



Town Cats Strategic Plan 2015-2017

LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Dear Friends of Town Cats:

We are happy to share with you our first-ever Strategic Plan. The creation of this document has been a collaborative effort, an adventure and a learning experience. Through this process we did an assessment of where we are today and we dared to dream of how we would like to succeed in the future. This Town Cats Strategic Plan 2015 – 2017 is our roadmap, a thoughtful analysis of our programs and our goals. We thank you for your vital participation in this process and we encourage your feedback and ongoing participation and partnership.

Town Cats is an amazing, diverse group of people dedicated to the welfare of cats in our community. Our supporters, volunteers, donors, staff, adopters and partners work together to improve the status of all cats in our community. We are honored to be part of this ever-growing team of hardworking, kindhearted, generous people. We are committed to being faithful stewards for Town Cats; we are intent on fulfilling our mission to save and improve the lives of cats in our community as we guide, strengthen and grow the organization itself.

Join us!

Beth Ward, President Board of Directors

Pat Abreu, Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Town Cats has served the community of Santa Clara County for over 15 years, working to help homeless cats by rescuing and placing cats of all kinds into safe and loving homes. Known for making the impossible possible, Town Cats has specialized in serving cats that society has largely ignored - special needs cats such as prewean bottle baby kittens, cats who are feline leukemia (FeLV) positive and/or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) positive, and feral or community cats who roam the streets and live among us - cats frequently in need of veterinary assistance such as spay/neuter services. We educate the public on cat issues and we promote the spaying/neutering of all companion animals and the TNR of community cats. Led by our Founder, Rosi Mirko, who saved feline and human lives alike with her compassion, passion and hard work, Town Cats has become a local resource, particularly in South Santa Clara County, for cat lovers.

In July 2013, Rosi Mirko tragically passed away, within just a year of her husband, Albert Mirko, also a driving force within Town Cats. As a Founder-driven organization, the loss of Rosi and Albert was deeply felt across the organization and drove Town Cats into a period of

significant transition and change as new leaders gathered the pieces of Town Cats and tried to move the organization forward. After addressing the most pressing issues within the organization, the Town Cats Board of Directors decided to engage in a strategic planning process to establish new goals and a refreshed vision for the future. Town Cats contracted with Olive Grove in September 2014 in an inclusive, five-month planning process. Some of the questions the process sought to address included:

- How can Town Cats best honor founder Rosi’s legacy in an authentic way, while also moving the organization toward continued improvement and sustainability?
- What is the geographic area Town Cats should commit to?
- What is Town Cats’ role in the community? A rescue, a shelter? As part of the WeCARE coalition?
- How can Town Cats best balance financial sustainability with its intake policies and commitment to being “no kill”?

We took a collaborative approach to the strategic planning process engaging staff, volunteers, donors, and clients in various capacities to develop a plan that truly reflects the culture and needs of Town Cats. The Executive Director and Board members partnered with Olive Grove to drive the process and decision-making, and staff members provided valuable feedback and support in creating the action plan.

The concrete deliverables of the strategic planning process include this narrative, an action plan that can be updated in real time over the next three years, a 2015 budget and five-year financial goals. Just as importantly, the strategic planning process provided an opportunity for Town Cats to reflect on its successes and engage the community in developing a long-term vision for the future.

TOWN CATS HISTORY

TIMELINE

In 1997 Rosi Mirko founded Town Cats, an adoption center and sanctuary for cats, with the support of her husband Albert. Rosi was the driving force behind Town Cats, working tirelessly to save countless lives and inspiring others to do the same. She changed the landscape of the animal welfare community of Santa Clara County by championing feral cats, and promoting the humane TNR Trap/Neuter/Return method to control their populations. Under Rosi’s guidance Town Cats became an integral part of the Feral Freedom program, through which thousands of community cats are spayed/neutered and released to live out their lives.

In 2008 Town Cats joined the WeCARE coalition of animal shelter organizations in Santa Clara County, along with five other shelters. WeCARE is the Community Alliance to Reduce Euthanasia whose goal is "working together to provide a home for every animal."

WeCARE was formed to increase adoptions and spay/neuter surgeries, increase the communication between organizations and to heighten community-wide awareness about saving healthy and treatable animals. The WeCARE alliance of public and private shelters and rescues exemplifies what can be accomplished when groups come together to maximize everyone's strengths for the benefit of the animals. Rosi and Town Cats brought a unique perspective to the alliance, with the focus on feral cats and the promotion of the Trap/Neuter/Return model.

