

## Austin No Kill Coalition 2012 City Council Candidate Questionnaire



Answers from Mike Martinez,  
Running for re-election on the Austin City Council, Place 2.  
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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?*

We owe the success of no-kill in Austin to the hard work of the staff at the Austin Animal Center, the Animal Advisory Commission, community volunteers, rescue groups and area partners. I am proud to have championed the Council policy that helped lead Austin to become the largest No-Kill City in the country. I will continue to collaborate with all stakeholders to ensure we are able to maintain our no-kill status. Achieving and maintaining no-kill for more than a year is an accomplishment we should all be proud of, but in order to sustain that progress we must remain diligent in our efforts. A 90% save rate is the widely accepted national standard for being no-kill, but I view the 90% rate as the floor. The City must strive for policies that enable our Austin Animal Center and community partners to save every adoptable and treatable animal in Austin.

*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?*

I was the lone vote on Council opposing the relocation of the animal shelter to East Austin. I arrived at that decision after hearing from many folks in the animal advocacy community. However, now that the Austin Animal Center is in the new location we must work to maximize all of our resources to guarantee we don't take any steps backwards in our no-kill priorities. We must continue to provide needed funding for the scope of the programs we have at the Austin Animal Center, foster healthy relationships with local partners and rescue groups and push for public outreach and education to keep the community engaged.

*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 will continue my steadfast support of an adoption center at the TLAC site that has the same or higher capacity than what is there today. I will not support a project on that parcel of land that does not include adequate space for animal services and adoptions. If any future project requires that Davenport be rebuilt, we must ensure that we have a temporary facility available in the interim so there is no lapse in services that would pose a risk of losing ground in our efforts to maintain no-kill.

*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 am proud to have worked closely over the last several years with Dr. Ellen Jefferson, and I have a special understanding of how impactful APA's services are both on a broad scale and on a personal level. Austin Pets Alive! rescued a pregnant dog named Helen from TLAC a couple of years ago and located a foster home that would provide a safe environment for her to have her puppies. APA then successfully found homes for Helen and her entire litter. My dog, Chucho was the last puppy in Helen's litter. My wife, son and I are so thankful to have him as part of our family.

Austin Pets Alive has played a crucial role in helping us achieve no-kill by saving our most vulnerable companion animals through their Parvo Puppy and Bottle Baby programs. While many easily-adoptable pets can be placed in foster homes, these programs for at-risk animals require a stable facility to make them possible. I will continue to work tirelessly with City staff, Dr. Ellen Jefferson and community members to do everything we can to guarantee APA has a facility to continue the critical services they provide for the City of Austin and our animal community.

*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 proud of the votes of my appointee to the Animal Advisory Commission, who serves as the current Chair, David Lundstedt. David and I share a commitment to no-kill and frequently communicate about issues that come before the AAC. David served as the Vice Chair during the drafting and execution of the No Kill Implementation Plan and was an excellent resource for our office while working through that process.

*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?*

As with all of the policies we've implemented through the no-kill process, I believe we must have a comprehensive public input process to determine the best way to move forward on this issue. Addressing problems for renters and pet owners that breed restriction policies cause has been an ongoing challenge that we've been working on for quite a while. My office worked with Love-a-Bull to set up a meeting with representatives from the Austin Apartments Association to talk about potential solutions.

We've found this issue is especially complex because many apartment buildings are owned by national chains and many of them use insurance companies that will not insure if certain breeds are on the property. This is just one example of an obstacle that's not impossible, but will require strategic planning and partnerships to overcome. We've had a similar challenge with national apartment chains restricting storage of bicycles on apartment balconies which is not in line with our values as a community. An ordinance is not the only way to address these issues; we must use all tools available to us to insert our values during economic development agreements and zoning cases whenever possible.

In the interim, I appreciate that groups are working to help families and individuals with certain restricted breeds find housing. Love-A-Bull has a section on their website with pit bull friendly properties, realtors and landlords that serves as a huge resource.

*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?*

In order to maintain no-kill, we must find creative ways to successfully place pit bulls and other large dogs in loving homes. We still have work to do, but our success so far would not have been possible without our shelter staff, rescue groups, and the efforts of Love-A-Bull. I'm proud to have sponsored fee waivers for Love-A-Bull's National Pit Bull Awareness Day Parade and Festival in 2009 and 2010 and their Texas-Sized Pittie Pride event in 2011. Public events like these help raise awareness for the breed and break the temperament stereotypes often portrayed in the media about pit bulls.

Love-A-Bull also offers free training, education, and service dogs to visit adults and children in need of therapeutic interaction. I sincerely appreciate Love-A-Bull's dedication to approach breed discrimination in a hands-on way, and their continual effort educate the public about just how sweet and docile pit bulls can really be. My office will continue to be a resource for Love-A-Bull and others who are looking to make improvements in our community on this issue.

I have worked internally at the City to combat breed discrimination as well. The Austin Police Department released a statement about a dog attack and sited the breed as a pit bull. I contacted the Chief's staff to see how they determined the dog's breed, which ultimately resulted in their statement being retracted. This incident opened up a dialogue that allowed me to educate their staff about stereotypes and how difficult it can be to determine the breed. I will continue to work with Public Information Offices within the City to ensure that we are doing the most possible to report news accurately without fostering any further breed discrimination.

*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?*

Studies have shown that the biggest obstacle for pet owners to have their companion animals spayed or neutered is cost. Rather than criminalize behaviors by enacting a mandatory spay/neuter law, we must continue our work with groups like Emancipet to provide free and low cost spay and neuter services and increase accessibility for those in our community by making mobile locations available in low-income areas of our City.

Last year I trapped a feral cat in my garage and had him fixed at Emancipet. Since then, Tater Tot has become a new addition to our family and is convinced our dog, Chucho, is his mother. We must continue to address our feral cat growth in Austin. I applaud the Austin Humane Society for their TNR Program that helps curb the growth of Austin’s feral cat community and prevents many homeless pets.