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# LAKE OCNEE

## HUMANE SOCIETY



## UPDATED STRATEGIC PLAN 2025 - 2028

JANUARY 2025



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# LETTER FROM THE BOARD

January 2025

Lake Oconee Humane Society (“LOHS”, formally known as ORHS) has been transitioning from a small local humane society towards a community center focused on the needs of the Lake Country’s pets and their caregivers. Steadfast in its mission to create a more humane community by reducing pet homelessness and help pets and their owners to have their best quality of life, our path to how we best meet the needs of our community requires some adjustment. Therefore, this is a revised version of the 2022 Strategic Plan.

Since the initial plan was developed in 2022 LOHS has worked with our volunteers and community partners to determine how to best address the challenges our pets and their families are facing. We’ve seen a drop off in our adoption rates but acceleration in our food distribution, low-cost spay & neuter, trap-neuter-return, community medical and miracle care programs. We can’t seem to help people with their pets enough. Unfortunately, the veterinary costs keep rising at the same time.

To better understand community support, the board engaged a consulting firm to conduct an assessment. Based on that feedback, we found the community to be in support of our direction, but not necessarily supportive of a new, expensive facility. We are flexing to be more focused on the non-adoption community programs in an effort to expand them within our existing walls.

This revised Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for LOHS’s future. It outlines a focused direction to create an animal services center that addresses the most critical issues of today while preparing for tomorrow..

Moving forward we remain committed to putting ideas into action that will result in a safer and healthier public and the best outcomes for animals.



# INTRODUCTION

In 2022, ORHS (now LOHS) developed a strategy to migrate from the existing small humane society into a community resource pet center for Georgia's Lake Country (focused on Greene and Putnam counties) to best meet the needs of our growing catchment area. Since the original strategic plan was drafted changes at the community and shelter have occurred and we're redirecting our efforts. While the end goal is still the same, the sequencing of the steps to get there has changed.

This revised LOHS Strategic Plan reflects the changing societal needs as LOHS has experienced them. Because we live in an area where there is significant economic diversity, we've become more focused on meeting the needs of the entire community.

Initially our focus was on starting with a new shelter so we can save more lives, but we've experienced a drop in adoption rates (which is consistent with other rescue organizations) and an explosion in the need for low-cost veterinary services and food distribution. So, we are refocusing to address the immediate needs as they evolve.

Our mission and vision remain unchanged and reflect the desire to work more with our community and build an organization that provides broader services for the overall health and wellbeing of its pets. This revised Strategic Plan lays out the roadmap for how to:

- Deliver traditional services
- Improve those services through new enrichment programs
- Enhance partnership with the community, both those that rely on us for services and those that provide services
- Operate in an efficient and effective manner

The Strategic Plan continues to be a living document that will be reviewed and revised to meet the changing needs of our community.



# HISTORY

ORHS was formed in 1999 by a group of residents with a common passion for animals. A small team of volunteers started by fostering animals in their homes while trying to get them adopted any way they could -- in including weekend road trips to Milledgeville, Athens and Conyers.

In 2004 ORHS became a 501c3 non-profit organization with a Board of Directors. In our adoption center (a limited admission facility) all incoming animals accepted were evaluated, medically treated and rehabilitated when needed. ORHS did not (nor does it today) receive any government funding but relies on the goodwill and generosity of individuals and corporations. Our volunteers ran the operations and did the necessary fundraising.

ORHS grew quickly. Within a few years, hundreds of cats and dogs were being rescued, adopted, and spayed or neutered annually. Thanks to a bequest, a low income Spay & Neuter program was added for residents of Greene and Putnam counties.

In 2012 ORHS was fortunate to find a small centrally located place to house its many cats and kittens with an area to temporarily hold a small number of dogs. Eventually we hired a few employees to help run the center, but we continued to rely on our volunteers for much of the shelter support and fund-raising activities. This is still true today.