In 2013 Rosi passed away, and over the past 18 months we have been working to continue the work she started while also establishing a foundation for Town Cats to build upon for the future. In March 2014 we hired longtime volunteer Patricia Abreu as our first Executive Director. During 2014 we added Beth Ward and Ann Wondolowski to the Board of Directors and focused on hiring key managers and employees to establish an operational core for the organization.

Town Cats has rescued, helped, and adopted out thousands of friendly cats to loving families in the 17+ years we have existed. We look forward to continuing this mission going forward.

CURRENT STATE

Town Cats currently provides the following programs to the community in Santa Clara County: Rescue, Foster, Adoption, Community Cats, Food Pantry and Community Support.

Medical and Supportive Care

Our intake of cats is largely from the other WeCARE shelters in Santa Clara County. We help alleviate overcrowding in these shelters and provide medical care and housing for these cats as we prepare them to be ready for adoption. We have close to 70 volunteers who foster animals, and we also have our own housing facilities for the cats in our care. Our focus is to take in cats who otherwise may not be able to be cared for by the shelters and to ensure that all of these cats have an opportunity find a good home.

Foster

Town Cats has a group of volunteers who open their hearts and homes to temporarily care for many of our cats. We have over 70 volunteers in our Foster Program, who care for the cats until they are able to be put up for adoption. Through the help of these volunteers, we are able to increase our capacity to care for cats as well as provide homes for cats who otherwise may not be able to be helped.

In our Foster Program, our volunteers create a vital link in the network that saves animals in Santa Clara County.

There are six common reasons cats/kittens are in foster care:

- They are too young and/or underweight to be placed up for adoption
- A momma cat and her nursing kittens need a home environment where they can feel safe and receive proper socialization
- Cats or kittens may need time to recuperate from an illness or injury
- Cats may need socialization or behavior modification
- A senior cat or severely ill cat may need hospice type care in their final days
- Town Cats is out of space in our own facilities to care for an incoming cat

As soon as the foster cats/kittens are ready to be adopted they are either placed in one of our Adoption Centers if there is space, or we make them available for adoption at our weekend Adoption Fairs while they continue to live with their Foster Parents.

Adoption and Forever Homes

We run 8 Adoption Centers at partner pet food stores throughout Santa Clara County. Through these centers we have adopted out 692 cats in 2014 and 632 in 2013. Our staff and volunteers work with potential adopters to help them understand how to select the best cat for their family situation and ensure that the adoption is a good match. We strive to secure loving, permanent homes for the cats in our care. We provide post-adoption support for adopters, answering questions and helping to ensure that our adoptions are successful.

Community Cats

Town Cats has always been the champion of all cats, and we have historically been one of the few organizations with a focus on feral or community cats in the area. We continue our founder Rosi's work today with our Community Cat programs, which strive to help manage the population of community cats through TNR, as well as to place unsocial, working cats in barns, gardens, wineries, warehouses or on ranches.

Town Cats has always been a strong proponent of TNR for free-roaming community cats. It is the proven, humane way to reduce cat populations and increase the overall health of existing cat colonies. We are community cat advocates and we work in our community to educate the public on TNR and best practices for community cat colony care. We educate the public about the cat overpopulation problem and provide people with the tools they need to become part of the solution. Town Cats supports individuals who want to help through progressive, low or no cost spay/neuter programs and by providing cat food to low income cat guardians, feral cat colony caregivers, and foster families.

As part of our WeCARE efforts, representatives from Town Cats are the "R" return part of TNR in the Feral Freedom program. Community cats are spayed/neutered, vaccinated, microchipped,

and ear tipped at the participating shelters (SJACS, HSSV, SVACA, and the Santa Clara County Shelter) and then the Town Cats teams pick up the cats in the cities of San Jose, Milpitas, Santa Clara, and San Martin and return the healthy, altered cats back to their home territories. Last year 3,142 community cats were helped through the Feral Freedom program and the WeCARE Coalition in Santa Clara County. In 2013, there were 2,748 cats who went through the Feral Freedom program getting vital veterinary care before going back home.

In addition, we operate a Food Pantry to provide cat food for cat owners and community cat colony caregivers who need assistance to take care of their cats. We work with local pet food stores, businesses and donors to get donated food to stock the pantry. Through the generosity of these businesses and donors, we are able to help many needy cats and the people who care for them.

Town Cats focuses on ensuring that all cats get a loving home and in helping owners to be able to keep their cats once they have them. We provide consultation, information and references to owners who are having behavioral or other issues with their cats. At our Adoption Centers we regularly answer questions and help current or potential cat owners to understand how to care for their cats to ensure long-lasting support and care is provided and the human-cat bonds are strengthened in our community.

