



# City of Lakewood City Council

Council At Large  
Sarah Kepple, President  
Thomas R. Bullock III  
Angelina Hamilton Steiner

Ward Council  
Kyle Baker, Ward 1, Vice President  
Bryan Evans, Ward 2  
Cindy Strebig, Ward 3  
Matthew Bixenstine, Ward 4

Noticed 04/29/26

## **PUBLIC NOTICE – COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

Committee of the Whole will meet Monday May 4, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Auditorium at Lakewood City Hall, 12650 Detroit Ave. The meeting is open to the public.

The meeting will be livestreamed on the City's website.

### **The agenda is as follows:**

Approval of the minutes of the March 30, 2026 Committee of the Whole.

Communication from Chief Assistant Law Director Swallow regarding litigation update.

*Pursuant to Ohio Revised Code [Section 121.22 \(G\)](#), a motion to enter executive session may be made for the purpose of conferences with an attorney for the public body regarding disputes involving the public body that are the subject of pending or imminent court action.*

Communication from President Kepple introducing proposed Charter amendments (*referred to COW 2/17/26*)

**ORDINANCE 19-2026** – AN ORDINANCE to take effect immediately provided it receives the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the members of Council, or otherwise to take effect and be in force at the earliest period allowed by law, submitting to the electors of the City of Lakewood an amendment to the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood in order to establish a process and requirement for ward redistricting in the City of Lakewood. (*1st read & referred to COW 2/17/26; 2nd reading 3/2/26*)

Sarah Kepple, Chair  
**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT PROTOCOL**

The public is invited to comment on agenda items by submitting a written comment in advance of the meeting using the [eComment platform](#). New users must create an eComment account. Committee Chairs may also accommodate in person public comment.

### **ADA PROTOCOL**

Individuals with disabilities who require accommodations for participation in meetings must request accommodations at least 3 business days ahead of the scheduled meeting. Contact Michelle Nochta at (216) 529-5906 or [michelle.nochta@lakewoodoh.gov](mailto:michelle.nochta@lakewoodoh.gov).



City of Lakewood  
Department Of Law

Ernest E. Vargo, Director  
Jennifer L. Swallow, Chief Assistant Director  
Jeffrey Crossman, First Assistant Director

(216) 529-6030 | law@lakewoodoh.gov

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April 20, 2026

Lakewood City Council  
Lakewood, Ohio

RE: Litigation Update

Dear Members of Council:

I am submitting this correspondence to request a Committee of the Whole meeting to provide all of Council with an update on pending and imminent court matters involving the City of Lakewood. We recommend that this meeting take place in Executive Session.

I look forward to meeting with you to keep you informed of legal matters that affect the City.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Swallow



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February 17th, 2026

Lakewood City Council  
Lakewood, Ohio

## **RE: Charter Amendments**

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood requires a review of the Charter by a citizen commission. On July 1, 2024 after extensive research, deliberation, and reflection, this nine-member body submitted their [final report](#) to City Council with recommendations for six amendments. City Council and the Charter Review Commission held a joint meeting on Monday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024 to review their six recommendations. Council held an additional Committee of the Whole on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025 to learn more about Rank Choice Voting.

In addition to the merits and details of each recommendation, Council discussed the process and potential timeline for placing amendments before voters. Per Article 7.5(b), “Amendments to this charter may be submitted to the registered voters of the city by a two-thirds vote of all councilmembers.” As voter turn-out tends to be higher in even-year general elections, rather than in municipal, special, or primary elections, placing the proposed amendments on the November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026 General Election would allow for the most democratic participation. To that end, following this communication are draft ordinances for each of the Charter Review Commission’s six recommendations.

### **Amend Article 2.2 to Codify Council Appointment Process**

The current charter requires City Council to appoint a new member to fill any vacancy, but it does not specify process. This body has a tradition of utilizing an open, democratic procedure of putting out a call for applications and holding public interviews prior to filing the position. This amendment would codify that process to ensure that it continues beyond our service.

### **Amend Article 2.8 to Simplify Manner of Amending Legislation**

Currently, revising or amending ordinances requires the current language to be listed and repealed, which can create confusion, particularly for the public. Modern technology allows for redlining, which more clearly displays the intended changes. The Law Department suggested the changes as set forth in the draft ordinance, and the commission understood the concern and agreed.

### **Add New Article 7.2(i) Create Process for Ward Redistricting**

The commission noted that currently, there is no requirement for ward redistricting in the charter. Since the wards were drawn in 1971, Ward 4 has seen an increase in percentage of population while the remaining three wards’ population remains very evenly distributed. Ward 4’s population is more than 10% higher than the other wards. While our current ward shapes follow best practices such as being contiguous, Lakewood has the opportunity to ensure more equitable representation and set an example of codifying a process that will minimize the risk of political gerrymandering.



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The amendment as written in the draft proposal would establish that wards are to be nearly equal in population, made up of contiguous and compact territory, bounded by natural boundaries or street lines and drawn by the citizens of the Planning Commission, rather than by elected officials.

### **Amend Article 6.7 to Increase Frequency with which Civil Service Commission Reviews Public Official Salaries**

The current Charter language requires the Civil Service Commission to review the salaries of elected officials, the Mayor and City Council, in each Presidential election year, which falls on an even year every four years. Both the Charter Review Commission and the Civil Service Commission expressed a desire for more frequent review of salaries. The amendment would move the required review to municipal election years, every two years on odd years, on a date far enough in advance of the filing deadline for potential candidates to make an informed decision based on the adopted salary for the upcoming year.

