

Fix Austin Questionnaire  
Laura Morrison  
Candidate for Austin City Council Place 4

**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?**

I do not support the decision to relocate the shelter. Most models for no kill shelters believe that shelters are most effective if they are centrally located within the city. The new location is not easily accessible, and the neighborhood plan was not considered when the move was decided. I believe the neighborhood should have input to this decision, and that the shelter should be centrally located within the city. While the neighborhood plan may or may not hold legal authority in this case, at a minimum it is bad public policy to ignore and/or circumvent the neighborhood plan goals and objectives

**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?**

If the shelter is relocated, there *should* be a satellite shelter located at Town Lake.

**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 will support the current location to remain open for adoptions at hours that are convenient to our city residents. Staff’s role and responsibility is to implement the decisions of the Council. I will work with the new City Manager to ensure that responsibility is fulfilled in general and specifically regarding this issue.

I live in the Old West Austin neighborhood that hosts the Town Lake Animal Shelter and our organization strongly supports not only keeping it open, but also protecting that land from pressures for development. It is public land and must remain so.

**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 envision an adoption center that is inviting and that is open to working in and out of the center to facilitate a community wide no-kill shelter approach. Shelter hours should coincide with community needs and culture to maximize that likelihood that willing adopters can visit the facility. I do not have sufficient background to determine what percentage of the budget should be allocated to adoption but believe the current kill versus adoption rate is unacceptable.

**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 do firmly commit to requiring shelter practices that increase adoptions. With the \$5 million being devoted now, we certainly can direct some of that budget toward taking action to lower our kill rate. That would be a wise investment in a better Austin.

**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?**

For a city like Austin, there is no excuse for the high kill rate we currently have. The current management needs to work toward lowering the 54% kill rate, and be open to working with no kill models such as Nathan Weingrod has offered. There are several elements to this. As I learned while meeting with the executive directive of Emancipet, our shelter needs to improve in many ways, including increasing its rate of returning lost pets to their owners and dedicating adequate to meet the demand for adoptions.

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

The City of Austin currently has a Pay For Performance Program to reward non-exempt employees who meet or exceed job performance. Management performance bonuses are at the discretion of the City Manager. However, I do believe it is important for Council members to clearly communicate the level of service which they believe city management should be held to.

**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?**

I would first give shelter management the opportunity to provide a clear and transparent explanation of how annual donations have been spent and what fiscal controls are in place before taking further action. If that is not satisfactory, I would support an audit. As a City Council Member, I have the fiduciary duty for oversight related to the city's financial and performance reporting practices, internal controls, compliance with laws and regulations, and initiatives to improve the performance of city services. I will take my duties seriously on the City Council and expect the highest fiscal responsibility for our city government.

**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?**

The debate concerning spay/neuter programs has been ongoing and divisive. At this time, I do not believe that a spay/neuter ordinance is the appropriate approach to reducing dog and cat populations in Austin because of its challenge of enforceability, cost and effectiveness. I believe we need an inclusive discussion to bring all perspectives to the table.

**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?**

As with all commissions, I believe the Animal Advisory Commission's role is to provide community expertise and perspective, to foster community dialogue and to advise the Council. As with all appointees, I will look for strong, knowledgeable, and trustworthy people who have shown they have the ability to work well in a governmental-like setting. Furthermore, I will look for a person who has demonstrated a willingness to protect the public interest and animal welfare.

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

I no longer have a pet. Our dog, Kanga, joined our family when my youngest son was 2 years old. We adopted Kanga from the Town Lake Animal Shelter. Kanga died just after my son graduated from high school.