



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 05/13/26

PUBLIC NOTICE – COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Committee of the Whole will meet Monday May 18, 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 May 11, 2026 Committee of the Whole.

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

ORDINANCE 16-2026 – 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 change the frequency with which the Civil Service Commission reviews elected official salaries. (*1st read & referred to COW 2/17/26; 2nd reading 3/2/26*)

ORDINANCE 17-2026 - 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 add additional requirements to the process by which Council appoints new members to fill a vacancy. (*1st read & referred to COW 2/17/26; 2nd reading 3/2/26*)

S. 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*)

ORDINANCE 21-2026 - 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 allow Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting. (*1st read & referred to COW 2/17/26; 2nd reading 3/2/26*)

Communication from President Kepple regarding Charter Amendments Connected to Ranked Choice Voting. (*referred to COW 5/4/26*)

ORDINANCE 27-2026 - 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 allow Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting.
(1st read & referred to COW 5/4/2026)

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.



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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 16th, 2024 to review their six recommendations. Council held an additional Committee of the Whole on July 7th, 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 3rd, 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 4th; 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. 16-2026

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 change the frequency with which the Civil Service Commission reviews elected official salaries.

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 change the frequency with which the Civil Service Commission reviews the salaries of elected officials.

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 to Section 6.7 Salary Recommendations to increase the frequency with which the Civil Service Commission reviews the salaries of elected officials.

Section 2. Upon approval of the electors, Section 6.7 of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, Salary Recommendations shall be amended to read as follows:

6.7 SALARY RECOMMENDATIONS

On or before ~~March 1~~ ~~July 1~~ of each year in which a ~~municipal presidential~~-general election is held, the civil service commission shall review and make a written report to council, which report shall be filed with the clerk of council and the office of the mayor,

setting forth the commission's recommendations for the salary and other compensation for the offices of mayor and members of council. Council shall place that report on the next docket at a regularly scheduled council meeting. If council takes no action or fails to decline to follow the suggestions within 90 days, the recommendations shall take effect as if council had adopted them by ordinance approved by the mayor. However, no increase in salary under this section shall exceed 10 percent of the salary for the office of mayor or council, unless there has been no increase in salary for that office in the preceding ~~8~~¹⁰ years.

Section 6.7 SALARY RECOMMENDATIONS

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 Section 6.7, Salary Recommendations, of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood be amended to increase the frequency that the Civil Service Commission reviews elected official salaries.

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

Maureen M. Bach, Clerk of Council

Approved: _____

Meghan F. George, Mayor

ORDINANCE NO. 17-2026

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 add additional requirements to the process by which Council appoints new members to fill a vacancy.

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 establish in law the open process by which Council appoints new members to fill a vacancy.

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 to Section 2.2 Qualifications and Vacancies, which adds additional requirements when Council is filling a vacancy.

Section 2. Upon approval of the electors, Section 2.2 of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, Qualifications and Vacancies, shall be amended to read as follows:

2.2 QUALIFICATIONS AND VACANCIES

(a) Qualifications. Each member of council shall have been for at least one year immediately prior to the date of taking office both a resident and registered voter of the city. Each member of council elected from a ward of the city shall be a resident of the ward from which the member was elected. All members of council shall continue to be residents and registered voters of the city and, if elected or appointed from a ward, shall

be and continue to be a resident of that ward. Any member who ceases to possess those qualifications shall immediately forfeit his or her office. Council shall be the judge of the election and qualification of its members.

(b) Vacancy. Vacancies in council shall be filled by appointment made by the remaining council members. Prior to making any appointment, council shall first issue an open call for all interested candidates to submit applications and, upon council's review of the applications, shall hold candidate interviews in public session. In the event council does not appoint a successor within 60 days of the occurrence of a vacancy, the mayor may fill the vacancy. If the vacancy occurs more than two years and 120 days before the ~~municipal primary election~~ filing deadline for the next term of that office, the appointee shall serve only until his or her successor is elected and qualified at the next regular municipal election. If the vacancy occurs afterward, the appointee shall serve until the end of the unexpired term of the former councilmember. Any vacancy that results from a recall election shall be filled in the manner provided by Article Nine.

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 Section 2.2, Qualifications and Vacancies, of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood be amended to require that Council issue an open call for interested candidates, to interview candidates in public meetings and to clarify the term of the appointee.

