



AUSTIN NO KILL COALITION CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATE FORUM QUESTIONNAIRE

Laura Morrison, Candidate for Austin City Council, Place 4

1. In February and March, Austin saved 90% of the impounded animals at Town Lake Animal Center (now called Austin Animal Center), making Austin the largest "No Kill" City in the United States. There is still much work to be done to keep and maintain this status, however, such as increasing adoptions from our City Shelter, Austin Animal Shelter. How important is this 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 City?

Absolutely! I am committed to making Austin the nation's most humane city for animals and to eliminate the unnecessary killing of lost and homeless animals at our city animal shelter. That's why I provided Council leadership and support for the effort to have our Animal Advisory Commission develop a multi-pronged program to both reduce shelter intake and increase live outcomes.

I also sponsored the moratorium on killing of animals when cages are empty at TLAC. I have a proven track record of leadership in the No Kill effort in Austin and will continue to do so aggressively.

2. The City Shelter is moving to a smaller facility in November 2011. In 2007, the City Council voted to keep part of the existing facility open to serve as an Adoption Center (the Davenport Building only); and in 2010, the Council voted to keep all of the existing facility open for at least 6 months as a safety net when the shelter moves. Knowing that the current TLAC facility is the only one of its kind in the whole of Austin and that Austin Pets Alive is proposing to run it at little cost to the City, would you support keeping the whole facility open beyond 6 months as both a safety net for the new, smaller facility, and also to significantly increase shelter adoptions?

TLAC's current No Kill status was made possible by the collective efforts of city staff, volunteers, rescue groups, fosters and non-profits. Austin Pets Alive was one of the non-profits that played a vital role in our No Kill success, by taking approx 7,000 animals off the city shelter's euthanasia list and finding homes to adopt them at no cost to the city. In order to maintain our current No Kill status, it is imperative that APA be able to continue their work with the city of saving the most difficult to adopt animals. Since the current TLAC site is a move-in-ready site, we are uniquely positioned to keep this site fully operational, hence giving us the greatest opportunity for continued success as a No Kill city. I would support keeping the TLAC facility open beyond six months.

3. Maintaining Austin's status as a "No Kill" City requires an unhesitating commitment to "live outcomes"--- keeping high the percentage of impounded animals that leave the

shelter alive through rescue groups, other shelters, and direct adoptions to the public. The largest percentage of live outcomes at any time is direct adoptions, which will remain essential to the City's "No Kill" goals when the main shelter is relocated to the new, smaller facility. When determining which nonprofit should inhabit the existing Austin Animal Center facility after the main shelter relocates, would you commit to prioritizing a non-profit that focuses exclusively on saving those animals who are slated to die at the City facility, thereby directly reducing the City's "kill rate"? Or, would you be willing to have the City facility be run by a non-profit that instead focuses on animals brought in from other communities or from sources other than the City's municipal shelter? How specifically will you determine which non-profit will be housed in the old facility?

Some criteria I would support are:

- **a non-profit that that has significantly increased live outcomes from the Austin animal shelter**
 - **a non-profit that focuses on TLAC rather than bringing in animals in from surrounding communities.**
 - **a non-profit that has the capacity to significantly increase live outcomes in the future**
 - **a non-profit that would effectively leverage the use of the facility and has a proven track record in outreach to the Austin community**
4. Recognizing that No Kill is an ongoing project and that the City Animal Services is the only City department where lives are lost on a daily basis, would you vote for or against moderate increased expenditures that are directly associated with more lives saved?

As a council member I have demonstrated an unwavering commitment towards the success of a No Kill Austin. Investing in the welfare of animals is a short term expense which can result in savings and generate revenue. For example, when a cat or dog is adopted from TLAC that revenue goes into the general fund, which helps support other city-wide initiatives. In evaluating demands on our city budget, I will include moderate increased expenditures directly associated with more animal lives saved as a priority.

5. The City of Austin returns about 8% of stray cats and 37% of stray dogs to their rightful owners. Other successful "No Kill" cities, however, are able to reduce the strain on the shelter and rescue groups by returning upwards of 65% of dogs to their owners. Would you support an internal review, and if necessary, restructuring of the City's Return to Owner Program at Austin Animal Center in order to gain more live outcomes and ease strain on the City and non-profit resources?

I understand that an effective Return to Owner program is an integral part of long term success as a No Kill city. As a member of the Health and Human Services subcommittee, I supported the closing of the night drop boxes, which prevents the impulsive relinquishment of animals. This allows staff the ability to counsel and to work through issues that lead the owner to surrender their animal. Often times the issue is easily fixed, but the owner did not know how to solve the problem. By meeting with staff, they are provided with the resources they need to keep their animal.

