

Austin No Kill Coalition 2012 City Council Candidate Questionnaire



Answers from Lee Leffingwell,
Running for re-election as the Mayor.
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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?

Yes, I have always, and will always, support Austin's no kill plan.

I would like to see our save-rate as high as possible, and will continue to support our efforts to choose innovative solutions to grow our 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?

As a strong believer in our "No Kill" effort, I was proud to sponsor the effort to keep the Town Lake Animal Shelter open in an effort to aid the East 7th Street location. As we continue to pursue our "No Kill" status, it is important that we maintain the services at TLAC while exploring new initiatives.

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 proudly sponsored the effort to keep the Town Lake Animal Center open. I continue to believe the site should remain open, and services should be maintained. During the period the YMCA submitted a proposal to City staff - that was later rejected - I maintained my commitment to the TLAC site and the services provided there.

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?

I have long been a proud supporter of Austin Pets Alive. APA's executive director is my appointee to the Animal Advisory Commission, and APA's board chair is a friend and advisor to my office. I believe Austin Pets Alive does an incredible job through proactive efforts on adoption, and other services. The concept of Austin Pets Alive using the TLAC available space is certainly very appealing, but issues related to the facilities of the City of Austin need agreement with City Staff and the City Legal department. While I support the concept, I have to respect the process of our City Staff.

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?

My appointee to the Animal Advisory Commission is Dr. Ellen Jefferson. As a Veterinarian, the executive director of Austin Pets Alive, and a commissioner, Ellen has done a remarkable job. She embodies the qualities I look for in an Animal Advisory Commissioner: a strong passion for animal advocacy, a desire to pursue our "No Kill" status, and the foresight to be innovative, and collaborative, as we build better programs for animals.

I was a sponsor of the No Kill Implementation Plan, and later a sponsor to keep the TLAC site open for services, and I believe the advice and input of the Animal Advisory Commission has been pivotal to those important efforts.

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?

I am open to innovative solutions to achieve our "No Kill" status, and this concept is intriguing, I cannot commit to a ordinance without a discussion with the City Legal team.

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 increased awareness and education about dog breeds. I have known many Pitbulls myself and believe they can be wonderful dogs. In fact my Campaign Manager owns two pitbulls who are regular volunteers at my campaign HQ.

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?

I am in favor of affordable spaying and neutering programs and services such as the one Emancipet provides being expanded so citizens who want to spay and neuter their animals can do so with less financial burden. I do not support a mandatory spay and neuter law concept.