In 2024 ORHS celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and changed its name to Lake Oconee Humane Society (“LOHS”) to clarify its geographic focus. In the 25 years of our existence, we’ve saved thousand of animal lives through our adoption, food distribution and community medical programs, and reduced homelessness by altering thousands of dogs and cats.

In 2025 our focus will be to grow our volunteer team and establish in-house veterinary services.

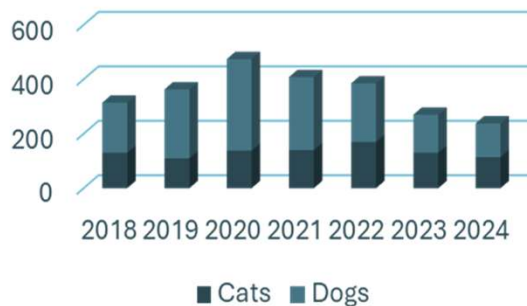
# HISTORY: LOHS BY THE NUMBERS

## Volunteers:

- Currently we have 175 volunteers who collectively contribute some 220 hours weekly: cat and dog care and feeding, walkers, front desk, publicity, spay & neutering scheduling, marketing, fund raising, food distribution and transportation
- Fosters (volunteers that care for cats and dogs in their homes while animals are awaiting adoption): 11 cat foster homes and 32 dog foster homes

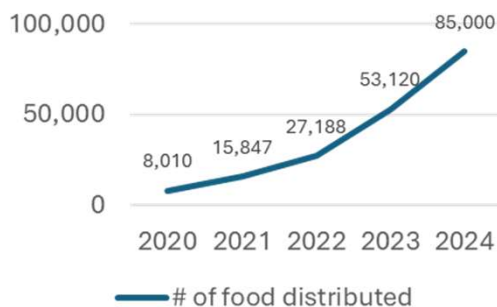
## Pet Care:

Pet Adoptions

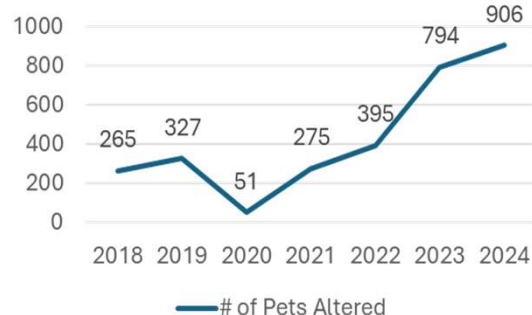


While our adoption numbers have decreased since COVID, food distribution and altering programs have exploded

Food Distribution



# of Pets Altered



# MISSION, VISION AND VALUES



LOHS is dedicated to creating a more humane community by reducing pet homelessness and helping pets and their owners have the best quality of life

## MISSION



LOHS envisions a community where companion animals live in a safe and loving home and the human/animal bond is honored by respect and compassion