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

Maureen M. Bach, Clerk of Council

Approved: _____

Meghan F. George, Mayor

1st read & referred to COW
2/17/26; 2nd reading 3/2/26

Please substitute for original

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) 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 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 divisions proposed by the Planning Commission unless council specifically finds that such redivisions are not contiguous or compact or bounded by natural boundaries or street lines or do not provide for equal population distribution.

(2) 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

Maureen M. Bach, Clerk of Council

Approved: _____

Meghan F. George, Mayor

ORDINANCE NO. 21-2026

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 allow Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting.

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 allow Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting.

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 to Section 9.1 Elections, which requires Council to Codify the process by which new members of Council are appointed to fill a vacancy.

Section 2. Upon approval of the electors, Section 9.1 Elections of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, Elections, shall be amended to read as follows:

9.1 ELECTIONS

(a) Regular and Special Municipal Elections. General municipal elections for the purpose of the election of officers provided for in this charter shall be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in each odd numbered year and shall be known as regular municipal elections. ~~Except for primary elections;~~ All other

elections held under the provisions of this charter or as may be required by law shall be known as special municipal elections.

~~(b) Primary Elections. On the second Tuesday in September prior to each general municipal election, a primary election shall be held for the purpose of nominating persons, without regard to political parties, for election to offices provided for by this charter to be voted for at the next regular municipal election.~~

~~The number of candidates for the offices of mayor, each of the four ward councilmembers, and judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court at any regular municipal election shall be the two persons on the primary election ballot receiving the highest number of votes at the primary election. The number of candidates for the office of councilmember at large at any regular municipal election in the city shall be the six candidates on the primary ballot receiving the highest number of votes at the primary election.~~

~~—In case there shall not be more than two persons who have filed petitions for the office of mayor, any of the offices of the ward councilmembers, or judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court, then those persons shall be the candidates at the regular municipal election and the primary for the particular office shall not be held. In case there shall not be more than six persons who have filed petitions for the office of councilmember at large, then those persons shall be the candidates at the regular municipal election and the primary for that office shall not be held.~~

(be) Election Procedures. Write-in votes for municipal candidates in regular municipal elections shall be permitted only if a duly nominated candidate cannot participate due to death or other disqualification, or if a candidate does not have an opponent, or if no candidate has been nominated. The ~~ballots used in the primary and regular~~ municipal elections shall be without party mark or designation. ~~The~~ Except as provided under this charter or by ordinance, the names of all candidates shall be placed upon the same ballot and shall be rotated in the manner provided by general law.

~~(d) Certificate of Nomination when no Primary is Held. In the event a primary election is not held, the county board of elections shall declare each candidate to be nominated, issue appropriate certificates of nomination to them and certify their names in order that they be printed on the official ballots provided for use in the regular municipal election, as if a primary election had been held and each person had been nominated at that election.~~

(cg) Designation of Candidates. Candidates for ~~nominations to~~ elective offices provided for in this charter shall have their names printed on the official ~~primary~~ ballot by filing a declaration of candidacy, meeting all required qualifications and paying any required filing fees.

(df) Declarations of Candidacy. Candidates for the offices of mayor and member of council shall, not later than 4:00 p.m. of the 90th day before the day of the ~~regular~~ municipal ~~primary~~ election, file a declaration of candidacy. Except as otherwise required by this charter, the general law of the state shall govern declarations of candidacy. Nominations for each elective municipal office shall be made by petition only, on standard forms provided by the county board of elections for the nomination of nonpartisan candidates. Declarations of candidacy for write-in candidates shall be made on standard forms provided by the county board of elections and submitted within a period of time prescribed by the general law of the state.

(eg) Ballot Form. Except as otherwise required by this charter, the form of the ballot at ~~primary~~, special and regular municipal elections shall be determined by the election authorities in accordance with this Charter and general law.

(fh) Nomination and Election of Judges. Candidates for judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court shall file a declaration of candidacy and be nominated by petition signed by at least 200 registered voters of the city. The petition or petitions when filed shall be accompanied by the written acceptance of the nominee. Each signer of a petition shall sign his or her name and after his or her name designate his or her residence. The petition or petitions shall be filed with the county board of elections as one instrument not later than 4:00 p.m. of the 90th day before the day of the regular municipal primary election for the office of judge. The names of all nominated candidates shall appear on a nonpartisan judicial ballot in the regular municipal election.