### **Amend Article 7.7 to Clarify Language Regarding Process to Amend Charter**

The commission found that the language providing for the amendment to the charter was somewhat confusing, and they recommended language that clarifies the process in the current charter.

### **Amend Article 9.1 and Add New 9.5 to Enact Ranked Choice Voting**

The commission recommended the adoption of Ranked Choice Voting for municipal elections. In discussion with the commission members benefits were discussed such as reducing cost to voters by removing the need for a primary, reduction in divisive and negative campaigning, and the reduced barriers to participation by candidates with lower financial means. The draft ordinance would eliminate the primary and establish rank choice voting barring the passage of legislation at the Statehouse that would affect municipal funding.

The deadline to submit ballot language to the Board of Elections for the general election this year is September 4<sup>th</sup>; however, it is our hope that Council will complete our work on these ordinances prior to August, when we traditionally recess. We look forward to continued dialogue about these proposed amendments in committee.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kepple  
President of Council, Member at Large

ORDINANCE NO. 19-2026

BY: KEPPLER

AN ORDINANCE to take effect immediately provided it receives the affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of the members of Council, or otherwise to take effect and be in force at the earliest period allowed by law, submitting to the electors of the City of Lakewood an amendment to the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood in order to establish a process and requirement for ward redistricting in the City of Lakewood.

WHEREAS, Article XVIII, Section 9 of the Ohio Constitution permits City Council the authority to submit propose amendments to the Charter to the electors of the City by a two-thirds vote of Council; and

WHEREAS, Section 7.5 of the Charter permits City Council the authority to submit proposed amendments to the Charter to the electors of the City by two-thirds vote of Council; and

WHEREAS, it is the intention of Council to place before the electors of the City a Charter amendment which, if adopted, would require periodic ward redistricting where necessary.

WHEREAS, as set forth in Section 2.12 of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, this Council by a vote of at least two thirds of its members determines that this ordinance is an emergency measure and that it shall take effect immediately, and that it is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public property, health, and safety and to provide for the usual daily operation of municipal departments in the deadline for submission of municipal charter amendments to the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections is Friday, September 4, 2026; now therefore,

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF LAKEWOOD, OHIO, at least two-thirds of the members of Council concurring:

Section 1. This Council hereby determines to authorize and direct the submission to the electors of the City of Lakewood at the general election to be held at the usual places of voting in the City of Tuesday, November 3, 2026, the proposed amendments by enacting new Section 7.2(i) Redistricting the Wards of the City to require periodic ward redistricting where necessary.

Section 2. Upon approval of the electors, Section 7.2(i) of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, Redistricting the Wards of the City, shall be enacted to read as follows:

**7.2(i) REDISTRICTING THE WARDS OF THE CITY**

(1) Upon the adoption of this Charter by the electors of the city and at least 180 days prior to the filing date of nominating petitions for the terms beginning on January 1, 2028, the Planning Commission shall review and make, if necessary, appropriate redivisions of the City into four wards which shall be as nearly equal in population as is possible, each ward to be composed of contiguous and compact territory, bounded

by natural boundaries or street lines. City Council shall adopt and enact the redistrictings proposed by the Planning Commission unless council specifically finds that such redistrictings are not contiguous or compact or bounded by natural boundaries or street lines or do not provide for equal population distribution.

(2) Commencing with the Federal census decennially taken in the closest proximity to January 1, 2030, and following each subsequent Federal decennial census, within six months after the proclamation of the Ohio Secretary of State announcing the population of cities of Ohio, the Planning Commission shall review and make, if necessary, appropriate redistrictings of the City into four wards which shall be as nearly equal in population as is possible, each ward to be composed of contiguous and compact territory, bounded by natural boundaries or street lines. City Council shall adopt and enact the divisions proposed by the Planning Commission unless council specifically finds that such redistrictings are not contiguous or compact or bounded by natural boundaries or street lines or do not provide for equal population distribution.

(3) Any changes in ward boundaries shall become effective for the next regular municipal election, unless the new ward boundaries are adopted after the filing deadline for that election in which case they shall become effective for the following municipal election.

Section 3. The Board of Elections of Cuyahoga County is hereby directed to submit the following question to the electors of the City at the general election on November 3, 2026:

**Shall new Section 7.2(i) Redistricting the Wards of the City, be adopted to require the Planning Commission to review the four wards of the City of Lakewood beginning with the adoption of this amendment and after every decennial Federal census to review the population of each ward and to change ward boundaries if necessary to ensure near equal population in each ward.**

Section 4. The Clerk of this Council is instructed to file a certified copy of the Ordinance and the proposed form of the ballot question with the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections no later than 4 p.m. on Friday, September 4, 2026.

Section 5. If a majority of the electors vote in favor of adopting the above-stated amendment to the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, it shall become effective January 1, 2027.

Section 6. It is found and determined that all formal actions of this Council concerning and relating to the passage of this ordinance were adopted in an open meeting of this Council, and that all such deliberations of this Council and of any of its committees that resulted in such formal action were in meetings open to the public in compliance with all legal requirements.

Section 7. This ordinance is hereby declared to be an emergency measure necessary for

the immediate preservation of the public peace, property, health, safety and welfare in the City and for the usual daily operation of the City for the reasons set forth and defined in the preamble to this ordinance, and provided it receives the affirmative vote of at least two thirds of the members of Council, this ordinance shall take effect and be in force immediately upon its adoption by the Council and approval by the Mayor, or otherwise it shall take effect and be in force after the earliest period allowed by law.

Adopted: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah Kepple, President of Council

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Maureen M. Bach, Clerk of Council

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Meghan F. George, Mayor