

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 support maintaining the City's "No Kill" status. There is a possibility that I will be the only council member returning to the dais next year, and I recognize my responsibility to not only support No Kill but lead on its continuance. I have been honored to get to know and work with the many animal rights advocates that helped the City achieve No Kill status, such as Austin Pets Alive and the Animal Advisory Commission. I have learned a great deal from them, and I will continue to work alongside these groups to support the policies and resources necessary to ensure the City is maximizing live outcomes at the animal shelter and improving the lives of Austin's animal population.

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, the success of Austin Pets Alive has had in increasing live outcomes for animals demonstrates the importance of maintaining the Town Lake Animal Center as an off-site adoption center. I am supportive of pursuing a long-term lease on the site to continue and expand our ability to increase live outcomes.

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 am supportive of continuing to support and fund spay and neuter programs, but I do not believe that a mandatory pet alteration ordinance would be effective in achieving our desired goals to increase live outcomes and decrease shelter intake. Spay and neuter programs should be focused on helping provide access to spay and neuter services for low-income families, targeting spay and neuter efforts on high-risk populations like feral cats, and continuing to ensure all animals adopted out of the City's animal center are spayed or neutered. This balanced approach can help us maximize our resources on efforts that have been statistically proven to increase live outcomes and reduce intake.

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 am supportive of efforts to reduce the prevalence of size and breed restrictions throughout the housing market. These restrictions not only inhibit our opportunities to match animals up with families, they also limit housing choices—and thus affordable options—for families needing to move. Families shouldn’t be faced with a decision to move out of their community or give up their loved ones. I’ve looked into this issue, and I believe one of the most significant challenges we have is not necessarily from the landlord-side but from the insurance companies that impose breed restrictions within their property insurance policies. This may require state advocacy to either limit or mitigate this insurance-industry practice, and I am open to working with animal rights advocates and landlords on the appropriate remedy. With regards to city-funding and city-owned land, I am supportive of the described limitations on breed restrictions, and I believe it would be important to have a dialogue to ensure these builders don’t then ban all dogs.

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

I have two pets right now: a 10+-year-old cat named Grace that I adopted from the Town Lake Animal Center, and an eight-year-old dog named Felix. I found Felix as a puppy, running along the street near South Fifth Street, and despite our best efforts through TLAC, the newspaper, and neighborhood listserv posts, we did not locate his owner. In recent years we lost two other beloved cats; one was a very wild stray that we (mostly) domesticated, and the other was adopted from the Austin Humane Society.