Section 3. . Upon approval of the electors, Section 9.5 Ranked Choice Voting of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, Elections, shall be enacted to read as follows:

9.5 RANKED CHOICE VOTING

(a) Ranked Choice Voting Elections. Municipal officials shall be elected by ranked choice voting. Ranked choice voting is a method of casting and counting votes in which voters rank candidates in order of preference and votes are counted in rounds. Ranked choice voting is also known as “instant runoff voting” when electing a single winner or the “single transferable vote” when electing multiple winners in proportion to their relative share of the votes cast. The council may, by ordinance, adopt ranked choice voting for any other elected local office or offices.

(b) Instant Runoff Voting. Elections for Mayor, Judge, and members of council elected to represent a ward, and for any other single-winner election for which the council, by ordinance, adopts ranked choice voting shall be conducted by instant runoff voting. For elections conducted by instant runoff voting, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated in each round and each voter’s ballot counts as one vote for its highest-ranked remaining candidate in each round. When two or fewer candidates remain, the candidate with the greatest number of votes is elected.

(c) Single Transferable Vote. Elections for members of council elected at large, and for any other multi-winner election for which the council, by ordinance, adopts ranked choice voting shall be conducted by the single transferable vote. For elections conducted by single transferable vote, each ballot counts in whole or in part for its highest-ranked remaining candidate in each round. A candidate is elected if they receive the minimum whole number of votes needed to win a seat. To determine this threshold, divide the total number of valid votes cast by the sum of one and the number of seats to be filled, round that number down to the nearest whole number, then add one vote. If a candidate receives more votes than this threshold, part of each vote received by that candidate counts for each ballot's next highest-ranked remaining candidate instead. If no remaining candidate meets this threshold, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and votes for that candidate count for each ballot’s next highest-ranked remaining candidate.

(d) Council Authority. The council shall, by ordinance, establish:

(1) the ballot format and the rules for casting and counting the votes, consistent with nationally recognized best practices;

(2) a process to release unofficial preliminary round-by-round results starting on election night, unofficial preliminary ballot-level ranking data in a machine-readable and searchable open format no later than the counting of ballots is complete, and official final round-by-round results and ballot-level ranking data in a machine-readable and searchable open format upon certification of the results; and

(3) the procedures for filling vacancies and conducting recall elections for offices elected by single transferable vote, notwithstanding any charter provision to the contrary.

(e) Effective Date. This Act shall go into effect the 1st day of January, 2029.

(f) Severability. If any provision of this amendment, or the application of any provision of this amendment to any person, office, or circumstance, is held to be unconstitutional or may result in the loss of state funding per state law, such provisions shall become null and void until the relevant constitutional infirmity or state law is removed.

Section 4. 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 Article 9 of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood be amended and expanded to adopt ranked choice voting in municipal elections? If approved the new system would end primaries for City Councilmembers, Mayor, and Judge for the City of Lakewood.

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, 2029**.

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

Maureen M. Bach, Clerk of Council

Approved: _____

Meghan F. George, Mayor



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
Matt Bixenstine, Ward 4

May 4, 2026

Lakewood City Council
Lakewood, Ohio

RE: Charter Amendments Connected to Ranked Choice Voting

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to provide background and clarity about the interconnected nature of three charter amendment topics currently before Committee of the Whole. The Charter Review Commission's Final Report included six areas on which the commission focused their review. Those six topics were Manner of Amending Legislation, Charter Amendments (addressing the process for getting on the ballot), Ranked Choice Voting and the Primary Election, Salaries of Elected Officials, Council Appointment Process, and Ward Redistricting.

As you know, at our March 16th Committee of the Whole meeting, two ordinances were referred favorably back to full council. Those were:

Manner of Amending Legislation Ordinance 18-2026 to amend Section 2.8 to update the manner of Amending Legislation from restating and repealing the entire section to utilizing strike-through and underlining. Councilmembers expressed hope that adopting this change would make proposed changes clearer and easier to understand.

Charter Amendments Ordinance 20-2026 to amend Section 7.5 to clarify the paths by which Charter amendments can be placed before voters. If adopted, the two paths -affirmative vote of two-thirds of councilmembers or petition signed by not less than 10% of registered voters of the city- would remain the same, the Charter Review Commission simply recommended updates to the language to clarify the process.

Three of the topics remaining in committee, Ranked Choice Voting and the Primary Election, Salaries of Elected Officials, and Council Appointment Process, are interconnected and further explained below.

