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Lakewood Animal Safety & Welfare Advisory Board

July 15th, 2026 Meeting

Location: East Conference Room

Present: Board Members: Emily Christescu, Nancy Binder, Julia Garleb, Teresa Schleicher, Lise Stevens, Amanda McCreedy, Juleen Russell, Phyllis Dykes, Councilperson Angelina Hamilton Steiner, ACO Gary Crumley

Not present: Stacey Zigman

**Lakewood Animal Safety and Welfare Advisory Board Meeting
Minutes Wednesday July 15th, 2026**

- I. Welcome and roll call conducted by Board Chair Binder. 8 voting members present.
 - a. Board Binder welcomes guests and reminds them that public comment is limited to 5 minutes. She explains that our board is volunteer led and discusses the various projects we work on such as the 500 cats helped via low cost spay/neuter events and the pet food drives helping the Lakewood Community Services Center. Board Chair Binder expresses the support the city provides our board and the outreach we provide. Board Chair mentions CCLAS (Citizens Committee for Lakewood's Animals and Shelter) and how their non-profit organization supports the animal shelter and animals in Lakewood with fundraising and resources. Board Chair Binder mentions our shelter is a Municipal Shelter, it is not a rescue organization. She explains the work that Animal Control does, including supporting incidents like the Waterbury Beagles a few years ago. She mentions the brand new municipal shelter, which was built with input from experts and architects. Board Chair Binder believes we have state of the art facilities and resources for animals in Lakewood. She notes the shelter/animal control is in the process of revamping policies and procedures and that will take time. She explains the last process of TNR updates took a very long time focussed on best practices and meeting local laws, state laws and ordinances, it took 2.5 years. She notes that the city is working on the shelter/animal control policies and procedures. Board Member Dykes says ACO Crumley has been talking for a while about needing policies and procedures, it just became obvious that they don't have the staff to do the kind of research that we need.
- II. Approval of June Meeting Minutes - Board
 - a. Unanimous verbal vote in favor of motion to waive formal reading of the minutes. Motion passes to approve the minutes.
- III. Committees & Initiatives
 - a. Community Events - LCSC Pet Food Drive - Board Member Russell is working on planning the fall pet food drive. Board Chair asks the board to bring new ideas for promoting it to the next meeting.

- b. Wildlife - Board Chair mentions the social media content. Board Member McCreedy has wildlife awareness posts and a calendar prepared through December. Topics include backyard bird feeding, existing with coyotes, and a guide for what to do when you encounter wildlife. The posts include links and images. A motion is made to approve the calendar and submit the calendar to the city; motion seconded. Motion passes. Board Member Christescu will assist with submitting the calendar to the city.

- c. Ordinances/Admin

IV. Communications - Social Media Posts / Articles

- a. The board discusses other avenues for ways to promote resources and information online. Board Member Stevens will check in with the Observer on supporting content we may want to share.

V. Lakewood Animal Control Update

- a. Animal Control Shelter Report - ACO Crumley reported that trapping activity appears to be lower this year, although the residents who regularly trap are continuing to do so, possibly at a slower pace.
- b. Board Chair Binder asked about current adoptions and animals in foster care. ACO Crumley reported that there are currently two cats in foster care. One is being fostered for socialization, including the mother of two kittens, and staff are hopeful she will soon be ready for adoption and spay surgery. Another kitten is in foster care until it reaches the appropriate weight for spay surgery. Four cats are currently available for adoption. The Chihuahua recently received neuter surgery through PetFix and was adopted shortly thereafter. There are currently no dogs available for adoption.
- c. Board Chair Binder asked about the cat receiving socialization. ACO Crumley said the process had recently begun but that he believes the cat should be able to be socialized successfully. One new cat is currently in quarantine and within its required holding period. If the cat is not claimed, it will be spayed Tuesday and then made available for adoption.
- d. The Board discussed the shelter's foster program. ACO Crumley explained that Animal Control generally does not need to utilize foster homes as frequently as rescue organizations. He addressed a recent Facebook post suggesting that foster volunteers were not being used, stating that the shelter had contacted the individual involved but that they were unavailable when assistance was needed. ACO Crumley said the current need for additional foster homes is not significant.
- e. ACO Crumley also explained that when residents inquire about volunteering, he tries to determine their interests and needs while explaining that Animal Control primarily handles stray and impounded animals. Most animals are reclaimed by their owners, although some are abandoned. In certain cases, staff must conduct investigations to identify and locate an owner.
- f. Board Chair Binder asked whether there were any other shelter matters to report. ACO Crumley said operations are generally going well. He noted an issue with dog spay/neuter procedures through the APL related to a new form required under the Avery law. The Lakewood Law Department has advised that the form cannot be signed due to employment-related considerations. As a result, Animal Control is currently using PetFix for these procedures.
- g. ACO Crumley requested an opportunity to clarify information discussed during the previous meeting regarding a cat that had been found underneath the front tire of an