STAFFING AND FINANCES

Town Cats currently has 17 full or part-time staff and over 150 volunteers to care for the cats in our care and operate our programs and services. Our operating budget is roughly \$850,000 annually.

DISCOVERY FINDINGS

PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS

The Town Cats Board engaged stakeholders (volunteers, staff, funders, adopters, fosters and donors) in a discovery process during September and October 2014 to gather feedback about the organization to inform its future direction. The methods for gathering information included one-on-one interviews, focus groups, a group staff-interview, and a survey which generated 163 responses. Questions focused on program impact and operations, volunteer/donor/client experience, community and partner needs, organizational culture and values, and what would define success for Town Cats.

PRIMARY TAKEAWAYS

Town Cats has endured significant transition in the last two years, and both the infrastructure and people involved with the organization are reflecting the strain of that transition. Some of the key themes from the feedback gathered are outlined below.

- TNR and Feral Freedom programs are core strengths for the organization and Town Cats is seen as the strongest community cat advocate in the area.
- Foster care and Adoption programs are strong individually but the coordination between the programs does not enable efficient movement of cats.
- While Town Cats has operated with informal guidelines, the development of systems and infrastructure can enable consistent and quality operations in the future, as well as provide clarity around staff and volunteer roles.
- Town Cats has tremendously committed volunteers, who require more communication, support, appreciation and accountability.
- Town Cats is a valued member of the WeCARE coalition, and could continue to deepen relationships to benefit the whole Coalition's efforts to achieve a 90% save rate.
- The organization will need to increase its contributed revenues in order to sustain operations at their current level.

When asked about what stakeholders would like to see in Town Cats three to five years down the road, they mentioned primarily these elements of success:

- Grow the organization while maintaining quality of programs and sustainability of the operation.
- Expanding visibility through multiple channels (online, in community, word of mouth, etc.)
- Partner with other community organizations to increase impact and expand the number of cats and their owners served.
- Formalizing Town Cats' role as a leader in feral and community cat advocacy.

The mission is simply, a no-kill rescue center, with compassion and respect for all cats.

There were several factors that stakeholders cited as external dynamics that may impact Town Cats in the future: the growth of South County population as Silicon Valley expands; a shifting political climate and changing feral cat laws; the increasing cost of land and real estate; and the potential erection of a new animal shelter in South County.

MISSION AND VISION

Town Cats is dedicated to the welfare of all cats in Santa Clara and is unique in its commitment to serving special needs cats who might otherwise be abandoned by society. During the strategic planning process the Board of Directors reviewed the mission statement of the organization to determine if any adjustments needed to be made. While the Board wishes to potentially streamline the mission statement in the future, the intent and meaning of the mission remain relevant for the organization and its goals, expressed as:

We work to alleviate the suffering of stray, abandoned, unwanted, and free-roaming community cats in Santa Clara County. We sponsor innovative programs to help cats in traditional shelters in our county, as well as community cats who live outdoors. We educate the public about the cat overpopulation problem, and provide people with the tools to become part of the solution. Town Cats supports individuals who want to help through aggressive spay/neuter and cat care programs, and by providing vet care and cat food to low income cat guardians, fosters, or owners. We find permanent, safe, and loving homes for the homeless house cats and kittens in our care.

Incorporating the feedback gathered in the discovery phase, the Board of Directors discussed and determined who Town Cats serves and where they are served, and what the primary model is for the organization:

- Town Cats serves both cats and humans throughout Santa Clara County; and
- Town Cats operates as rescue and temporary housing resource for cats in transit to their forever homes.

Clarifying these parameters will serve as decision-making filters for the organization as it addresses new opportunities and challenges and will also define a new level of intent and ambition for Town Cats.

Town Cats leadership also sought to define what success would look like for the organization over the long-term (ten to twenty years). In addition to supporting the WeCARE Coalition goal of achieving a 90% save rate across Santa Clara, Town Cats defined its vision as:

People in all of Santa Clara County care about cat welfare for cats of all kinds (domestic, feral, special needs), value cats as members of their family, and recognize the enrichment created by the cat/human bond.

This vision statement reflects the understanding that while Town Cats serves cats, it serves humans equally. In order to ensure the safety, health and happiness of a cat, the cat requires a

dedicated human companion who values the cat as a member of the family. As such, Town Cats will strive to build feline champions across Santa Clara County so that cats are not perceived as a problem to be solved by the fabled “crazy cat lady,” but as companions who deserve to be supported and respected by people, even if the person does not own a cat.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

OVERVIEW AND LOGIC MODEL

To begin to progress towards its vision, Town Cats developed three-year outcomes across four formally defined programs. Each program reflects activities that Town Cats has been engaging in for much of its 15-year plus history, but seeks to further define and refine the programs to increase their efficacy. The next three years at Town Cats will focus on leveraging strengths and past achievements, and developing a sustainable infrastructure that can support growth three to five years into the future.

