

Huntsville City Council Candidates Survey

No Kill Huntsville

No Kill Huntsville is a political advocacy group that formed in 2012 to encourage the City of Huntsville to stop destroying healthy and treatable animals at the tax-funded animal shelter and to instead embrace proven programs which balance public safety with animal welfare.

<https://www.nokillhuntsville.com/>

At the time our group formed, 2 of every 3 animals entering the shelter were destroyed regardless of health status. The city has since changed the culture at Huntsville Animal Services (HAS) under the leadership of City Administrator John Hamilton; more animals leave the shelter alive than at any time in the history of the city. HAS serves the City of Huntsville and Madison County but not the City of Madison which handles its own animal control functions.

As a candidate for the Huntsville City Council, we would like to share your views on subjects related to the animal shelter with our followers.

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Issue 1. Operating Hours. HAS is currently open from 9-5 on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 9-6 on Tuesday and from 9-3 on Saturday. These hours make it difficult for residents to reclaim a lost pet, adopt a new pet or volunteer at the shelter. For example:

A person lives on Winchester Road in District 1. He works from 8 to 5 at Huntsville Hospital and has an hour lunch break. His cat goes missing and he knows his beloved cat is at the shelter from using the city's GIS website for found pets. He can only reclaim his cat on Tuesday after he gets off work or on Saturday unless he takes vacation time or drives fast and hits all green lights. Why? It takes time to reclaim a pet and get that pet back home. It takes 11 minutes to get from the hospital to the shelter under the best circumstances. It takes 15 minutes to get from the shelter back to his home and another 13 minutes to get back to work. That's a total of 39 minutes which only leaves 21 minutes to reclaim his cat from the shelter staff on his lunch break. The process likely takes longer than that depending on how many people are working at the shelter and already in line ahead of him. This time computation does not include time to get to/from his vehicle at each location.

Changing operating hours does not mean more hours. It means different hours. Having the shelter open from 11 to 7 during the week and 6 hours on both Saturdays and Sundays would make it easier for families to get to the shelter.

Would you support more family friendly hours at HAS to make the operation more accessible to the public toward having the fewest number of animals in the building at any given time?

Issue 2. Community Outreach. HAS is one of a few city departments the operation of which is radically affected by public behavior. In any given year, approximately 4,000 animals found

running at large enter the shelter. The source of those animals is known thanks to a GIS website maintained by the city engineering department.

<https://maps.huntsvilleal.gov/lostanimals/>

For many years we have asked HAS to do community outreach to each district in the city to engage directly with citizens about issues in each particular district. This is much like community policing and would form bonds with the public being served. Council members hold regular town hall meetings. The shelter director could attend those meetings to address the public directly, explain issues from that area, and find out what people need to keep their animals out of the shelter. This would cost nothing and take very little time.

If elected to city council, would you invite Dr. Sheppard or a representative of HAS to speak with your constituents to help them and reduce shelter intake?

Issue 3. Dogs Destroyed for Behavior. In any given month, dogs at HAS are destroyed for behavior. We recognize that some dogs are cognitively impaired or have never been properly socialized to people and present a genuine public safety risk. Those dogs cannot be allowed in the community. In progressive communities, this represents approximately 1-2% of dog intake. Many of the dogs who present poorly in a shelter environment do so out of fear; they behave completely differently once they leave the building and are outside.

HAS often destroys large numbers of dogs each month for behavior, sometimes as much as 8% of intake. We have made several recommendations over the years which have included having a staff member focus on just those dogs with the most behavior challenges to provide them with adequate enrichment and develop plans for their care. We have asked that the dogs who do the worst inside the building be housed outside during the day to reduce stress on the dogs and staff and make it easier for potential adopters to meet them (with supervision).

Would you promote or support HAS developing a more detailed plan to reduce the percentage of dog deaths due to behavior issues with the help of a consultant or expert?

Issue 4. Metro Shelter Operation. HAS has undergone a series of renovation projects in recent years to include turning an education room into CatWorld and improving the dog kennels so each dog has a double kennel area. The shelter was built approximately 20 years ago to house and destroy animals and no longer serves the public or the animals well. It is located a very short distance from the Greater Huntsville Humane Society; most people drive by GHHS to get to HAS. The location of the shelter (combined with the operation hours) make the current location less than ideal. We have proposed that the city consider construction of a metro facility to serve the City of Huntsville, Madison County (and perhaps even the City of Madison) and have that facility located further north. Lake County, Florida (which serves a population similar to that served by HAS), recently built a new shelter for approximately 8 million which is designed to be more welcoming to the public and less stressful for the animals.

Would you support the idea of a metro shelter facility as part of future plans for the city?

Issue 5. The Huntsville Animal Protection Act. We have long promoted the Huntsville Animal Protection Act which is a way to codify standards for the shelter operation. The city changed the city code related to animals in 2018; Dr. Robinson was instrumental in this process. The revision included some of the HAPA provisions we sought, but not all. There was resistance at the time to what John Hamilton called “legislating outcomes.” HAS has made vast changes in the last 7 years. We would like support to have the rest of the HAPA we sought enacted by the city. The things we seek are already being done. Putting them in the city code would be what we consider legacy legislation to prevent the shelter operation from reverting to a catch and kill model when the shelter director retires or different people are elected to lead the city. We see this as being similar to a police department that seeks CALEA certification to hold itself to a higher standard. We know CALEA relates to policies, but the intent is similar. The city holds itself to a higher standard moving forward and is proud of that fact. A copy of the HAPA is provided with these questions.

Would you support adoption of the provisions of the HAPA to ensure the city maintains the progress achieved to date at HAS and does not revert to old operating methods?