

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?

We owe the success of no-kill in Austin to the hard work of the staff at the Austin Animal Center, the Animal Advisory Commission, community volunteers, rescue groups and area partners. I am proud to have championed the Council policy that helped lead Austin to become the largest No-Kill City in the country. I will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure we are able to maintain our no-kill status. Achieving and maintaining no-kill is an accomplishment we should all be proud of, but in order to sustain that progress we must remain diligent in our efforts. A 90% save rate is the widely accepted national standard for being no-kill, but I view the 90% rate as the floor. The City must strive for policies that enable our Austin Animal Center and community partners to save every adoptable and treatable animal in Austin. If elected as your next Mayor, I'll ensure that maintaining Austin's no-kill policy is a top priority for the new Council.

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 was the lone vote on Council opposing the relocation of the animal shelter to East Austin. I arrived at that decision after hearing from many folks in the animal advocacy community. However, now that the Austin Animal Center is in the new location we must work to maximize all of our resources to guarantee we don't take any steps backwards in our no-kill priorities.

I will continue my steadfast support of an adoption center at the TLAC site that has the same or higher capacity than what is there today. I will not support a project on that parcel of land that does not include adequate space for animal services and adoptions. During the interim when the new site is being built, we must ensure that we have a temporary facility available so there is no lapse in services that would pose a risk of losing ground in our efforts to maintain no-kill.

Austin Pets Alive! has played a crucial role in helping us achieve no-kill by saving our most vulnerable companion animals through their Parvo Puppy and Bottle Baby programs. While many easily-adoptable pets can be placed in foster homes, these programs for at-risk animals require a stable facility to make them possible. I was proud to sponsor the resolution that ensured that Austin Pets Alive! is part of the Lamar Beach master planning process to enable them to continue their current level of services at this site. This will be an ongoing issue of discussion over the next year, and it's critical that our next Council understands the importance of Austin Pets Alive! having space

at this site. I will continue to work tirelessly with City staff, Dr. Ellen Jefferson and community members to do everything we can to guarantee APA has a facility to continue the critical services they provide for the City of Austin and our animal community.

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?

Our current practices using the balanced approach in our no-kill policy have been successful, and we should continue that approach. Studies have shown that the biggest obstacle for pet owners to have their companion animals spayed or neutered is cost. Rather than criminalize behaviors by enacting a mandatory spay/neuter law, we must continue our work with groups like Emancipet to provide free and low cost spay and neuter services and increase accessibility for those in our community by making mobile locations available in low-income areas of our City. We must also continue to address our feral cat growth in Austin. I applaud the Austin Humane Society for their TNR Program that helps curb the growth of Austin’s feral cat community and prevents many homeless pets.

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 with all of the policies we’ve implemented through the no-kill process, I believe we must have a comprehensive public input process to determine the best way to move forward on this issue. Addressing problems for renters and pet owners that breed restriction policies cause has been an ongoing challenge that we’ve been working on for quite a while. My office worked with Love-A-Bull to set up meetings with representatives from the Austin Apartments Association to talk about potential solutions.

We’ve found this issue is especially complex because many apartment buildings are owned by national chains and many of them use insurance companies that will not insure if certain breeds are on the property. This is just one example of an obstacle that’s not impossible, but will require strategic planning and partnerships to overcome. We’ve had a similar challenge with national apartment chains restricting storage of bicycles on apartment balconies which is not in line with our values as a community. An ordinance is not the only way to address these issues; we must use all

tools available to us to insert our values during economic development agreements and other City partnerships whenever possible.

In the interim, I appreciate that groups are working to help families and individuals with certain restricted breeds find housing. Love-A-Bull has a section on their website with pit bull friendly properties, realtors and landlords that serves as a huge resource.

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

My family currently has 3 cats and 2 dogs. My wife rescued 2 kitties, Punkin and Kizmet, before we were married. Austin Pets Alive! rescued a pregnant dog named Helen from TLAC and located a foster home that would provide a safe environment for her to have her puppies. APA then successfully found homes for Helen and her entire litter. My dog, Chucho was the last puppy in Helen's litter. A few years ago I trapped a feral cat in my garage and had him fixed at Emancipet. Since then, Tater Tot has become a welcome addition to our family and is convinced our dog, Chucho, is his mother. The latest addition to our family is Izzy, an energetic Chihuahua that we adopted from an Austin Animal Center mobile adoption site at the Pecan Street Festival. All of our rescue animals have greatly enriched our family, and I'm thankful to Austin Pets Alive! and the Austin Animal Center for bringing them into our lives.