## VISION

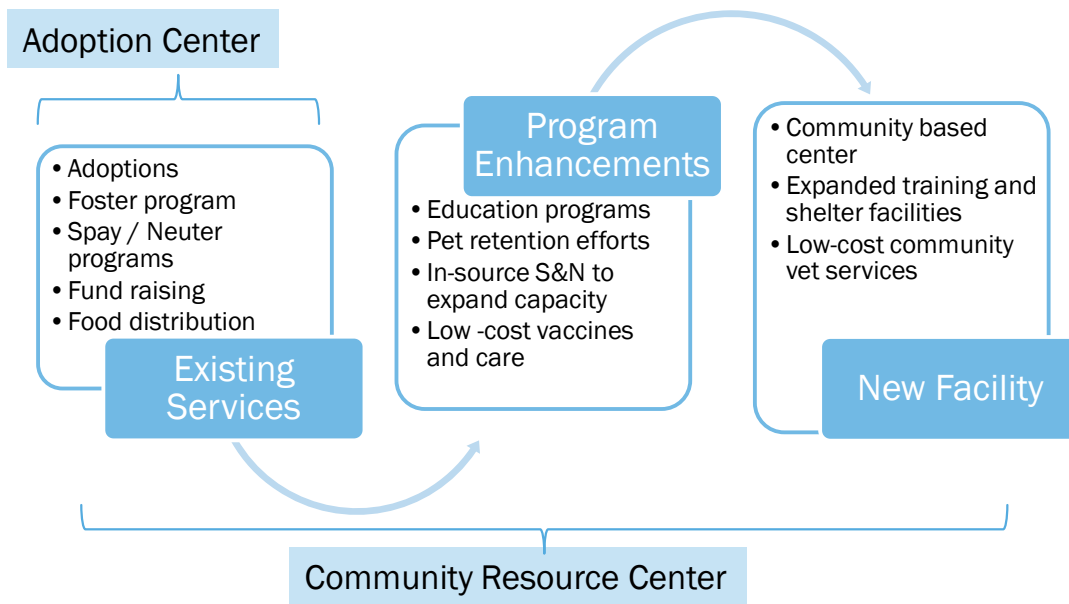
The way we operate to deliver our mission and strive to progress towards the vision includes key **VALUES** of:

- Compassion
- Integrity
- Fiscal responsibility
- Compliance with laws, and
- Teamwork



# DAY-TO-DAY AND LONG-TERM GOALS

LOHS strives to move from a local shelter to a Community Resource Center.



Significant effort and coordination is required to deliver our day-to-day services while we build out the enhancements and improvements as outlined in this Strategic Plan. New initiatives will be planned, developed and embedded into every-day activities. The result will be the Community Resource Center we hope to become.

The critical factors for the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan will be LOHS's ability to partner more broadly with the community. This will allow us to:

- Expand our volunteer base
- Increase fund-raising goals
- Improve / expand our brand
- Team with local pet professionals (veterinarians, trainers)



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities reflect our desire to build upon what we've started while expanding our efforts to consider the needs as outlined in "The 5 Freedoms".

## The 5 Freedoms

Our strategic priorities are intended to deliver on the promise of the 5 Freedoms for Animal Welfare (Farm Animal Welfare Council 2009):

- 1 Freedom from hunger and thirst
- 2 Freedom from discomfort
- 3 Freedom from pain, injury or disease
- 4 Freedom to express normal behavior
- 5 Freedom from fear and distress



Simply, we want to be able to do more for people and their pets.

Our goals remain unchanged and are:

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Reduce animal homelessness

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Optimize and enrich animal care

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Provide community education and outreach

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Drive operational excellence

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Foster financial growth and stability

# **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: REDUCE ANIMAL HOMELESSNESS**

LOHS’s core programs of rescue / adoption, fostering, food distribution and low-cost spay / neutering are geared towards reducing animal homelessness and keeping pets in their homes. But we can do better. Over the next 3-5 years we want to:

- Grow our successful rescue / adoption program
- Grow our foster program
- Become a resource for other rescue agencies to provide the spay / neuter program at a more affordable rates.

## **Goal 1A: Grow our successful rescue / adoption program**

Our enhancements to the existing rescue / adoption program will begin in January 2025 and continue to be developed and deployed throughout the year. We hope to build on early success each subsequent year.

Activity	Timeframe
Align adoption events with the community calendar	January each year
Expand adoption events venues	ongoing
Evaluate tech needs	2025
Develop training content for 1 <sup>st</sup> time adopters	2025
Develop pet retention strategies	2025
Expand relocation program / transport	2025
Develop and deploy pet ownership education materials	2025

# **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: REDUCE ANIMAL HOMELESSNESS**

## **Goal 1B: Grow the foster program**

Our enhancements to the existing foster program need to get started asap and continue to provide foster support.

