

HUMANE SOCIETY of South Central Michigan

2011 Legislative Questionnaire

Candidate Name: Susan Baldwin Office Sought: Battle Creek Commissioner at Large

Candidate Committee: Committee for Susan Baldwin

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Candidate Address: 164 W. Hamilton Lane, Battle Creek, Mi 49015

1. Do you have any pets? If so, please list species, breed and name(s) of pets.

My husband and I have two dogs. They are both mixed breeds. The older one is a black, five year old retriever mix named Rusty (age is approximate). He weighs in at about 75 pounds. We adopted Rusty from the Humane Society of South Central Michigan in May 2007 when he was a little less than a year old – at least that was the estimate of his age. His name at that time in your records was Anthony. He was neutered while at the Humane Society.

We adopted Jenny, our mixed breed, brindle coat terrier in June 2009, from the Calhoun County Animal Shelter. She was about six months old. We had been told she was spayed but discovered in January 2010 that she was not. We had her spayed promptly. She weighs approximately 50 pounds.

Both dogs regularly have check-ups at Dickman Road Veterinarian Clinic and are micro-chipped.

2. Do you believe issues related to the population of stray dogs and/or cats negatively impact important development strategies in our community? If so, please explain.

Stray dogs and cats can be a real issue for neighborhoods and making places attractive to live. First, of course, is the unfortunate circumstance for the animal, being unloved and uncared for. Stray dogs which may have been abused and then left behind by their owners can become dangers. Stray cats can be the source of noise and smells. There are those who believe the stray animals can be a health hazard. Whether real or imagined, stray dogs or cats can negatively impact neighborhood revitalization efforts.

3. Do you believe the current municipal animal control budget provides adequate funding for its overall responsibilities? If not, please explain areas of critical need not currently provided by animal control.

Elected officials and residents may disagree on the level of animal control services that a city like Battle Creek needs. If we had the luxury of unlimited funding, additional animal control officers as well as more shelter facilities would be welcome. But the bottom line is, we need to live within our budget. The City of Battle Creek must provide police and fire services for the safety of its residents. Streets and water and sewer lines must be maintained, repaired and updated. We operate an airport which serves as a critical economic development asset. Our community is clamoring for more neighborhood parks and recreation facilities for children and

teens across the city. We must balance all of the citizens' and city's needs, and that includes making the most of the dollars available for animal control.

4. Do you believe that pet-friendly policies, particularly in downtown areas, can be important factors contributing to economic development or a more livable community? If so, please describe.

As we encourage and plan for more downtown living, we must develop appropriate policies for regulating pets in the urban area. Pets should be welcome as we want to encourage people to live downtown and many will want their beloved companions with them. But we have a right to expect pet owners to be responsible. In more congested areas, dogs should be leashed and controlled. And all waste should be immediately picked up.

The City of Battle Creek has a leash law. Most cities do. The laws often include license and pick-up-after-your-dog provisions. These ordinances are designed to protect both the dog and the public. A dog on a leash is safe from traffic and controlled from chasing children, investigating trash cans or digging up the landscape. Whether a dog is friendly or aggressive, a leash keeps him in check and allows the public to pass undisturbed.

Pooper-scooper laws are essential for both the health and beautification of the community. Canine diseases and parasites may be found in feces, which puts other dogs and children at risk. No one wants to maneuver around unsightly piles of dog waste when out for a walk. By requiring owners to pick up feces and dispose of it properly in appropriate waste receptacles, we can keep our downtowns user-friendly for both pet owners and the public.

5. How would you handle the feral or stray cat overpopulation problem in our community?

The City of Battle Creek is fortunate to have a local organization specially addressing the feral cat population. As they state on their web page, "Alley Cat Angels is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization comprised of local volunteers who are dedicated to actively addressing the overpopulation of homeless cats and kittens through a humane and effective feral cat management program known as Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)."

Established in 2002, the organization is working to reduce the numbers of feral and stray cats living outdoors in Battle Creek and across Calhoun County. One of my fellow commissioners is currently an active volunteer with Alley Cat Angels. She has explained the trap-neuter-return program and the practice of ear tipping to identify those cats which have been managed in the program.

6. If elected, would you support any form of canine breed restrictions?

This issue was taken up by the Battle Creek City Commission in the summer of 2005. An ordinance was requested by the animal control division of the Police Department which had included a section referring to pit bulls as nuisance animals that had to be muzzled in public and kept on a very short leash. The ordinance referred to pit bull terriers, American Staffordshire terriers, Staffordshire bull terriers and American pit bull terriers.

I was serving in my first term on the Commission at the time. The Police Department had provided information that as many as 80% of the city's vicious dog complaints were related to pit bulls. Further, that a substantial number of the dogs picked up by animal control were pit bulls.

While we recognized that the numbers were negative regarding pit bulls, we also noted that it's the owners that are the problem, not the animals. After hearing concerns from area residents, we voted to remove the breed-specific language from the ordinance.

7. If elected, would you support stricter penalties for animal related offenses such as neglect and abuse?

Battle Creek was the first community in Michigan to enact an ordinance regulating chaining of a dog outside. The ordinance, which I supported, was enacted during my first term on the commission and states that dog chaining must be limited to three hours a day.

Specifically, Section 608.09(a)(7) provides: [No person shall ... confine an animal on a tether unless ...] "For dogs, the tether is at least ten feet in length; the tether and collar, harness or other type of collaring device when taken together weighs not more than one-eighth of the dog's body weight and does not, due to weight, inhibit the free movement of the dog; the manner of tethering prevents injury, strangulation, or entanglement on fences, trees or other man-made or natural obstacles or objects; the collar, harness or any other type of collaring device being used is designed for that purpose and made from material that prevents injury to the dog; the period of tethering does not exceed one continuous hour, except that tethering of the same dog may resume after an hiatus of three continuous hours; and the dog is tethered no more than a total of three hours per day."

This language is just part of our ordinance related to animal cruelty.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the HUMANE SOCIETY 2011 Legislative Questionnaire process.

Susan Baldwin
Mayor, City of Battle Creek

Candidate for City Commission at Large