

Austin No Kill Coalition 2012 City Council Candidate Questionnaire



Answers from Brigid Shea,
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1. In 2011, based on the work of Austin Animal Center, its placement partners, and the City Council's mandated No Kill Implementation Plan passed in March 2010, Austin's open-admission shelter saved 91% of all impounded dogs and cats, giving Austin the status as the largest "No Kill" city in the United States. Do you support (or continue to support) Austin's mandated No Kill Implementation Plan, and do you commit (or remain committed) to maintaining Austin's status as a 90% save-rate "No Kill" community? And, would you support increasing the save-rate target beyond 90%? Why or why not?

As Mayor, I would be committed to continuing the 2010 No Kill Implementation Plan goal of a 90% save rate. I would also support having discussions with the Animal Advisory Commission, the city staff, animal welfare organizations and rescue groups in Austin to find out if a higher goal is feasible and, if so, what steps we would need to take as a community to reach a higher save-rate.

2. In 2007, the City Council voted to relocate Austin's animal shelter to a mostly industrial area off of East 7th Street near 183, against the advice of Austin No Kill organizations and the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Austinites. So far, it appears that the No Kill advocates' concerns were right: the new shelter has 60 fewer kennels for large dogs, early data indicate a drop-off in adoptions since the move, and at least two reports of gun shots near the shelter have caused shelter management to warn volunteers to stay in groups and avoid volunteering after dark. Given the harmful effects of the shelter relocation on resources, staff, and animals, what will you do to make sure Austin doesn't lose its "No Kill" status due to the shelter relocation?

Austin needs more dog kennels than are currently available at the new Austin Animal Center. Had I been Mayor at the time the decision to build a new shelter was made, I would have advocated for a shelter that had at least the

same, if not more, dog kennels as the old shelter. Given the current situation, I will work to ensure that the old shelter site is used to make up for the lack of dog kennels at the new facility.

3. In the same 2007 vote to relocate Austin's animal shelter, the City Council also voted to keep open at least the Davenport Building at the current Town Lake Animal Center as a permanent downtown adoption center. That decision was reconfirmed in the 2010 No Kill Implementation Plan vote by the City Council, and again in subsequent votes. Yet the YMCA released plans this year to build a swimming pool project that would require demolishing Town Lake Animal Center, and the YMCA appears to have committed only to a very small adoption center near the current TLAC site. What is your position on the YMCA swimming pool proposal? Do you support demolishing Town Lake Animal Center? If so, do you commit to replacing it with an at-least 5,000 square feet adoption center (the approximate size of the Davenport Building) with cages and kennels for cats and dogs?

I am committed to ensuring that the kennel capacity that was lost in the decision to build a new shelter with 60 fewer kennels is restored by using the old shelter site. The details of how we will restore kennel capacity will need to be worked out with input from City staff, the Animal Advisory Commission, animal welfare organizations and rescue groups, but I am committed to restoring the lost kennel capacity and to having an Adoption Center at the old shelter site.

4. Austin Pets Alive has saved more than 12% of the city shelter's intake each of the last two years, which is approximately as many animals as all other partner shelters and rescue groups combined. Specifically, Austin Pets Alive saves the kittens less than 8 weeks old, the puppies with parvo, the small dogs, and the sick and injured dogs and cats who have been placed on the "at risk" list at Austin Animal Center (as well as about half of the large dogs needing additional behavior training who have been placed on the same list). To continue its present rate of lifesaving, Austin Pets Alive will need a building in Austin. Meanwhile, about 75% of the old Town Lake Animal Center site sits empty and unused. Do you support Austin Pets Alive's expanded use of part of the empty cages and kennels at Town Lake Animal Center for the foreseeable future?

Austin Pets Alive has done an excellent job in saving countless homeless animals in recent years. I commend Austin Pets Alive, the Austin Animal Center staff, Animal Trustees of Austin, Emancipet, the Austin Humane Society and the many rescue groups in Austin who have worked hard to make Austin a No Kill city. I support using the empty cages and kennels at the Town Lake Animal Center to ensure that Austin maintains its No Kill goal of a 90% save-rate.