Activity	Timeframe
Complete foster handbook with detailed guidelines, SOPs	2025
Create virtual foster program for older dogs and cats	2025
Create a network for fosters to communicate / collaborate	2025
Enhance awareness of the foster program	2025
Create foster family retention strategies	2025
Better utilize existing fosters	2025
Increase community collaboration	2025

## **Goal 1C: Enhance Spay / Neuter Program**

Our Spay & Neuter program has reached its limit with respect to partnering with others. To grow we need to consider a different model.

Activity	Timeframe
Bring Spay & Neuter in-house	Q2 2025
Identify new S&N partners	Q1 2025
Evaluate models to best meet short and longer term needs	Q1 2025

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: OPTIMIZE AND ENRICH ANIMAL CARE**

LOHS had hoped to be able to build a new facility by about 2027. However, after assessing the community’s appetite for financing a state-of-the-art building, we’re reprioritizing to optimize our existing space to enable growth of our community programs.

To meet this priority, we have identified several goals:

- Secure a vet
- Build (or rent) a surgical suite
- Identify partners to provide the volume to make pet care feasible
- Evaluate expansion of care into low-cost basic veterinary care for the underserved pet population

Concurrently with the build-out of the existing facility, LOHS will continue to look for opportunities to secure land / facility for the future home of LOHS. As we grow our community programs, LOHS will again assess support for such a facility in the future.

### **Goal 2A: Secure a vet**

Activity	Timeframe
Identify candidate for vet position	Jan 2025
Determine best approach to employment	Feb 2025
Negotiate vet employment arrangement	March 2025

### **Goal 2B: Build out surgical suite, or identify rental opportunity**

Activity	Timeframe
Identify needs: Equipment and staff	Feb 2025
Identify sources to purchase / hire	Feb 2025
Secure equipment	March 2025
Build-out space or rent until build is feasible	April 2025

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: OPTIMIZE AND ENRICH ANIMAL CARE**

We continue to be surprised by the appetite for our services, and the need for routine and emergent care for pets not accessing treatment from local veterinarians. As a natural extension of our low-cost spay & neuter programs, we will extend limited services to those who qualify.



*Goal 2C: Grow S&N programs and provide low-cost vaccinations and basic medical care to underserved area*



Activity	Timeframe
Expand spay & neuter program by opening it up to new shelter partners	Q2 2025
Undertake an analysis to define what services to provide and who would be eligible, and how (where) they can be treated	Q3 2025
Consider offering low-cost vaccines through partnerships with animal control or veterinarians	Q3 2025

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: OPTIMIZE AND ENRICH ANIMAL CARE**

### *Goal 2D: Re-evaluate needs for the LOHS community pet center and finalize timing*

While we are disappointed that a new center cannot be the top priority, we will continue to evaluate our ability to house a center that will ultimately enhance the services we provide to the community and improve the lives of animals in our custody.

Activity	Timeframe
Confirm internal / external space needs	2025
Update requirements for land / building	2026
Finalize center design and estimated cost modeling	2027
Run capital campaign for new building	2027-2028
Finalize center design	2027
Acquire property, hire contractor	2027
Manage / oversee construction	2028-2030



## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PROVIDE COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

One area we feel we can be impactful immediately is the development / expansion of our community outreach and educational programs.

*Goal 3A: Build relationships with schools, clubs, organizations to promote LOHS and animal well-being*

We need to focus on expanding our external footprint to make sure community members understand all we do and the value we deliver to our community

Activity	Timeframe
Build relationships with the schools to help build volunteer programs	2025
Build relationships with other organizations to foster cross support	2025-2026
Promote / advertise our community programs to increase awareness and participation	ongoing
Expand education efforts to include outreach to local organizations to provide content to be shared upon request and on the website	2025 - 2026



## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PROVIDE COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND OUTREACH**

### *Goal 3B: Develop a marketing plan that promotes our services via events, publicity and community partners*

Continue to enhance our brand awareness throughout the community so people have a better understanding of the breadth of our services. Key activities to do so include:

