investment or partnership, such as Mueller, to eliminate breed discrimination. We should also work with homeowners associations to provide education and try to reverse some of their breed restriction policies. My understanding is that this is a more contentious issue, partly because the media has branded some breeds including pit bulls as “dangerous,” when often that’s simply not the case. These policy changes may require significant coordination with our community advocates to help raise awareness and show a movement, and I’ll work to facilitate that process when an opportunity is presented. We should be proud that we’ve achieved the 90% live outcomes required to be considered no-kill, but we should strive to do even more when we’re able.

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

I consider myself an animal lover, but my heavy workload and community activism has left me with very little free time over the last several years. I don’t currently have any pets because I want to be able to dedicate the time needed to give them a good life, but I do hope to adopt a rescue animal in the future when my schedule slows down and allows me enough time to be a good caretaker. When I was growing up, my family had a dog named Odie and a cat named Garfield. My dad found Odie in an alley downtown and Garfield literally walked in our front door on a rainy day and thankfully never left. We also had other dogs that were abandoned that my father found at various places. Taking in animals in desperate need of a home was a rewarding experience I hope to repeat in the near future.