

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 am firmly in favor of preserving the No Kill policy. I have even committed to this on my TV commercial reaching nearly every home in Austin. If it came before Council I would indeed commit to maintaining it.

We are a city that is rich with pet-friendly culture; many dog parks, pet-friendly establishments, and of course the Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail. We also maintain a culture of adopting rescue animals at an encouraging rate. I believe that in such an environment, a city-wide no kill policy is not only practical, but is the morally right thing to do. Diane and my dog was a rescue animal and Diane manages the animal friendly Tarry Town Shopping Center for Jeanne Daniels.

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 support a long-term agreement between the City of Austin and Austin Pets Alive for the animal center to remain on Town Lake. It is hard for me to imagine this city without a no-kill animal shelter on Town Lake and I will certainly work to preserve this facility. Additionally, I would like to ensure that in the interim when the new facility is being constructed to provide for those animals still needing shelter.

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?

Over the course of this campaign, I’ve been brought information that I did not have at the beginning. I am and will always remain open and eager to learn, especially on issues as important as this one. Based on information offered and received from both sides on this issue, I do not feel that I know enough to take a position on a mandatory alteration law requiring all pet owners to spay or neuter. I want the opportunity to bring advocates from both sides into my office so that I can see and hear both sides at the same time. I have heard from APA folks that mandatory alteration has been shown to increase pet abandonment, surrenders at shelters and also is not cost effective. I do believe we need to make this service as broadly accessible as possible and that people who wish to spay/neuter their pet, but struggle to afford the procedure, should be able to receive the service for their pet at low or no cost.

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 believe that a record of good behavior means far more than mere size for anticipating how a pet will interact with neighbors or other animals in an apartment or neighborhood complex. There has been some success in other cities where landlords do not place the same kinds of restrictions so long as pet owners of larger breeds provide a recognized certificate that the dog has been trained, such as the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Program. I believe that we need to continue working at this issue to find solutions that, as stated, base pet restrictions on records of behavior and not arbitrary measurements of size and do so in ways that the city can impact.

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

At present, I do not have any pets. Diane is still recovering from the loss of Jake, an incredible rescue dog who we adopted. Further in the past, I have had three cats (Smokey, Austin, and Travis) and another dog (Scamp), all rescue animals (except Smokey since my family got him while I was very young and I don’t know where he came from).