

Volunteer shortage and rent surge threaten Shelburne's Feral Cat Rescue Thrift Shop



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A local thrift store that quietly underpins one of Dufferin County's busiest animal rescues is now facing a rent hike that could threaten its future and the care of hundreds of cats.

The volunteer-run shop, operated by Feral Cat Rescue, funds a very large portion of the organization's medical costs, from spay/neuter surgeries to complex procedures as needed by the cats.

Shelter operator Sharon Morden said that model is now under pressure.

"We were already down to four days a week of having the thrift shop open due to lack of volunteers to safely operate it," Morden said. "That was already tight for us, and now, it's going to become unsustainable. Rent has increased as of June 1 (to \$3,069 a month), and it's set to increase moving forward; the math just isn't working anymore."

The new lease was a surprise for Morden, who had little warning that it was coming. The annual increases over the years only make a tight situation even worse, adding further uncertainty to a rescue that has no paid staff, relying on donated goods and volunteer labour.

To keep the doors open, Feral Cat Rescue is appealing for more community help.

"My thought is the only way to save this whole situation is to find a way to operate the thrift store Monday to Saturday, from 10 to four," she said. "That's either going to be our answer, or we'll have to quickly locate another source of fundraising to make up for the new difference."

"It would be great if we had another at least six people — ideally 10 — would be best in order to distribute the work, and have at least two people running the store at a time," Morden added.

Ideally, these new volunteers would work in three main roles: cash handling and greeting customers; sorting and pricing donated items; and managing online sales for unique or collectible goods through platforms like Facebook Marketplace.

The rescue is also open to volunteers who can help organize independent fundraising initiatives to offset rising costs.

The thrift store is only one part of a broader effort that began long before Feral Cat Rescue was formally incorporated. Founder Sharon Morton has been trapping, fixing and rehoming cats in the region since around 2011, including large-scale work in areas like Chipwood Park, where unmanaged colonies had become a longstanding problem.

Over time, the rescue secured land in Riverview and obtained permanent zoning to operate a dedicated feral cat facility, giving the animals a stable base rather than relying on temporary arrangements.

Despite that progress, the rescue's mission remains straightforward and urgent: reduce stray and feral cat populations through intake, vet care and adoption, while giving unwanted cats a safe place to land.

For Morden, the work is deeply personal and a passion project.

"We've had 603 intakes in our community of cats and out of that 603 we've adopted 472 that's keeping these guys off the street and not populating any further," she said. "It's a win win for everybody in the community, including the cats."

"At the end of the day, we all want to end our day feeling good, knowing we've helped these guys find better homes. That's what this is about. We've made a huge impact, but we need to keep getting the word out there," Morden added.

For now, whether that work can continue at its current scale may depend on whether enough volunteers step forward to keep the thrift store and its lifeline of funding alive.

For more information and to contact Feral Cat Rescue, go to: feralcatrescue.ca