

**PIO RENTERIA'S ANSWERS TO THE
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?

Yes, I support being a "No Kill" City because I believe a society is judged by how they treat the least among them. It is almost as important to me as stopping the death penalty on humans – especially humans who have developmental, emotional, or mental disabilities because, again, I believe a society is judged by how they treat the least among them.

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 remains 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've spent most of my advocacy work directed towards poor people and finding ways the city can leverage its resources and develop long-term agreements and formal partnerships with non-profits providing health and human services. I admit I would need to learn more about helping and advocating for animal rights but since my heart and knowledge base has been built around human rights, I believe a lot of those skills and experiences can be translated to include animals without a large learning curve. I know the controversy surrounding that piece of prime real estate on the Lake because I had to fight the city manager to keep the land designated by prior Councils to be used for the Mexican American Cultural Center over several boom and bust cycles and the manager was always wanting to do a swap and let private develop buy the land which would increase the tax intake by the city. However, we persevered and once the bonds passed, we had the land. I will say that I am not a big fan of giving city-owned facilities over to private groups for their exclusive use – like the Palmer Events Center giving half the building to the non-profit operating the Long Center – especially without a city commission overseeing its budgets and expenses because private non-profits are not required by law to public disclosure of anything but broad balance sheets. So, if elected, I'd like to pursue a better agreement than the deal with the City's Palmer tract and the Long Center Board which taxpayers have complained about since the deal went down. I'm not sure a Community Land Trust can be used for animals but I know the City is doing it with the new library downtown, where the city owns the land, the non-profit doesn't pay tax on the land only the buildings, and the city taxpayers get a little more control and oversight. As chair of the Council's Community Development Commission, I know a lot about Land Trusts and I think that might be a better option than just a long-term lease.

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?

Yes, I support the current No Kill policy. I have a real issue forcing poor people to pay fees when access to services required are difficult for them because of price, transportation, ignorance, or lack of income altogether. I used to work with my wife with homeless folks and one of the worst things homeless folks go through is choosing to live on the streets because shelters don’t allow pets in Austin. We’ve known of homeless folks losing their pets to false threats of animal abuse by people who really just hate homeless people hanging around as well as all the trauma seniors in the RBJ Tower next to my home where for many years prior admins had a no pet policy and they had to give their pets away in order to get the housing they needed. The new director allows small pets and everyone is a lot happier over there. Pet therapy is known to be healthy for people in crisis or declining health. These are the reasons I don’t want to see mandatory fees for S/N or pet registration unless there’s a huge fund for poorer people to access. We’ve worked with Emancipet for years promoting free spay/neuter and the mobile van is great – we just need more of them. We also participated in a big TNR for feral cats in our neighborhood with Emancipet, Animal Trustees of Austin and some very dedicated cat people in the 1990 when TNR was just getting off the ground in our neighborhood in partnership with Martin School.

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?

Yes, I don’t like to see any one discriminated on “what-if” possibilities which have really been a big issue in my experiences with rental housing receiving city funding as the CDC chair for 8 years. That’s why we also fund the Austin Tenant’s Council and I’d bet that fine organization would be willing to work with your coalition as well as Councilmembers whether or not I’m elected. I’m all about finding ways to bring people and groups together who can provide each other support.

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

We have a cat named Scruffy in the summer and Fluffy in the winter that was born under our house and wouldn't come out for almost 2 years. It's still semi-feral and only lets my wife pet it. It's very old and we are struggling with a decision to put her down because she has something going on in her throat but we can't afford doctor visits for ourselves let alone a feral cat that's not very friendly. We also have 4 grand dogs; Chola, Mister, Lily and Leo are rescued from the city shelter by our 3 grown children. We also adopted Homer the Homeless Goose, a mascot for Austin's "Street Peoples' Advisory Council" which they used to bring attention in this town that people cared more for birds than people (back in 1988 there was all kinds of controversy over using tax money to save the black capped vireo by giving them refuge in parkland and the homeless folks wanted the city to give them parkland to have KOAs for homeless people, google it, Homer was quite the international celebrity) We cared for Homer at our house for over 18 years before Austin Aviary non-profit took him in. A few years later, Austin Aviary Rescue moved so they moved him to the Austin Zoo. We hold a birthday party for Homer the (formerly) Homeless Goose every year at the Zoo on the Sunday closest to his real birthday which is April Fool's Day. Homer was bought from Callahan's General Store. When we get too old to travel/vacation we'll be adopting a small fluffy dog from the Animal Shelter.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your coalition's survey.