Activity	Timeframe
Create better external awareness by leveraging social media routinely, providing content to newspapers, work with partners to spread the word	2025
Expand strategic partnerships with, local businesses, and service organizations (BPOE, Rotary, etc.)	2025
Create intern opportunities, working with college students more broadly, and cross training our volunteers	2026

### *Goal 3C: Enhance website*

We will add educational content to our new website and keep it a hub for everything LOHS

Activity	Timeframe
Create blog / article content	2025
Select content resources	2025
Retain site manager for ongoing maintenance	Ongoing



## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: DRIVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

As we look to expand our services, it is critical that we do so in an efficient and effective way. Internalizing clinical services for our pets and low-cost S&N services to the community will require a different kind of support from our team.

Because LOHS relies on a volunteer labor force which allows us to allocate funds raised to care for the animals it will be of critical importance to manage the new services with the existing. Keeping our eye on executing the day-to-day activities while optimizing our resources is imperative. As workflows and technologies are introduced and changed, volunteer roles will need to be considered.

### *Goal 4A: Build out veterinary capability*

Activity	Timeframe
As outlined in our first two priorities, we will attempt to insource veterinary services for S&N programs, and day-to-day care for our animals. Key steps include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hiring a vet</li><li>• Determine best way to bring program up in terms of space and employment relationship</li><li>• Evaluate and secure necessary technology</li><li>• Secure equipment and supplies</li><li>• Source vet tech</li></ul>	2025

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: DRIVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

### *Goal 4B: Grow and manage volunteer program*

As we have grown, our volunteer pool hasn't kept pace, mostly because of the demographics of that team. We need to make sure our volunteer team has the tools they need to do their jobs while growing the team.

Activity	Timeframe
Optimize our volunteer platform <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Track hours</li><li>• Communicate with communities</li></ul>	2025
Create a volunteer handbook that documents key training as well as operational information	2025
Working with the Volunteer Advisory Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• determine if we need a culture reset for our volunteers</li><li>• Create new volunteer opportunities that attract a more diverse group of volunteers</li><li>• RECRUIT</li><li>• Working with the VAB, explore volunteer retention strategies including:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating a buddy-system</li><li>• Build volunteer follow-up and exit interviews, and surveys</li></ul></li></ul>	2025

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: DRIVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE**

### *Goal 4C: Manage key programs*

While our food distribution and S&N programs grew and others stayed about the same or shrunk, all need to be managed to ensure they stay relevant and vital. This is largely done by a combination of our staff and volunteers, and we must make sure to operate them effectively.

Activity	Timeframe
Provide appropriate program management, including tracking and documentation to optimize our community programs and increase adoptions with or without transport.	Ongoing



## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: FOSTER FINANCIAL GROWTH & STABILITY**

We're very proud of our fund-raising efforts and very appreciative of our donors. How we do what we do is 100% dependent on their efforts and contributions, and we have been successful in securing the funds needed to deliver the services we provide. Under-taking in-house veterinary services will require keen attention to quality, and throughput. We will need to be diligent about our financial planning, and make sure we optimize our resources.

### *Goal 5A: Develop annual fundraising Plan*

Our approach is designed to build upon past success with discipline and create new opportunities to raise income to support current and future programs.

Activity	Timeframe
Set goals for fundraising and donations <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review software options</li><li>• Create fundraising / event calendar</li><li>• Build individual event marketing plans</li><li>• Assign volunteers for each event</li></ul>	Annual
Consider new funding opportunities, e.g. matching gifts, crowd funding, giving tiers	2025
Evaluate donor analytics to create a retention strategy	2025 - 2026
High Donor event and strategy	2025
Explore challenge grants with local businesses	2026
Leverage celebrity endorsements	2026

## **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5: FOSTER FINANCIAL GROWTH & STABILITY**

*Goal 5B: Secure grant monies for key strategic initiatives and on-going care*

Activity	Timeframe
Investigate additional sources for future grants	ongoing
Increase grant submissions, continue to work relationships with grantors, especially Fix Georgia Pets	Ongoing