5. The extremely successful No Kill Implementation Plan passed by City Council in March 2010 was originally drafted in a collaborative effort with city staff and the Austin Animal Advisory Commission. As you know, each Council Member selects one person to serve on the Commission. What qualities will you look for in selecting an appointee for the commission? And will you ensure that your appointee is committed to Austin's 90% save-rate goal? If you are currently on Council, do you stand by the votes and positions of your current appointee?

I am committed to appointing highly qualified candidates to all Boards and Commissions, including the Animal Advisory Commission. In selecting a candidate for the AAC, I would look for individuals who are not only committed to the 90% save-rate goal the city adopted in March 2010, but I will look for intelligent, compassionate, committed and highly qualified candidates who want to improve city services for lost and found, homeless and rescued pets.

6. More than 20 different dog breeds are banned in the overwhelming majority of Austin's apartment-housing market, making finding appropriate housing very difficult for owners of these dogs despite high levels of owner responsibility and great dog temperaments and training. In turn, the difficulty in finding housing negatively and significantly impacts adoptions of these breeds from the shelter and forces some owners to surrender their pets, making maintaining No Kill more challenging. Indeed, breed discrimination is even included in the neighborhood rules for the Mueller Development, which began as a public-private partnership between the City and the developer. Would you support an ordinance that would prohibit breed discrimination by apartment complexes, homeowners' associations and other housing authorities in Austin? Would you at least support a rule eliminating breed discrimination in developments paid for in part by public funding or otherwise assisted by the public, such as those receiving zoning changes or other variances?

Yes, I would support an ordinance to ban breed discrimination in Austin. I would use my influence as Mayor and my vote to direct city staff and the Animal Advisory Commission to work with apartment complexes, homeowners associations and housing authorities to ensure their rules are based on animal behaviors and not on breeds. Dogs with Canine Good Citizen certificates or other proof of good training should be welcome in apartment complexes and I will support efforts to educate apartment complexes on that issue.

7. Pit bull type dogs, like other large dogs, are the highest at-risk population for "euthanasia" at the shelter. Love-A-Bull, mixed breed rescue groups, shelter staff, and the Animal Advisory Commission all recognize that there is a great need to address public misperception and reverse media stereotypes that paint a negative picture of these dogs, in order to increase adoptions and acceptance of pit bulls as wonderful family companions and maintain a commitment to No Kill. Do you support the work of these groups and the message that they are sending to the community, through City support of pit bull-focused education and awareness events and initiatives?

Yes, I support the work of Love-a-Bull and, as Mayor, I would support public awareness efforts to educate the public about so-called "bully breeds." I believe the public awareness campaigns that Love-a-Bull has already started to create public awareness have been excellent, but much more can be done and, as Mayor, I would support these efforts.

8. In 2011, Austin became the largest "No Kill" City in the United States due to the City shelter and placement partners' implementation of proven programs and policies that had already successfully ended shelter killing in other communities such as Reno, NV, Charlottesville, VA, and Ithaca, NY, among dozens of others. Nonetheless, some activists in Austin are against these lifesaving programs and policies, and instead favor a regressive and punitive "mandatory spay-neuter" ordinance that would impose severe monetary penalties (or worse) on the small percentage of Austinites who either cannot afford to, have no access to, or have elected not to alter their pets. Given that such punitive laws have been proven in an extensive study by the ASPCA to have failed---in every community in which they have been implemented---to either reduce shelter intake or increase community spay/neuter rates, and in fact have increased killing, intake, and spending in multiple communities, are you willing to risk Austin's success by enacting such a punitive law?

No, I would not favor enacting a punitive law. However, I do think that creating incentives for people with limited finances to spay or neuter pets is not only humane but also cost effective. As Mayor, I would encourage the Austin Animal Center and animal organizations to partner with the many low income advocacy groups to figure out creative programs to address the high cost of spaying and neutering pets for low income residents.