

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?

As we discussed in our face to face, 'No Kill' is important. Yes, including a review of additional information regarding the budget of the Austin animal shelter and the amount, if any cost over runs since moving to the new location. I am a realist and understand that there must be intentional affords to educate pet owners in District #1 regarding the care of their pets and conversations regarding sterilization of their beloved pets. We live in a real word and there may be times when a pet can not be adopted, rehabilitated and/or place with an appropriated foster home or rescue group. Those would be the exception not the rule.

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, I support a long term lease. Neighbors who live in the central city, south and west Austin deserve the opportunity to come by the APA site, new building and all and rescue a pet for their apartment, condo, home, children. The APA shelter would be in the appropriate location to make the pets accessible to people who live west of Congress. It is doubtful that APA can locate property in close proximity to the central business district without running into a conditional overlay that prohibits kennels.

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 support the balanced approach with the understanding that more emphasis must be placed on people with low resources who live east of Congress. Based on the data I would not support a punitive law to mandate that pets be altered (oops in 1. I apparently used the wrong word) or implement a tax on owners who do not alter their pets. This would place an undue burden on the very people who can least afford either the altering or the tax. Education is the key. Would support identifying ways to reward for compliance by partnering with the pet industry. Rewards can range from food for a specific amount of time (six months to a year); immunizations for two years; micro chip; and there must be other options to encourage people to alter their pets. Always think about the financial situation for people with low resources.

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?

In conversation with other stakeholders I would certainly be willing to have those conversations. The conversation is the best starting place. There is an education piece about the behavior of an animal vs its size or breed. The Apartment Owners Association, the Board of Realtors, city staff, veterinarians, and others come to mind. I would be willing to start with developers of dense properties to have dog parks for their tenants. Need to think more about limiting city subsidies or supports to developers to insure that they do not discriminate based on your stated criteria.

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

We are a dog family. Over the years most dogs have been rescues. Most recently we had a large dog and a three legged, small dog. One rainy night a small frightened kitty adopted us. Both dogs have died, Kitty Red continues to rule the roost even though he is 13 or 14 years old.

Ora Houston
18 October 2014