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The Highland Park Petco store would become a dog and cat adoption center if approved by the City Council this month.

# Pet adoption center planned

**PAWS Chicago involved in project to save cats, dogs**

**BY DONALD LIEBENSON**  
Special to the Tribune

Homeless animals on the North Shore stand to get a new leash on life following the Highland Park Plan Commission's unanimous recommendation to allow PAWS Chicago to establish a dog and cat adoption center in the Petco store on Deerfield Road.

The Plan Commission's approval is contingent on several conditions, among them that there be no special sales of animals that can be considered to be predatory or environmentally hazardous, or are related to specific holidays, such as bunnies or chicks for Easter.

The City Council will consider Petco's request in late February.

While Petco is supplying the space for the adoption center, PAWS Chicago — a no-kill animal shelter — will be responsible for the funds to remodel and operate it, as well as to pay for medical services and employee salaries.

Paula Fasseas, founder

and chairwoman of PAWS Chicago, estimates the non-profit organization needs to raise about \$300,000. She said fundraising is underway.

The Highland Park PAWS location will be solely for adoption of dogs and cats. It will not accept abandoned or surrendered animals. Highland Park and its neighboring suburban municipalities each deal with abandoned animals through municipal animal control and partnerships with shelters that accept stray, lost and abandoned animals.

Until PAWS Chicago can raise the funds to operate the adoption center on a daily basis, it will host adoption events at the Highland Park Petco from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. on the first and third Saturday of each month and the fourth Sunday of each month.

"We think the North Shore will be a great area to get more animals into homes and interest families in volunteering and helping the cause," Fasseas said.

Founded in 1997, PAWS Chicago's mission is "to solve the problem of overpopulation of homeless animals by not only adoption

but also providing free spaying and neutering services for low-income-family pets," Fasseas said.

The organization's clinic on Chicago's South Side, which opened in 2001, "has made a tremendous difference in bringing down the number of animals being brought to the city's shelter."

With a new Highland Park location, she said, PAWS Chicago is looking north.

"Many of the homeless animals entering the North Shore are coming from Waukegan and North Chicago because low-income families can't afford to spay or neuter" their pets, she said. Petco is helping to fund a van that will offer those services in Waukegan, she noted.

The Highland Park Petco store will be one of only a dozen of the company's 1,000 stores to offer an adoption center for dogs as well as cats, said Lance Schwimmer, vice president of regional operations and a member of the board of directors of Petco Foundation, an animal welfare charity. The foundation works with more than 8,000 local animal welfare

groups across the country to find homes for homeless animals, he said.

"Almost every store has a pet adoption habitat, but dogs require more space," he said.

Schwimmer called the proposed Highland Park location an important step to reducing the number of homeless pets.

The company's "adoption first" philosophy, developed to reduce the number of the millions of homeless dogs and cats that are euthanized each year, has led to the adoption of 4.5 million pets since the foundation's inception in 1999, he said.

"The opportunity to add an adoption center in the Highland Park store provides more exposure for homeless animals and more opportunities for people in the community who are looking for companion animals," Schwimmer said.

The Highland Park PAWS Chicago adoption center will also be seeking volunteers to help with walking and feeding the animals, "meet and greets" to socialize the animals and making follow-up calls to families.