Ranked Choice Voting and the Primary Election

As you know, Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) was one of the topics investigated by the Charter Review Commission (CRC) and was included in their six Charter Amendment recommendations to Council. The CRC's [final report](#) to City Council, submitted July 1st, 2024 states:

The majority of commission members are supportive of the city adopting ranked choice voting in the near future but given the uncertainty about the timeline needed to implement this overhaul (and potential legal and legislative threats to implementation), the commission decided to recommend providing the city with the authority but allow council the greatest flexibility possible.



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The proposed amended language in Exhibit F of the CRC's Final Report states that "Council shall, by ordinance, adopt either plurality voting, as described in Section 9.1(c), or ranked choice voting, as described in Section 9.1(d), as the method for the election of the officers provided for in this charter."

The CRC's Final Report alluded to legal and legislative threats to RCV implementation. One such threat that was discussed at the July 7th, 2025 Committee of the Whole (COW) was Ohio Senate Bill 63 which states:

If the secretary of State determines that a county or municipal corporation has, by resolution or ordinance, approved the use of ranked choice voting or instant runoff voting in a primary election, then the county or municipal corporation is ineligible to receive any local government fund distributions from the state during the period beginning with the month following the adoption of the resolution or ordinance and ending with the month following the last day it is in effect.

At that COW meeting, councilmembers received copies of an analysis produced by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC), "a nonpartisan agency providing the Ohio General Assembly with drafting, research, budget and fiscal analysis, training, and other service," according to their website. That analysis, dated March 26, 2025, prior to the bill's final passage, addresses a variety of questions including whether, under SB 63, a city would lose Local Government Funds from the state if it adopted a charter amendment approving the use of RCV. The analysis states that:

A reviewing court might find that if the electors of a city approved a charter provision requiring ranked choice voting, that action would not qualify as approving the use of ranked choice voting "by resolution or ordinance" for purposes of the bill, and therefore would not trigger the loss of LGF funds.

In response to a question from council, at the same COW meeting, the Law Department stated, "If we wanted to do this, and to comply with what's before the house bill, the lower risk is to do it by charter, and amend the charter to allow for Ranked Choice Voting and take that issue directly to the people, assuming the bill holds up."

Considering this analysis and discussion, Ordinance 21-2026 was drafted and then introduced on February 17, 2026 with the intention of mediating risk by taking the decision about Ranked Choice Voting directly to the people through Charter amendment rather than ordinance, and it includes a severability clause stating:

If any provision of this amendment, or the application of any provision of this amendment to any person, office, or circumstance, is held to be unconstitutional or may result in the loss of state funding per state law, such provisions shall become null and void until the relevant constitutional infirmity or state law is removed.

On March 17th, 2026 Governor DeWine signed [Senate Bill 63](#) into law. *Now that the bill has been passed, the question before council is which, if any legislative option to adopt regarding Ranked Choice Voting.* Following this communication is legislation as provided by the law department based on the original recommendation of the CRC, and I intend to make a motion to refer it to COW as part of our deliberation on this question.

If Ranked Choice Voting were adopted either directly by voters into the Charter or by council via ordinance, it would eliminate the need for the primary. According to their final report the CRC, "decided to recommend that council have the authority to determine if the primary election should be held in May, September, or not at all if the option for ranked choice voting (also referred to as an instant runoff) is adopted as recommended by the commission and enacted by council." The current language of Article 9 of the Charter places



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municipal elections on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, with the primary on the second Tuesday in September prior, and requires that candidates file not later than the 90th day before the primary election. The language of both Ordinance 21-2026 and Ordinance 27-2026 list the filing deadline as 90 days before the municipal election if RCV is adopted, moving it to early August instead of June as is it is currently.

Salaries of Elected Officials

The current charter language in sections 2.3 Council Salaries and 3.5 Salary of the Mayor states the salaries for each must be adopted not less than 30 days prior to filing deadline for the office. Current Section 6.7 Salary Recommendations lays out a deadline by which the Civil Service Commission must make salary recommendations to Council. "If Council takes no action or fails to decline to follow the suggestions within 90 days, the recommendations shall take effect as if council had adopted them." If RCV were to eliminate the primary and move the filing deadline to early August instead of June, then the Civil Service Commission deadline could be moved to early April to allow for the combined 120 window.

