



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 07/20/26

PUBLIC NOTICE – COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Committee of the Whole will meet Monday July 27, 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 June 15, 2026 Committee of the Whole.

Communication from President Kepple regarding litigation with First Energy.

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.

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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July 20th, 2026

RE: Litigation with First Energy

Dear Colleagues,

We are all entirely too familiar with First Energy's ongoing failures to provide the Lakewood community with reliable electricity. In addition to experiencing outages ourselves, we have heard from countless residents who have endured extreme hardship – losing medicine, food, and in some cases facing hospitalization and life-threatening conditions. These perpetual electrical failures are entirely unacceptable. They drain our city's resources as we work to support a community suffering from this wealthy corporation's neglect.

So what can we do?

Our response must be multi-faceted and include continued pressure on First Energy through the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) as well as expanding resilient and sustainable solutions locally. Additionally, we can and should advocate for state-wide policies such as limiting the expansion of large-scale data centers to reduce strain on an already outdated system.

As we pursue these efforts, Council and the community must understand the legal process that has taken place so far, the steps ahead through PUCO, and the potential for additional litigation. This communication includes a timeline of some legal action taken by the City thus far. I intend to make a motion to refer it to Committee of the Whole and ask the Law Department to provide a briefing and answer questions about further litigation options. Understanding the public's justified interest in this topic, I hope to have as much dialogue as possible in open session; however, in the best interests of City representing those residents, some information may need to be provided in executive session in accordance with ORC 121.22(G)(3).

Litigation Timeline

In June of 2025, Mayor George, and the Cleveland City Council members representing the affected Cleveland wards formally petitioned PUCO to investigate the outages that occurred the week of June 23rd. On July 23, 2025, PUCO's investigation resulted in a [letter of Probable Non-Compliance](#) (PNC) to First Energy. The PNC found First Energy in probable non-compliance with certain sections of the Ohio Administrative Code for:

1. Failure to invest in necessary improvements to maintain adequate service following frequent reoccurrence of equipment failures at the same circuit/substation; and
2. Failure to maintain and implement a comprehensive plan to guide CEI's communications with customers, their communities, and their government agencies, to ensure that accurate and timely information is getting to the customers who need it.

The PNC laid out a corrective action plan, and in October, PUCO formally ordered First Energy (operating under the umbrella CEI) to install two new transformers at a Lakewood substation and complete inspection and repair of pole equipment no later than the end of 2026.



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Despite promising to rebuild trust with residents, First Energy petitioned PUCO to *lower* its reliability standards. The City of Lakewood filed legal intervention, with the Mayor and City Council both submitting formal documents opposing First Energy's request. Law Director Vargo represented Lakewood at the hearings, and on June 24, 2026, PUCO issued their [decision denying First Energy's request to lower reliability standards](#). The ruling repeatedly cites the high volume of complaints filed with PUCO from Lakewood residents as influential in the ruling, combating First Energy's claims of customer satisfaction based on their own internal survey.

Summer 2026

Interestingly, the day after the ruling denying their request to lower reliability standards, First Energy issued a press release announcing the delivery of two transformers to a Lakewood Substation, leaving out of the press release that they were ordered to do so by PUCO following Lakewood's complaint. Less than a week after issuing that press release, equipment failures at the Lauderdale substation caused thousands of Lakewood residents to suffer loss of crucial electricity during dangerously hot weather, in many cases for multiple days leading up to the 4th of July.

During this period, First Energy refused to put out a Press Release or social media posts educating residents about what was happening. They also cut off communication with City Councilmembers who were working hard to keep residents informed. We heard from many residents that the limited communications that they did receive from First Energy were inaccurate- informing them of rolling periods of electrical restoration that never came, or insultingly encouraging them to reduce electrical usage to relieve strain on a system that they couldn't use. The PNC corrective actions included providing PUCO staff with First Energy's steps to "improve communication to communities and customers who experience outages". I will be interested in the Law Department's input on whether First Energy is in compliance and our potential next steps.

On July 10th, PUCO Chair Jenifer French responded to the Mayor's recent letter requesting further investigation and financial penalties. In her [letter](#), Chair French stated that PUCO staff have begun to investigate, "the cause of these outages and whether or not they are related to items in the PNC corrective action plan that have or have not yet been completed, whether additional items should be added to the existing corrective action plan, and whether a new PNC should be issued."

Many residents have also expressed interest in pursuing legal action outside of the PUCO process, and I expect Councilmembers will be interested in exploring the potential for any such action. I look forward to an informative discussion, and I move to refer this communication to Committee of the Whole.

Sincerely,

Sarah Kepple
President of Council, Member at Large