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NO KILL CONTACT

157 Million Reasons to Go No Kill

October 17, 2017, By [Nathan J. Winograd](#) | Comments (Closed)



A [new study out of the University of Denver](#) offers 157 million reasons for a city to embrace No Kill. The exact number — or rather, dollar value — is \$157,452,503. That’s the total positive economic impact the City of



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Austin, TX, has realized since passing Resolution 20091105-040, the “No Kill plan.” And, the study authors note, that’s “the most conservative possible measure of the data.” In other words, the true economic benefit is likely to be much higher.

The No Kill Plan

The No Kill plan was passed in November of 2009 and went into effect in early 2010. It included three main programmatic components:

- An “immediate moratorium on the [convenience killing] of animals if there were available kennels at the municipal facility”;
- Implementation of [the No Kill Equation](#) (offsite adoptions, medical care, behavior and training, pet retention, foster care, community cat sterilization, rescue partnerships, and community engagement); and,
- A mandated minimum live release rate of 90%.

(For a discussion of No Kill Equation programs, [click here.](#))

The University of Denver study measured “the social, environmental, and economic impacts” of the No Kill plan and found it had a positive impact on animal welfare, on human and public health, on social cohesion, and on the *bottom line*: leading to increased jobs, relocation of businesses to Austin, and more economic spending.

It also evaluated, and ultimately, debunked a lot of the criticisms made against No Kill, including that it is impossible (even in a city that serves over 31,000 animals

veterinary tele-care and save millions of animals

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a year), it leads to turning animals away and thus abandonment, it is too expensive, and that it threatens public safety by releasing dogs who bite and would have been killed in years past. It found no evidence for these propositions. And, in fact, found evidence against them. The report concludes that bite rates predate the No Kill plan, track human population growth, and more importantly, moderate to severe dog bites do not significantly vary and thus are not attributable to the resolution. In short, the dogs being saved are not a public safety threat.*

Here's just a summary of the findings:

Positive Impact on Animal Welfare

The No Kill plan resulted in significant increases in the adoption rate and a corresponding decrease in killing. Adoptions between the baseline year and the last year for which data was available showed dog adoptions were up 67% and cat adoptions were up 49%. Conversely, dog killing was down 94% and cat killing was down 91%. The live release rate went from 54% to 95% for cats and from 70% to 98% for dogs.

Impact on Costs and Benefits

While cost per animal went up about \$237, these costs were more than offset by the economic benefits. The study found that from 2010–2016, additional spending to implement the No Kill plan amounted to \$40,938,565. This expense, however, included those by non-profit organizations like Austin Pets Alive.

From the standpoint of city officials, however, the spending by APA is not a cost, but a benefit, as it shifts cost of care away from taxpayers and towards private philanthropy. The true cost — what the study calls the “No Kill premium” — to city taxpayers from 2010-2016 was roughly \$30 million, the majority of which was shelter staffing. Not only is staffing also a benefit as it provides employment and sources of additional community spending by those employed individuals, but the premium represents only a small increase in the overall City of Austin budget: from 0.2% to 0.3% or 1/10th of 1%.

Meanwhile, the additional spending by individuals within Austin on veterinary and pet care services as a result of the ordinance for the same period amounted to \$49,307,682. An additional \$25,333,237 was spent on other pet-related expenses as a result of the No Kill plan. These are additional expenditures, not total expenditures, and they are “attributable to the Resolution”: a total of \$74,640,919.

There were still other benefits: “creating a pet friendly environment will affect a city’s ability to attract new residents.” It will also attract businesses: Google’s decision to build a new office tower in Austin is directly attributable to the City’s No Kill plan. Google executives noted that “it is attractive to a young, vibrant, pet-loving workforce.” In turn, Austin’s pro-pet policies permeate throughout the community, leading to a wider pet friendliness, including on rates of rental housing, which in turn draws more people.

During the study period, Travis County’s population grew by 17.1%, resulting in an additional \$4.9 billion

spent on the local economy, of which \$72.3 million is “attributable to no-kill.”

Public Health/Social Cohesion Impacts

In addition to economic impacts of roughly \$150 million, the study finds broader social impacts including gains in public health and social cohesion. In other words, we know No Kill is good for animals — they live instead of die — but is it good for people? The answer is yes.

The study found that “increases in the rate of adoption can be connected to increased rates of pet-keeping in the community, which has been correlated with changes to pet-keeping individuals and families’ holistic wellness, including their physical, mental, and social health.”

Debunking the criticism from naysayers that No Kill leads to adoption of aggressive dogs, it found no variance in moderate and severe dog bites and that any increase in overall dog bites is attributable to the increase in the human and dog population, not the No Kill plan. (Given Austin’s 98% live release rate for dogs — and other communities that are even higher — it thus implicitly also debunked the notion that a 90% live release rate is the upper limit and thus constitutes No Kill.)

Finally, the study found that the No Kill plan is “positively associated with some forms of contact and interaction (civic engagement) and with perceptions of neighborhood friendliness” and “to the social and civil health of the city as a whole.” It also led to people looking out for animals by being more willing to report conditions of neglect/cruelty when they feel people are not living up to their responsibilities.