Amazon delivery truck. ACO Crumley said he reviewed the circumstances and made follow-up calls because he did not recall all of the details during the previous meeting. The individual who found the cat initially took it to Mr. Peck's location but received no response, although a Ring camera message was left. The individual then took the cat to their veterinarian but was unable to have it examined and subsequently contacted Lakewood Animal Control.

- h. ACO Bartkowski reported that the cat appeared emaciated and severely matted, which raised concerns about its condition. The cat was taken to Lakewood Animal Hospital shortly before closing, but because it could not be examined immediately, a morning appointment was scheduled.
- i. ACO Bartkowski subsequently documented that the cat weighed approximately 4.16 pounds, was missing teeth, and was severely emaciated, with its bones readily palpable. A limp involving a rear leg was also observed. The Board discussed the removal of the cat's collar. ACO Bartkowski explained that she removed the collar temporarily so that she could more easily read the identifying information because the cat was not allowing her to examine the collar.
- j. ACO Crumley explained that when Animal Control suspects possible animal abuse or neglect, the department generally waits until an animal has been evaluated by a veterinarian before contacting the owner. The veterinarian initially determined that the cat was severely underweight but could not identify a reason at that time why the cat could not be returned to its owner. ACO Crumley contacted Mr. Peck regarding the animal and was advised of an additional veterinary fee. ACO Crumley explained that such fees are permitted under the City's ordinances and are requirements that Animal Control must follow.
- k. ACO Crumley said Mr. Peck indicated that the cat also received care through Lakewood Animal Hospital. Animal Control initially could not locate the cat's prior records under Mr. Peck's name, but staff determined that the veterinary records were under another family member's name. Those records confirmed that the cat had been diagnosed with a thyroid condition, was receiving medication, and had been under veterinary care.
- l. ACO Crumley said the Animal Control investigation was based on the cat's documented emaciated condition and concerns regarding its dental health, as reflected in the veterinary records. The owners were contacted and the cat was returned. The collar was not initially with the cat when it was returned. After searching the Animal Control work truck and office, the collar was located on ACO Bartkowski's desk and returned to the owner that same day.
- m. ACO Crumley stated that he does not believe the narrative that Animal Control caused the cat's illness or subsequent death is accurate. He said Animal Control followed its required procedures when investigating a potentially neglected or abused animal and obtained veterinary evaluation before determining that the cat could be returned to its owner. ACO Crumley noted that the cat was in Animal Control's care for approximately 12 hours and that there were no sick cats housed in the shelter at that time.
- n. ACO Crumley expressed sympathy that the cat ultimately had to be euthanized, particularly given its age of approximately 18 years and its medical condition. However, he said he is concerned that negative statements about Animal Control could discourage residents from bringing animals to the department when they need assistance.

- o. ACO Crumley also addressed concerns residents may have about what happens when Animal Control impounds an animal. He explained that each animal is entered into the department's system, which is connected to the City's website and Animal Control's online resources. Animals are also posted on Facebook. ACO Crumley noted that the shelter did not have a Facebook presence when he began his position and that he believes the page has helped reunite animals with their families.
- p. The Facebook page is used to post information about feral cats, dogs, and friendly cats available for adoption. ACO Crumley explained that although feral cats may ultimately need to be euthanized when appropriate, Animal Control still posts information about them so that caregivers have an opportunity to reclaim them.
- q. ACO Crumley also encouraged residents to register their pets through the Animal Control website and Shelter Pro software. The website, <https://lakewoodoh.animalservices.website/> includes a "My Account" feature that allows Lakewood residents to create an account and register their pets, including photographs. If a pet goes missing, the owner can report it through the system. ACO Crumley explained that if Animal Control subsequently impounds an animal that appears to match a registered missing pet, the system can flag a potential match for both the owner and shelter staff. The pet-registration feature has been available for several months, beginning approximately in April. ACO Crumley encouraged residents to register their pets to increase the likelihood of animals being reunited with their families.