To make explicit its commitment to developing the appropriate organizational foundation, Town Cats has included in its logic model below four areas for capacity building to supports its programs. Specific activities and goals for these four areas are outlined in the next section – Investing in Organizational Capacity.

Programs			
Foster Care	Adoptions and Forever Homes	Community Cats	Medical and Supportive Care
3 Year Outcomes			
Foster Program operates smoothly with high volume of Town Cats and WeCARE cats being made available and adopted, with an average length of stay of 5 weeks, and	All adoption centers are well run with strong partnerships that result in an average length of stay of 30 days or less.	TNR and other community cat support, advocacy and education programs support 90% save rate goal with WeCARE partners.	Town Cats has a single facility with basic onsite veterinary care that provides intake and supportive care for “in transit” cats.

maximum stay of 6 months.

Vision

People in all of Santa Clara County care about cat welfare for cats of all kinds (domestic, feral, special needs), value cats as members of their family, and recognize the enrichment created by the cat/human bond.

Organizational Foundation

Committed and Knowledgeable Talent	Sustainable Business Model	Sound Systems and Processes	Proactive Community Engagement and Partnerships
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THREE-YEAR GOALS AND OUTCOMES

For each programmatic outcome, Town Cats set three-year goals to support its achievement. These are detailed below beneath their associated outcome, and have been assigned specific activities, timing and owners in a twelve-month action plan developed by the staff leadership team.

Foster Program operates smoothly with high volume of Town Cats and WeCARE cats being made available and adopted, with an average length of stay of 5 weeks, and maximum stay of 6 months.

1. Formalize Foster Care program goals, processes and policies.
2. Communicate Foster Program to staff, volunteers and stakeholders.
3. Train and educate existing volunteers on new policies and procedures.
4. Recruit and train additional foster volunteers.
5. Ensure medical and supportive care for fostered animals is accessible (location and timing) to all volunteers.

All adoption centers are well run with strong partnerships that result in an average length of stay at Town Cats of 30 days or less.

1. Recruit more adoption counselors to ensure consistent coverage at adoption sites and enable growth into new sites.

2. Conduct adoption fairs every weekend at each adoption site and at headquarters (currently 8 sites total).
3. Assess and maximize the efficiency of adoption sites. This may include site additions and removals and managing cat variety at each site.
4. Develop and document an emergency plan for cats that need to be moved from adoptions sites for medical reasons.
5. Enhance marketing efforts to increase number and frequency of adoptions overall.
6. Promote responsible lifetime guardianship to ensure adoptions into forever homes.

TNR and other community cat support, advocacy and education programs support 90% save rate goal with WeCARE partners.

1. Individually rehabilitate and place Town Cats unsocial/feral cats in working homes or managed colonies.
2. Promote TNR and best practices in community cat colony management.
3. Support WeCARE partners through the Feral Freedom program.
4. Develop a robust food pantry and education program to empower and support colony caregivers.
5. Formalize the definition of community cats and Town Cats' role in supporting them.

Town Cats has a single facility with basic onsite veterinary care that provides intake and supportive care for “in transit” cats.

1. Formalize the intake process to ensure all cats are appropriately assessed and placed.
2. Establish a medical fund with clear parameters to provide care for Town Cats cases outside of normal care.
3. Develop resources for low or no cost spay/neuter and veterinary services.
4. Develop a robust food pantry for financially distressed families.
5. Hire and train staff and volunteers to provide authorized, basic supportive medical care onsite or offsite for Town Cats' cats.
6. Enhance partnerships with medical providers.

In addition to the goals described above, Town Cats has adopted two program-wide goals – documentation and integration.

Town Cats staff and volunteers will work to document program goals, policies, processes, lessons learned, and best practices in order to provide a base of knowledge that will withstand transition and turnover. Staff leaders will also focus on the integration of the four, formal programs at Town Cats so that each supports and furthers others. This integration will ensure that a cat's journey through Town Cats, from intake to adoption, is as low stress as possible. It will

also enable Town Cats to decrease the length of time a cat is within the organization's care, which will in turn enable Town Cats to serve more cats with fewer resources.

