

## Austin No Kill Coalition 2012 City Council Candidate Questionnaire



Answers from Tina Cannon,  
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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?*

I support the "no kill" status and push to maintain a 91% target going forward. If a town in the U.S. can and should reach 90+ percent, that city should be Austin. I would hope that our town will continue to lead the charge on compliance and high goals for other cities to look to as a successful model.

*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?*

To be an effective leader on council it is imperative that our council members listen to those in the industry who live, cry and breathe these issues on a daily basis. I would have stood with Councilman Martinez and voted against the current location while at the same time work those who give of the time and passion to help our pet population to find a more workable solution. Fewer kennels and lower adoption rates should not be the resonating figures coming

from the new facilities but rather, better facilities and higher adoptions. It is imperative that we retain our "no kill" status and I will work with the shelter and organizations to do all the we can to support maintaining that status.

*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?*

The TLAC center is a part of Austin and should continue that way. If the new facilities are under serving the population (as stated in question above) then we need to continue to be able to use the TLAC center for adoptions and housing as budget allows and not be forgone at the hands of a proposed swimming facility.

*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 applaud the work and effort of the APA. Rescuing the pets that are in these classes is a noble effort and done by those with enormous hearts. I would raise caution to a facility both from a budget perspective but my more pressing concerns stem from a humanitarian point of view. Let me explain, it is not simply the facility but more over the professional level staffing that is indicated by this type of proposed facility. It is imperative to have veterinary professionals staffing this type of facility as the opportunity spread infectious diseases is very high, even by those with the highest of intentions to not do so. So the real question here is how would we plan to keep this facility disease free, and are their people associated with this proposed facility that would have proper qualifications and that understand infectious disease

control who are going to be overseeing this plan? If all these issues can be addressed then we should consider the option for providing a facility.

*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?*

Just as with all Boards and Commission appointees, I would look to industry leaders who are dedicated to serving. I would look for experienced individuals from both private practice and experience shelter care managers/directors who share the common goals of maintaining a 90% plus "no kill" rating.

*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?*

This is hard for me. As a pet lover and founder of the nation's leading pet health resource, PetsMD.com, I struggle with this issue. I understand that pet owners now their pets and many times feel that they (the pets) would cause no harm and thus should not be prohibited. On the flip side, as one who has raised children I would be concerned about living in a complex that had multiple aggressive breeds. Owners of these breeds say that they are not dangerous and that issues tend to revolve around the owner and not the breed. This is true as you can train a pet to an extent but you cannot always train the human. That said, there are characteristics associated with some breeds and aggression is one of those characteristics. Let me give you a flip side example, think of a border collie. Picturing it? Catching a frisbee, running, herding etc right? That is inherent to that breed the same as aggression can still linger in other breeds and they can be predisposed to certain behaviors.

*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?*

Certainly. These are passionate people who know and understand the breeds they work with in finding the right homes and in turn can have a positive impact on the predisposition of the breeds. Again, in many instances you can train the pet but not always the human. Working with these specialty groups can have a greater impact on the correct placement of these breeds into the right homes/owners.

*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?*

A mandate is not something I would support for many of the reasons you state in the question. I think we as a city, understand the need to spay-neuter is important and would support continuing to educate pet owners as such. Imposing fines or worse, removing the pet places undue burden on the families who are torn from their beloved pet and to the city services that now must care and place the pet into a new home. Nobody wins with punitive ordinances. I would much rather see continued outreach, offers for resources for those who have a financial need should they chose to alter their pet and remove barriers from pet ownership. Creating a mandate without providing resources is counterintuitive to responsible pet ownership and not what I would expect from Austin.