

Humane Society to move out of shelter

By Molly Archer
editor-in-chief

The Oxford-Lafayette Humane Society (OLHS) will move out of the Oxford animal shelter on Sept. 30. The shelter announced their closing this August claiming that overcrowding was becoming too large of an issue to continue running.

"We've [the city] had a relationship with [OLHS] for the past 25 years, but they told me last month that they couldn't do it anymore because they had absolutely too many animals," Alderman and Liaison with the Humane Society Janice Antanow said. "Their capacity is 100 in that shelter, maximum, and they had sometimes over 200 animals. They feel like they're just not making any progress. They're very concerned about that. They just seem to be getting more and more animals all the time and because people are not spaying or neutering their animals, they decided to deal with this problem from a different perspective."

Since opening in 1982, the Humane Society has had many issues with overpopulation. In order to combat this issue, they have decided to focus on creating a low-cost or free spay and neuter service.

"We decided it was time to make a drastic change and to let somebody else run the shelter, and we would focus on spay/neuter, and that's what we're going to do," OLHS board member Cindy Leigh said. "Now, [closing] is temporary. The City is going to get somebody else to run the shelter. They've put out a call for proposals."

According to Antanow, the shelter itself will be closed for renovation and cleaning for six to eight weeks after Sept. 30, and during this time, the city will hopefully find another group to take over the shelter's responsibilities.

"What we did is we put an ad in the paper and on our website for proposals, and we have gotten three different groups who have picked up the packet," Antanow said. "They'll put in the proposal for managing the shelter, and along with that goes animal control. We'll know on the 20th if and how many people have applied, and then we'll look over the applications and schedule interviews probably right away—maybe the next day—so we can decide who we want to contract with, and their contract will begin Oct. 1."

The contractual agreements for the new group will generally remain the same as OLHS, but the new contract requires the shelter to only take in animals from the Oxford and Lafayette County areas according to Antanow. The shelter has previously been an open admission shelter, so anyone could drop off an animal whether it was from the Oxford-Lafayette area or not.

"These other counties have had a free ride for years now, and it's their time that they stepped up and took care of their own animals," Antanow said. "It's something that every county should be doing. And because we had a shelter and they had a philosophy that the Humane Society was an open shelter, the surrounding counties just kind of took advantage of it, and didn't take care of their own business."

Antanow believes that making the animal shelter a

closed shelter will assist with the issue at hand. According to Lee Habeeb, another member on the OLHS Board, overcrowding was "the only reason [they] closed the shelter."

"Our goal is to fully commit to lowering the animal population through a very strong commitment to low cost and free spay and neuter services," Habeeb said. "It is the only direction we felt we could responsibly choose, and we hope to reverse this problem in the near future with the proper focus."

While the spay and neuter service is not up and running yet, Leigh hopes OLHS can begin working on the new project within the next year.

"It's going to take us probably until December to get the major plans made," Leigh said. "Sometime early in 2019, we hope we'll start to implement whatever we put in place, and I still don't know exactly what that's going to be."

According to Leigh, spaying and neutering animals is one of the main contributions to the large population of animals at the shelter.

"Overpopulation has been a continuous problem ever since we opened, but it's gotten worse as the area of Oxford has gotten bigger," Leigh said. "People have more animals, and if they don't get them fixed that means more and more animals if you do the math. It escalates in a hurry. The animals come in by the dozens everyday, and they don't go out as fast as they come in and you've got to try to figure out what you're going to do with the rest of them."

There are still a few animals at the shelter. The Humane Society asked anyone who would be willing to adopt to do so before they closed on Sept. 30. The animals not able to find homes will be taken by the ASPCA to be distributed to different shelters around the United States. According to Leigh, none of the animals will be euthanized in the moving process.

"ASPCA is an all-breed rescue across the United States, so they'll take them where they think they can get adopted," Leigh said. "It's mainly not the south. They'll take them to the East or North/Central area where they have strong spay/neuter laws and not enough puppies to fill them."



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