I do support efforts to improve our program and would look to recommendations from an evaluation by our staff and our Animal Advisory Commission to guide steps in the future.

6. Would you support the implementation of performance standards that tie management performance to salary increments or bonuses? If not, why not?

Since the role of the City Council is set policy and the management decisions for city staff is the role of the City Manager, it would not be appropriate for me to

weigh in on staff salary. I do, however, support increased use of performance measures in the process of our budget development in general, and recently co-sponsored a resolution to implement this improvement.

7. As many as 15 different dog breeds are being restricted in 99% of the rental housing market in Austin, which makes finding appropriate housing very difficult for owners of these dogs, despite high levels of owner responsibility and great dog temperaments and training. This is significantly slowing adoptions of these breeds from the shelter and causing many owners to surrender their pets or dump them into the community. What steps would you take to find solutions to this problem, in working with the apartment associations and property managers in Austin?

I understand this is an important issue in the community. In order to resolve it, I would facilitate a dialogue between the Austin Apartment Association, the Building Owners and Managers Association, city staff, the Animal Advisory Commission and the community, to develop recommendations to alleviate the problem. In my experience, bringing all stakeholders to the table with clear Council leadership and direction to find solutions, leads to understanding of differing perspectives and allows development of creative and consensus approaches that address concerns.

8. Pit bull type dogs are the highest at-risk population for "euthanasia" at the shelter. Love-A-Bull, the City's Pit Bull Working Group, mixed breed rescue groups, shelter staff, and the Animal Advisory Commission all recognize that there is a great need to address public perception 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. Would 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?

I am aware that pit bulls or staffies are often times mislabeled. I think that city support of pit bull focused education and awareness events are good ideas.

9. Austin is a No Kill City because it embraced new concepts that proved old rhetoric, sheltering ideology, and traditional excuses for killing wrong and outdated. Rather than relying on disproved excuses for killing, the City Council in March 2010 embraced the successful No Kill Implementation Plan, which aims to both increase live outcomes (through off-site adoptions, marketing, enhanced customer service, fostering, etc.) and decreasing shelter intake (through owner-surrender counseling, low-cost and free spay-neuter programs, etc.). Prior to March 2010, the City's animal-welfare policy focused almost exclusively on decreasing intake while largely ignoring the plight of the animals who were entering the shelter annually. Due to the more balanced approach in the 2010 plan, there have been dramatic reductions in shelter killing through significantly increasing "live outcomes" while maintaining the City's previous commitment to free and low-cost spay/neuter programs. Given the now proven success of the "No Kill" methodology compared to the high rates of killing resulting from the old model of animal sheltering, what vision do you have for the future of Austin's animal services?

So far, our plan has made great strides in improving the outlook for animals at our shelter. When I took office almost 3 years ago, only ~50% of the animals entering our city shelter resulted in live outcomes. In the months of December 2010 and January 2011, 88% of cats and dogs impounded at the shelter left the shelter alive through adoptions and transfers to rescue groups. That figure increased to 92% in February 2011, the highest save-rate month ever in Austin and the highest of any city our size in the country.

I believe we need to continue monitoring the success of the current no kill implementation plan and make adjustments in the future when needs arise.

With that said, there are some areas where I look forward to seeing improvements, such as building a city shelter off-site adoption program, increasing the volunteer program, increasing the foster program – all of which will result in more live outcomes.

10. As you likely know, the No Kill Implementation Plan passed by the Council in March 2010 has had a dramatic, measurable, and positive effect in reducing the number of animals killed at Austin Animal Center. The shelter's save rate has been almost or over 90% for all impounded dogs and cats from December 2010 to March 2011. However, some persons in town who oppose No Kill programs want the City to instead pass a mandatory pet alteration law or an intentionally exorbitant tax on unaltered pets that, when implemented in other cities, has never proven effective and has on multiple occasions resulted in a dramatic increase in shelter intake and killing. We believe that the passage of such a law could turn back the clock on Austin's lifesaving movement, resulting in higher intake and significantly more killing with no benefit at all. Do you support the current No Kill direction embraced by the Council and No Kill advocates? Or, are you willing to place at risk all of the progress Austin has made in the last year by imposing a regressive, punitive, and disproven mandatory alteration law?

I am enthusiastically in support of our current approach. The No Kill plan was modeled after successful No Kill cities and none of those cities have mandatory spay/neuter programs. Our plan is working and I believe we need to continue our current path of success. That plan also includes significant support for low-cost and free spay-neuter programs, and I am committed to continuing to study proven programs and policies to continue to make improvements in our city's animal-welfare policies.