CRC made a variety of recommendations regarding Council and Mayoral salaries including "changing the frequency of salary surveys conducted by the [Civil Service] Commission." The commission also noted that the "the mayoral elections and council ward elections are three years after the timing of the salary survey under the current charter provisions." Because municipal officials are prohibited from receiving increases during current terms, and the current Charter section 6.7 places review in even year, Presidential elections, there is a minimum three year delay in any salary increase recommended by Civil Service Commission from taking effect for the Mayor and Ward Council members, and a minimum one-year delay for councilmembers at large. Ordinance 16-2026 as before COW would move the review to March 1 of each odd numbered year which would align with municipal elections and allow for implementation in the following even year term. Should RCV not be adopted, and the filing deadline remain in June, the 120 day window moves to early February. Given that Civil Service Commission appointments typically occur in January, this may not be practical. The CRC's Exhibit A contemplated July 1st of each even-numbered year.

Council Appointment Process

The CRC recommended adding language to Section 2.2(b) to codify the current tradition of council posting an open call for applicants and holding public interviews following application review. Currently, this section also states that if a council vacancy "occurs more than two years and 120 days before the municipal primary election for the next term of that office, the appointee shall serve only until his or her successor is elected and qualified at the next regular municipal election." Ordinance 17-2026 contemplates tying this section to the filing deadline rather than a primary which could be eliminated with RCV.

I move to refer this communication to Committee of the Whole.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kepple
President of Council, Member at Large

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 allow Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting.

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 allow Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting.

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 Lakewood, Tuesday, November 3, 2026, the proposed amendments to Section 9.1 Elections which allows Council the option of implementing Ranked Choice Voting. .

Section 2. Upon approval of the electors, Section 9.1 of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood, Elections, shall be amended to read as follows:

9.1 ELECTIONS

(a) Regular and Special Municipal Elections. General municipal elections for the purpose of the election of officers provided for in this charter shall be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in each odd numbered year and shall be known as regular municipal elections. Except for primary elections, all other elections held under the provisions of this charter or as may be required by law shall be known as special municipal elections.

(b) Method of Voting. Council shall, by ordinance, adopt either plurality voting, as described in Section 9.1(c), or ranked choice voting, as described in Section 9.1(d), as the method for the election of the officers provided for in this charter.

(c) Plurality Voting. In the general municipal elections for the mayor, ward-based council members, and the judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court, each voter shall vote for no more than one candidate in each race, with the candidate receiving the highest number of votes being the winner. In the general municipal election for the councilmembers at large, each voter shall vote for no more than three candidates, with the three candidates receiving the highest number of votes being the winners.

On a date set by council by ordinance prior to each general municipal election, a primary election shall be held for the purpose of nominating persons, without regard to political parties, for election to offices provided for by this charter to be voted for at the next regular municipal election.

The number of candidates for the offices of mayor, each of the four ward councilmembers, and judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court at any regular municipal election shall be the two persons on the primary election ballot receiving the highest number of votes at the primary election, with each voter being permitted to vote for not more than candidate for each office. The number of candidates for the office of councilmember at large at any regular municipal election in the city shall be the six candidates on the primary ballot receiving the highest number of votes at the primary election, with each voter being permitted to vote for not more than three candidates for the office.

In case there shall not be more than two persons who have filed petitions for the office of mayor, any of the offices of the ward councilmembers, or judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court, then those persons shall be the candidates at the regular municipal election and the primary for the particular office shall not be held. In case there shall not be more than six persons who have filed petitions for the office of councilmember at large, then those persons shall be the candidates at the regular municipal election and the primary for that office shall not be held.

(d) Ranked Choice Voting. In the event that Council elects ranked choice voting, all officers provided for in this charter shall be elected by ranked choice voting. Ranked choice voting is a method of casting and counting votes in which voters rank candidates in order of preference and votes are counted in rounds. Ranked choice voting is also known as “instant runoff voting” when electing a single winner or the “single transferable vote” when electing multiple winners in proportion to their support among all voters.

The mayor, ward councilmembers, and the judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court shall be elected via instant runoff voting. The candidate with the fewest votes shall be eliminated in each round and each voter’s ballot shall count as one vote for its highest-ranked remaining candidate in each round. When two or fewer candidates remain, the candidate with the greatest number of votes shall be elected.

Councilmembers at large shall be elected by single transferable vote. Candidates shall be elected or eliminated in each round and each ballot shall count in whole or in part for its highest-ranked remaining candidate in each round. Candidates shall be elected if they receive the number of votes needed to win a seat. The number of votes needed to win a seat shall be determined by dividing the number of votes cast by the sum of the number of seats to be filled and one, plus one additional vote. If a candidate receives more votes than needed to win a seat, a part of each vote received by that candidate instead shall be counted for each ballot's next-highest-ranked remaining candidate. When a candidate is eliminated, votes shall be counted for each ballot's next-highest-ranked remaining candidate.

