

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 committed to keeping Austin a no-kill city. No-kill status is very important to me. I believe at my core that, considering Austin's economic and human resources, we should absolutely save animals from being euthanized and mistreated in our city whenever possible. If the issue were to come before Council, not only would I vote to remain no-kill, I would lead the effort to ensure we have as close to a unanimous Council on remaining no-kill.

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?

Yes. APA's volunteer resources already provide a great public benefit to our taxpayers, and APA's promised capital investments would not only continue to promote the City and APA's partnership, but would also open up more City land by reducing the footprint of the shelter. A long-term agreement would be appropriate for meeting this goal, so that the City can know with confidence that APA will continue to provide services, and so that APA can be confident in making its capital investment at the headquarters.

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 not support mandatory alteration laws. Such rules especially place an undue burden on lower-income pet owners. Furthermore, I believe our Council should follow national best practices that have proven they effectively decrease intake at shelters and increase adoptions, rather than simply pass sweeping mandates.

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 support finding the right citywide policy so that housing restrictions do not discriminate based on dog breed or size. I believe that by bringing together adequate data and convening major stakeholders (apartment owners, landlord associations, insurance companies), we can find the most effective path to move forward. I’m committed to including breed discrimination in the discussion of city contributions to residential developers, though I prefer, and I know many advocates would prefer, policy solutions that go beyond a case-by-case basis.

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

My long-time partner, Asha, adopted a Shih Tzu mix named Coco from the side of a West Texas road. Shortly thereafter, Asha and I began dating. Although I grew up wrestling with big Labradors, I’ve become very attached to Coco, and we’re now quite the pair. Asha tries not to get too jealous.