VI. Public Comment

- a. Bob Peck spoke on behalf of his cat, Millie. He stated that he is not trying to diminish the work of Animal Control but wants to ensure it is carried out with modern practices and common sense.
 - i. Mr. Peck said ACO Crumley's account of the incident has changed since the previous meeting. He noted that, at the last meeting, it was stated that the specific animal hospital was unknown, but he believes that explanation has since changed. Mr. Peck also stated that his name, phone number, address, and Millie's name were all on her identification tag. He said Millie's collar was not on her when she arrived at the veterinary hospital, leaving staff without identifying information.
 - ii. Mr. Peck explained that Millie was 18 years old and had never wandered farther than a few houses from home. He believes that if Animal Control had called the phone number on her tag, he would have been able to retrieve her immediately. He stated that he never received a phone call, a message, or anyone knocking on his door.
 - iii. He said he is advocating for common-sense procedures. Had he been contacted, he could have explained Millie's medical condition, including that she was a long-haired cat who required regular grooming of her hindquarters, had a thyroid condition, was on a special diet, and had lost many of her teeth but was still able to eat with appropriate care. Mr. Peck shared that Millie lived a long and well-loved life. She slept with him every night, held his hand, and was deeply loved. Although elderly, he described her as healthy for her age. He said she unexpectedly ran out of the house before he could catch her.

- iv. Within a week, Millie had died. She had a runny nose when she came home, was taken to the veterinarian the following day, and her condition continued to deteriorate. Mr. Peck believes she became ill while housed at the shelter. He said that if common-sense procedures had been followed, Millie might never have entered the shelter or become sick. Mr. Peck concluded by asking that the account of the incident remain consistent from month to month, noting that those who attended the previous meeting would recognize the differences in the story.
- b. Ashley Warner, founder of The Merlin Project, said the organization was created for situations like Bob's. She stated that, similar to Millie's case, many situations involving cats are preventable. Ms. Warner said she believes people generally have good intentions when they try to help an outdoor cat but questioned how to distinguish between an indoor/outdoor cat, a lost cat, and a community cat.
 - i. She explained that The Merlin Project is community-based, allowing neighbors to report sightings and help reunite lost cats with their owners while sharing information with shelters. Referring to policies and procedures, Ms. Warner said she met with Councilperson Steiner, who also met with Councilperson Bixenstine. She acknowledged that the proposed policies and procedures are a good start but believes there are still gray areas. She noted that free-roaming cats and feeding them are prohibited under current ordinances, while The Merlin Project provides a private system for tracking managed cat colonies between residents and project administrators.
 - ii. Ms. Warner stated that removing cat colonies does not solve the problem because new cats will move into the area. Instead, she advocated for trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs as a more effective long-term solution. She said identifying colony caretakers and distinguishing between lost cats and community cats could reduce reliance on Animal Control. She encouraged the Board and residents to learn more about the program and asked cat owners to register their pets.
 - iii. Ms. Warner explained that she designed the platform to continue growing, support municipalities, and help fund its operations. She noted that ACO Crumley referenced ShelterPro, which she described as software developed in 1995 and now outdated. Ms. Warner reported that The Merlin Project currently has approximately 475 users and more than 500 registered cats. She said the platform helps communities identify owned cats and provides tools for municipalities. It also includes a rescue platform for 501(c)(3) organizations, allows users to place stray holds on animals, cross-reference reports, and advertise adoption events for rescues and cities.
- c. Sheri Fry, a Lakewood resident and longtime volunteer with the APL foster program, shared her experience with a foster cat named Beau, whom she ultimately adopted.
 - i. Ms. Fry explained that she recently sold her home and was scheduled to move out on July 9. Shortly before the move, Beau, whom she described as a traumatized cat with PTSD, fled into the attic. She had to turn over

the home to the new owners while Beau was still inside. She informed both the real estate agents and the new owners of the situation, but Beau would not come out and later moved into the basement.

- ii. The following morning, at a neighbor's suggestion, she contacted Animal Control because they were unable to safely retrieve Beau. Ms. Fry said ACO Crumley responded and that Animal Control assisted her throughout the entire process. Over the next five days, Animal Control coordinated with both Ms. Fry and the new homeowners, who she described as gracious and cooperative, while traps were set and monitored.
- iii. On the fifth day, Beau was found not in the basement but in an attic closet that had been closed by the new homeowners, who were unaware he was inside. Ms. Fry concluded by stating that, in her opinion, Beau would not be alive today without the assistance of Animal Control.

Motion is made to adjourn; motion passes. Meeting adjourned at 6:49 pm.