If ranked choice voting is adopted by council, council shall, by ordinance, establish:

(i) the ballot format;

(ii) the rules for casting and counting the votes; and

(iii) a process to release unofficial preliminary round-by-round results, including ballot ranking data, starting as soon as a reasonable number of precincts have reported, but in no event later than as required by law, and continuing at regular intervals until the counting of ballots is complete.

~~(b) Primary Elections. On the second Tuesday in September prior to each general municipal election, a primary election shall be held for the purpose of nominating persons, without regard to political parties, for election to offices provided for by this charter to be voted for at the next regular municipal election.~~

~~The number of candidates for the offices of mayor, each of the four ward councilmembers, and judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court at any regular municipal election shall be the two persons on the primary election ballot receiving the highest number of votes at the primary election. The number of candidates for the office of councilmember at large at any regular municipal election in the city shall be the six candidates on the primary ballot receiving the highest number of votes at the primary election.~~

~~In case there shall not be more than two persons who have filed petitions for the office of mayor, any of the offices of the ward councilmembers, or judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court, then those persons shall be the candidates at the regular municipal election and the primary for the particular office shall not be held. In case there shall not be more than six persons who have filed petitions for the office of councilmember at large, then those persons shall be the candidates at the regular municipal election and the primary for that office shall not be held.~~

(e) Election Procedures. Write-in votes for municipal candidates in regular municipal elections shall be permitted only if a duly nominated candidate cannot participate due to death or other disqualification, or if a candidate does not have an opponent, or if no candidate has been nominated. The ballots used in the primary and regular municipal elections shall be without party mark or designation. The names of

all candidates shall be placed upon the same ballot and shall be rotated in the manner provided by general law, unless provided otherwise in this charter or by ordinance.

(f) Certificate of Nomination when no Primary is Held. In the event a primary election is not held, the county board of elections shall declare each candidate to be nominated, issue appropriate certificates of nomination to them and certify their names in order that they be printed on the official ballots provided for use in the regular municipal election, as if a primary election had been held and each person had been nominated at that election.

(g) Designation of Candidates. If council has adopted plurality voting pursuant to Section 9.3(c), Candidates for nominations to elective offices provided for in this charter shall have their names printed on the official primary ballot by filing a declaration of candidacy, meeting all required qualifications and paying any required filing fees. If council has adopted ranked choice voting pursuant to Section 9.3(d), candidates for the elective offices provided for in this charter shall have their names printed on the official regular election ballot by filing a declaration of candidacy, meeting all required qualifications and paying any required filing fees.

(h) Declarations of Candidacy. Candidates for the offices of mayor and member of council shall, not later than 4:00 p.m. of the 90th day before the day of the municipal primary election, if council has adopted plurality voting pursuant to Section 9.1(c), or not later than 4:00 p.m. of the 90th day before the day of the regular municipal election if council has adopted ranked choice voting pursuant to Section 9.1(d), file a declaration of candidacy. Except as otherwise required by this charter, the general law of the state shall govern declarations of candidacy. Nominations for each elective municipal office shall be made by petition only, on standard forms provided by the county board of elections for the nomination of nonpartisan candidates. Declarations of candidacy for write-in candidates shall be made on standard forms provided by the county board of elections and submitted within a period of time prescribed by the general law of the state.

(i) Ballot Form. Except as otherwise required by this charter, the form of the ballot at primary, special and regular municipal elections shall be determined by the election authorities in accordance with general law.

(j) Nomination and Election of Judges. Candidates for judge of the Lakewood Municipal Court shall file a declaration of candidacy and be nominated by petition signed by at least 200 registered voters of the city. The petition or petitions when filed shall be accompanied by the written acceptance of the nominee. Each signer of a petition shall sign his or her name and after his or her name designate his or her residence. The petition or petitions shall be filed with the county board of elections as one instrument not later than 4:00 p.m. of the 90th day before the day of the municipal primary election for the office of judge, if council has adopted plurality voting pursuant to Section 9.1(c), or not later than 4:00 p.m. of the 90th day before the day of the regular municipal election if council has adopted ranked choice voting pursuant to Section 9.1(d). The names of all nominated candidates shall appear on a nonpartisan judicial ballot in the regular 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 Section 9.1, Elections, of the Third Amended Charter of the City of Lakewood be amended to allow Council to adopt Ranked Choice Voting for municipal elections.

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

Maureen M. Bach, Clerk of Council

Approved: _____

Meghan F. George, Mayor