RESOURCE ALIGNMENT

In order to achieve its outcomes, Town Cats will need to align its resources appropriately to allow for new investments and necessary shifts in cost structure. After the passing of founder Rosi Mirko in 2013, Town Cats needed to make significant investments in staff and other support in order to replace the incredible void of a leader who served in every organizational function and held most of the institutional memory. Due to those investments and limited contributed revenue, Town Cats is currently operating at a deficit. In order to eliminate the imbalance, the Board of Directors has set a goal of decreasing the deficit in 2015 by roughly 10%, and continuing to decrease the deficit by 20% each year over four more years to achieve a balanced budget in 2019. This will require significantly increasing the diversity and depth of contributed revenues over the next several years, as well as streamlining organizational operations to reduce expenditures and securing in-kind resources.

INVESTING IN ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Town Cats has operated with a largely informal culture that relies heavily on volunteers to take on extraordinary commitments and problem solve without a strong organizational infrastructure to support them. Without the capacity to fully document policies, processes and roles, staff and volunteers have had to rely on their abilities to find resources where available and make decisions across a broad range of functions. As Town Cats looks to the future, the organization's leadership is committed to building a resilient foundation for the organization that will support staff and volunteers in effectively and efficiently carrying out their work in meeting Town Cat's mission. Over the next three years, Town Cats will focus on developing:

COMMITTED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE TALENT

Town Cats has exceptionally committed volunteers and has long been recognized as a reliable resource for information on feline care and community cats. Town Cats will continue to build on these strengths to achieve a workforce suited to its vision in the community by engaging in the following:

- Develop a robust volunteer program with dedicated staff to support recruitment, training, engagement and appreciation.
- Recruit and train new and existing volunteers to support programmatic work, particularly

in the Foster and Adoptions and Forver Homes programs.

- Recruit new leaders to the Board of Directors who will contribute new resources and expertise to Town Cats.
- Invest in staff training and development to increase capacity to manage staff/volunteers, problem solve, and ensure shared knowledge of Town Cats policies and procedures.

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Town Cats revenue model is dependent primarily on contributions from individuals and institutions. In order to ensure Town Cat's longevity, the organization must diversify its revenue base and leverage donated resources to the extent possible to control costs.

- Increase the depth and size of the Town Cats donor pool to increase revenue by an average of 10% every year over the next 3 years.
- Establish dedicated funds for various medical and supportive care programs to ensure consistent, transparent and controlled allocation of resources.
- Invest in volunteer and development staffing to build long-term capacity for revenue generation.
- Build and secure partnerships with medical care and feline supplies providers who can provide in-kind or reduced cost provisions for Town Cats.

SOUND SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

As Town Cats moves beyond a Founder-driven organization into a mature, sustainable institution, it is critical to have systems and processes that exist not just within an individual's head but are documented and shared across the organization. Developing shared policies, processes and systems will maintain stability through leadership transitions and support efficient and effective work for staff and volunteers.

- Document goals, policies and procedures for each program and department and develop a central repository of information for staff and volunteers.
- Continue to enhance customization and use of fundraising database.
- Establish a staff evaluation and development process to increase investment in staff leadership and professional and personal development.
- Continue to enhance use of PetPoint database software and "cat resumes" to build a pipeline of accurate background data as cats move through intake, foster and adoption processes.

PROACTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Town Cats understands that it takes collaboration to provide the best support possible for its cats and is a committed partner in the WeCARE collaboration, which has set a save rate goal of 90% across Santa Clara County.

- Establish a communications strategy to proactively engage prospective fosters, adopters and donors across Santa Clara County.
- Continue to work with WeCARE partners to facilitate appropriate intake and placement of cats within the County.
- Build relationships with other local community organizations that can expand the visibility of Town Cats and generate new resources for the organization.

CONCLUSION

Town Cats achieved remarkable success in its first iteration, saving the lives of thousands of cats over more than fifteen years under the visionary leadership of founder Rosi Mirko. With new leadership in place to succeed Rosi, Town Cats remains committed to the values established by its founder, while looking forward to establishing a sustainable organization that will save many more thousands of lives to come.

The many lives that have been saved by Town Cats was possible because of the passion, dedication and support of volunteers, staff and donors. Your contributions have shaped Town Cats into the extraordinary organization it is today and will continue to shape the organization as it evolves to meet new opportunities and challenges. We look to each of you – our volunteers in foster care, adoption, community cat programs and beyond, the families who have adopted our cats into their forever homes, our donors and other stakeholders – to help lead Town Cats into the future so that we can achieve our vision of creating feline champions who work to improve the status of all cats across Santa Clara County. We invite you to become even more involved with us and the work that we do at Town Cats.