Study Errors

While full of good news on the effect of Austin's No Kill Plan, the report is not perfect. For example, it included costs borne by private organizations in the negative ledger column, rather than seeing a shift from taxpayers to private philanthropy as a gain, at least for taxpayers. It also suggested that length of stay issues — even when that happened in a foster home — should be balanced against lifesaving goals because of cost and potential stress on animals. As to cost, the economic benefits far outweighed costs by several-fold. As to stress, it can (and was) mitigated via socialization and training and time spent in foster care. For an animal, spending more time in the “custody” of a shelter, when that includes time spent in foster care (animals don't know it is a “foster home;” to them, it is just a home) or in a shelter where they are being walked, are playing with other dogs in groups, and have plenty of TLC does not necessarily equate with stress. In fact, as other studies have shown, in a well-run shelter, [stress actually goes down over time](#).

Moreover, even if it were true that the animals experienced greater stress than they otherwise would have during the duration of their stay at the shelter(s), to suggest that such stress is on par as a possible harm with killing is a false equivalency. While it is important to mitigate stress in a shelter environment as much as possible, killing, which is the ultimate harm, should never be posited as a viable alternative. Were such a study to have assessed the impact of foster care on orphaned children, for example, it would have been unthinkable to posit ending the lives of such children as a viable option to minimizing any stress children may

experience as a result of their unavoidable circumstances. Killing, except in the case of animals who are physically irremediably suffering, should never be seen as a tool for avoiding another outcome, for no other outcome could ever be as harmful to an animal.

Another concern about the study is that it did not fully measure local sales tax revenues from spending attributable to the No Kill plan — at the Austin rate, almost \$2 million in additional local revenues to city coffers during the same time period — as well as increases in property tax revenues from both new construction and the increasing value of existing properties as a result of economic growth driven by companies like Google coming to Austin. Had it done so, it would have found that these additional sources of government revenue helped offset some of the direct city expenses related to the increase in the municipal budget for animal services. Moreover, while it used *actual* costs, it used very conservative estimations for the economic benefits. Indeed, it used “the *most* conservative possible measure of the data,” meaning the benefits were more likely higher and therefore the offsets via sales tax and property tax revenues would be even more significant.

Finally, despite the positive economic impact in favor of the city, local businesses, and the overall economy of over \$157,000,000 with an investment of just over \$30,000,000 — a return on investment of over 400% — and an admission that costs were “more than offset” by benefits, the authors will not call No Kill a “cost effective” approach. This is a self-contradiction.

For one, the sample size — one community — is too small to draw such a general conclusion. Second, the

sales tax rate is only 1% — also small — and only one measure of direct revenue (property tax rates for both new construction and increasing value are another). Third, to the extent that government's role is not to enrich itself but to create economic vitality across its economy and population, Austin succeeded beyond even the most ambitious declarations. Fourth, budgets are not created with scientific precision. They are based on politics and wants. Admittedly they are often too low, but sometimes favored departments have pet projects that can be jettisoned without impact on live release rates or are higher than necessary to get the job done. Otherwise, how does one explain the numerous other communities who have achieved Austin-level live release rates at a lower *per capita* cost? Most importantly, however, it is contradicted by the study data itself. Indeed, “cost effective” may be the understatement of the year. Not only is No Kill cost effective in Austin, it created an economic windfall.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, the study “represents the most comprehensive analysis conducted to date of the impact of the City of Austin Resolution 20091105-040”; the No Kill plan. It just may be “the most comprehensive analysis conducted” regarding the economic and broader impacts of No Kill sheltering. It's conclusions are, therefore, transferable to other communities. These include:

- “The study found that a high LRR [Live Release Rate] is achievable at a municipal level.”
- “The costs associated with implementing the Resolution appear to have been more than offset by a series of economic

benefits to the community.”

In addition, “the positive contribution of Austin’s progressive animal welfare policies to its brand equity” leads it to “attract employee demographic that in turn draw new business and economic growth to the area.”

Finally, there are additional positive impacts on “public health, social capital, and community engagement” which has “important implications for Austin’s ability to promote and sustain the health and well-being of both its human and non-human animal residents.”

No Kill “can be legislated.” And it should be.

The study, “*Legislating Components of a Humane City: The Economic Impacts of the Austin, Texas ‘No Kill’ Resolution*,” is available by [clicking here](#).

** For those who falsely claim that No Kill means turning animals away, for example, the study notes that for the year 2016 when the City finished with a 98% live release rate for dogs and 96% for cats, the City accepted stray animals all year long, but did ask people who wanted to turn their animals in to wait until they had room for only 15 days of the year if it wasn’t an emergency. At the same time, they analyzed whether these policies increased stray intakes, increased the number of animals found DOA, or were relinquished to shelters in surrounding communities and they did not. In fact, stray pick up and DOAs declined from the baseline year. In short, there was no increase in abandonment.*