

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?

I am absolutely in favor of the city's "No Kill" status - and will support maintaining it in the future. It has proven to be an overwhelming success and a perfect example of how government and non-profits can work together to promote Austin values.

As the city continues to grow in population and density, it's important we not lose focus on the issue of animal welfare, which I believe is also tied to public health and even affordability. Going back on "No-Kill" would be a tremendous loss for the community. I recall a time in the 1990's when the stray and overpopulation issue appeared out of control. There was a great deal of needless suffering and cruelty that was allowed to exist - and our city policy did nothing but keep the suffering "organized and efficient" as animals were funneled through an inadequate facility on their way to being euthanized. No one should want to see a return to those days.

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 favor allowing APA to use private funds to build the new shelter facility at the current location - and favor the city signing a long-term lease. This is something the surrounding neighborhood and the community as a whole strongly support, so it is difficult to understand why this hasn't already happened. If city staff fail to facilitate the project, in spite of repeated council direction, I would be willing to explore other actions - including a possible ballot initiative.

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?

While I do believe owners have an obligation to spay and neuter their pets - a requirement such as this would be extremely difficult to enforce. In fact, enforcement could be very selective - and I can envision it having an adverse impact on areas and populations that are economically disadvantaged.

The current system appears to be working and is cost efficient, so I do not understand the call for change.

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?

If properties are going to allow dogs, for example, this should apply to all types of dogs. Size and breed should not factor into the equation - as long as the animal meets attainable behavioral requirements.

As far as supporting developments based on animal policy (as described above), I favor this in general but would like a legal opinion on whether this type of requirement is allowable under state law. Either way, we should be working with developers in an effort to educate them on these issues. It is possible we may see a sharp rise in voluntary compliance.

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

My family currently owns a four year old pure Border Collie that we rescued from an abusive and neglectful owner in Elgin. Bella was just shy of a year old at the time of rescue. Unsocialized, infested with ticks and dramatically underweight. The trainer estimated she was within two weeks of death.

It took her more than a year to regain her health and finally accept us. She remains a flight risk and must be watched closely around other animals, but is a very beautiful watch dog and an amazing athlete.

We rescued our cats (both of which passed away in 2013 after more than 10 years) from a friend who was fostering with Animal Trustees of Austin. Prior to that we rescued a yellow lab / retriever mix with behavioral issues from a friend in Houston. She grew into a very loveable and loyal family friend who passed away after more than 12 years.