

GENE
LOCKE
for **MAYOR**

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As we look at how we have treated stray animals in Houston, we have not met a standard worthy of our great city. The facility where we house stray animals is an embarrassment to the city, we euthanize far too many animals and adopt out far too few. The Bureau of Animal Regulation and Care (BARC) is long overdue for reform. This is not only an issue of decency, but it is also a public safety and an economic issue.

We need a short term and long term strategy for BARC. Over the long term we need to look at a number of options with BARC. These options should include moving BARC out of city government into a public-private partnership on the model of the Houston Zoo and moving towards a no-kill shelter.

Leadership

The most immediate priority for BARC is finding permanent leadership for BARC. I believe that while the “change agent” brought on by Mayor White should be given the opportunity to kick-start reform, this is not a permanent solution. In looking for a permanent leader for BARC, there are a number of key goals that any applicant must set out to reach:

- Increased adoptions, decreased euthanasia –
 - The number of adoptions must increase. To be a truly humane city we need to do a much better job of adopting homeless and abandoned animals. BARC’s new director must have a track record that shows that he or she will be able to develop a plan to greatly increase adoptions.
 - While the long term goal of Houston’s animal shelter should be “no-kill” (with fewer than 10% of animals euthanized), in the short term there must be a drastic decrease in the number of animals that are euthanized in city care.
- Increase spay and neutering, increase interaction with SNAP –
 - The first step to reducing the number of stray animals that are euthanized is reducing the number of stray dogs and cats that are born on the streets. One of the requirements for the next director will be to find a way to increase funding for spay and neutering.
 - The Spay Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) has done an excellent job of helping owners all over the city spay and neuter their pets, especially in low income communities. The next director of BARC will work in close partnership with SNAP.
- Change the culture of BARC and the culture of those working for BARC –

- We need to make sure that all staff at BARC are well trained and treat animals with respect.

As mayor, I will personally review the progress towards these goals with the director on a monthly basis to ensure that we continue to move forward.

The Corridor of Cruelty

We know where most of Houston's illegal dumping and dog fighting occurs. I will work with HPD to set up a task force to address the "corridor of cruelty." We need to dedicate specific resources to solve this problem. In my first six months in office, we will direct efforts to clean up the corridor of cruelty.

- We need full time cruelty officer investigators at BARC. Animal cruelty is unacceptable and it is something we will prosecute when I am mayor.

Get the Public Involved

We need a sea-change in the public consciousness about BARC and about animal care in Houston. I will lead the way on this issue. I understand what it takes to educate people about BARC. I myself have gone through such an educational process over the course of the last few months. I have visited BARC and have spoken to officials at the City Health Department. I am committed to leading Houstonians through the process of education about how we treat the least among us.

- I will lead a large-scale public education drive on animal treatment issues. Everyone in Houston needs to take responsibility for their animals.
- This public awareness campaign must involve not only the City of Houston but Harris County and the animal rights community.

BARC's Status

Recently Mayor White's Administration moved BARC's budget out of the Health Department. The next mayor will have to determine the future of BARC in the immediate future and over the long term. One of my first actions as mayor will be to look at the short term future of BARC.

- In the short term I believe that BARC should remain outside of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services. During my first weeks in office I will determine if it is possible for BARC to stand alone as its own department.

- Over the long term we need to take a serious look at privatizing BARC similar to the Zoo model. While this will solve some of the problems that have been identified with BARC, such as difficulty raising private funds, it will require a new level of commitment and involvement from the animal rights community.

Funding for BARC

BARC clearly has serious budgetary needs. In a time when government needs to do more with less, the city's budget will not be able to address all of BARC's needs. As mayor, I will lead a capital campaign to raise private funds for a new facility at BARC, similar to the Discovery Green project. The funds raised for BARC will contribute, in part to the demolition and rebuilding of the current north kennel facility