*Goal 5C: Exercise prudent budget management with goal of net zero budget*

We will continue successful financial management as we grow our programs and initiatives. To do so we will:

Activity	Timeframe
Minimize expenses	Ongoing
Maximize use of volunteers	Ongoing



# PLAN IMPLEMENTATION & TRACKING

The Strategic Plan is meant to be a living document that will evolve over time as we improve existing processes and implement new programs. The timing of the specific efforts identified may change as some will be easier than anticipated, and others will be delayed due to LOHS capacity. We will track our progress towards specific goals to ensure effective execution.

## *Implementation*

A key to the successful implementation of this plan is to embed changes and improvements into the existing fabric of the organization. Strategic Plan activities must become part of the existing management and culture of the organization.

The implementation of this plan will include checkpoints for assessing progress towards goals. This will require good program management throughout the organization. Program management will include oversight, but also evaluation and monitoring of each program area. As with any plan, these changes are fluid and may require adjustments over time. There will need to be a realistic appreciation of what is possible to accomplish given current commitments and time constraints.

Core services such as animal care, rescue and adoption, food distribution, low-cost Spay & Neuter and Trap-neuter-return (TNR) cannot be compromised by new initiatives and responsibilities.



## Tracking

Program management will be the responsibility of LOHS Management and the Board.

Using metrics to monitor progress for improving existing processes and implementing new initiatives will enable LOHS to track execution success for the Strategic Plan.

- Monthly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – Tracking and reporting metrics for intake, fostering, adoption, donations etc. (KPIs were developed as part of the detailed strategic plan) will guide management and the executive team in assessing progress towards goals
- LOHS personnel and committee leads– Reviewing progress with teams (volunteers and board committees) via periodic written summaries that outline progress towards goals, obstacles encountered, and changes / help needed that will help keep LOHS moving towards its’ goals
- Board of Directors– Meet and review overall progress and make strategic adjustments quarterly over the timeline of the strategic plan.



## High level timeline

Balancing every-day activities while building out new programs can be challenging and will require discipline and exceptional project management. Many of the new initiatives will eventually be incorporated into new and improved daily activities, and future initiatives will be innovated as needed.

In an effort to illustrate how the projects that support the goals will work, we've created a chart that illustrates the initial (project / new initiative) and on-going efforts expected over the duration of this Strategic Plan.

	2025	2026	2027	2028
<b>Reduce Homelessness</b>				
Grow adoption program				
Grow foster program				
Expand spay/neuter program				
<b>Optimize Animal care and Enrichment</b>				
Develop timeline for new building				
Create plan to optimize current space				
Provide low-cost vax & basic medical treatment				
<b>Provide Community Education / Outreach</b>				
Build relationships with community				
Develop marketing plan promoting brand				
Enhance website educational / blog content				
<b>Operational Excellence</b>				
Build veterinary capability				
Manage and grow key programs				
Grow and manage volunteer program				
<b>Financial growth and Stability</b>				
Annual fund-raising campaign				
Capital campaign				
Grants				
Budget management				
		Project / New Initiative		
		On-going Services		



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## CLOSING THOUGHTS

LOHS remains committed to serve the best interests of the community and its companion animals. This Plan is documentation of that commitment and shows how this organization will achieve that commitment. The Strategic Plan will guide the actions of the staff and volunteers of the organization and is intended to help the organization have a greater impact in the community. Continued involvement from individuals who care about the work of the organization will be necessary to achieve the goals outlined herein.

As LOHS moves forward, we will continue to assess our customers' needs, both animal and human, and offer the highest quality services available. As the needs of our community change, we will attempt to adjust priorities to meet them. When resources do not exist, we will evaluate the opportunities to develop plans for how those gaps can be filled. Reassessment and revision will be needed in time as environments and resource availability changes. LOHS is committed to having this plan drive its continued success.

