

FixAustin.org Questionnaire – Jason Meeker

1. In October 2007, the City Council voted to relocate Austin’s animal shelter from the shores of Town Lake to a mostly industrial area on the eastern edge of the City. Do you support the decision to relocate the shelter? And if the issue comes before the Council again, how will you vote?

It was a terrible decision. I don’t support it all.

2. When the Council voted to relocate the shelter, the Council purported to adopt a “compromise” that would keep part of the current shelter on Town Lake open as an adoption center. But the shelter’s management has expressed great confidence that an adoption center on Town Lake will not actually materialize once the shelter is moved.

A. Assuming the shelter is relocated, what is your position on whether an adoption center should remain on Town Lake?

I think it’s a bad idea to move the shelter. A satellite shelter is OK in theory since it would give people another location to find a pet to adopt, but it is hard to imagine it being fully funded and supported.

B. What steps, if any, will you take to stop shelter management from thwarting the Council’s decision to keep open an adoption center at the current site?

I would work with shelter management to craft public policy and funding that addresses the needs of the animals and meets Austin’s budgetary ability. Or I would persuade Austin’s citizens to do more.

C. What do you envision the Town Lake adoption center to look like? Would it be open during all regular shelter hours? And what percentage of the animal-services budget do you believe should be allocated to the adoption center?

I can’t imagine how to divide the budget. But it should be fully funded and look like a serious part of Austin’s efforts to humanely care for homeless animals, not the aftermath of a bad decision and its poor compromise.

3. Each successful “no kill” community in the United States— San Francisco, CA; Ithaca, NY; Reno, NV; Charlottesville, VA; Ivans County, UT; and Orange County, VA—has become “no kill” by implementing shelter expert Nathan Winograd’s No Kill Equation, which, unlike Austin’s “Mission Orange” plan, places focus on getting animals out of the shelter alive through increased adoptions. Would you commit to demanding the implementation of shelter practices that increase adoptions—like off-site adoptions and

volunteer foster programs? If so, would you be willing to direct budgetary expenditures towards these programs?

I would. I am much more interested in doing what works.

4. Since 2000, Austin's pound has sheltered roughly the same number of animals (around 24,000) and killed roughly the same number of animals (around 12,000) each year. During the same period, the pound's annual budget has nearly doubled to nearly \$5 million. Do you believe that killing roughly half of Austin's lost and homeless pets—while other communities kill less than 10%—is evidence of effective government and strong shelter leadership? If not, what will you do to change the management of the pound?

It's a very sad record. Management of the shelter must change or be changed to implement the best practices of more successful shelters in the US.

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

Possibly. Right now we're talking about changing the whole mission. How to adjust compensation could be part of that. We may have a problem if other city departments don't have similar bonuses. One thing at a time. We need to refocus the mission to become a true No-Kill shelter.

6. The shelter management has discretion to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual donations to the shelter, yet it is unclear—in public documents—where that money is spent. Would you support an audit of the City's animal-services budget—including all discretionary funds? If not, why not?

Yes. I have also supported moving the city auditor under the authority of the council rather than the city manager.

7. No city in America has achieved "no kill" success—defined as killing less than 10% of pets sheltered at the community's open-admission pound—by implementing a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance. In addition, such ordinances require increased enforcement costs, taking money away from life-saving programs that are correlated with reducing shelter killing. Would you vote for or against a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance for Austin? And why?

I used to be solidly for mandatory spay/neutering, since my wife worked for the Austin Humane Society and they have that policy. My thinking is adjusting now. I still favor a mandatory spay/neuter ordinance with the requirement of securing a license if you have

an intact pet, but I am open to other ideas.

8. What, if anything, do you envision as the role of the Austin Animal Advisory Commission? What kind of person will you appoint to the commission?

Well, it shouldn't be ignored, as it was with the decision to move the shelter.

I would want experts in animal behavior and care on this board. I would seek people who are passionate about helping Austin achieve No Kill status.

The commission should be given the ability to collect information and share it with the city and the council to affect policy decisions with the same level of respect as any other commission.

9. Do you have pets? If so, where did you get them?

Yes, I had 5 until recently. I now have two dogs and two cats. Gibson (dog) was adopted at Town Lake. Mulligan (dog) was adopted at the Humane Society. Jimmy (cat) was also adopted at the Humane Society. Bebe (cat) adopted us.