Lakewood Animal Safety & Welfare Advisory Board
September 16th, 2026 Meeting
Location: East Conference Room

APPROVED BY

Present: Nancy Binder, Emily Christescu, Teresa Schleicher, Julia Garleb, Hillary Peters, ACO Gary Crumley, Councilperson Angelina Hamilton Steiner

Not Present: Juleen Russell, Amanda McCready, Phyllis Dykes, Lise Stevens

Lakewood Animal Safety and Welfare Advisory Board Meeting
Minutes Wednesday September 16th, 2026

I. Welcome and roll call conducted by Board Chair Binder. 5 voting members present.
   a. Discussion regarding members calling in. Angelina notes it is possible for someone to call in via zoom if they cannot attend in person.
   b. The two-year term appointments for Board Chair Binder, Board Member Christescu, Board Member Dykes, and Board Member Garleb is scheduled to expire on 31Dec2026. Members need to consider if they wish to seek reappointment.

II. Approval of July Minutes
   a. Motion to approve minutes. Motion seconded. Motion passes to approve the minutes.

III. Lakewood Animal Control Update
   a. Lakewood Municipal Animal Shelter Report
      i. ACO Crumley reports there are 23 animals total at the shelter. This includes a mom with 7 or 8 kittens from an owner who recently passed. ACO Crumley is hopeful the daughter will pick up the animals. There is still one more cat in the apartment that could not be retrieved. The animal is up in the ceiling and there is a lot of food and water available. There are also four dogs in the shelter, three of which are available for adoption. The person who found the fourth dog is interested in adoption. The cats who were dumped at the shelter were spayed/neutered and are now up for adoption. The shelter has been holding a cat named Lefty since 14Aug2026 for a gentleman who was evicted. The Lakewood court system evicted the man, so animal control took custody of her. Once he gets into a new place, he will take her back. There are currently two animals in foster care. ACO Crumley notes the shelter uses Pet Fix for dogs.
   b. Lakewood Municipal Animal Shelter discussion
      i. Board Member Christescu notes she added her cat Maxwell to Shelter Pro and the system connected him to his picture from when he was in the shelter before she adopted him. ACO Crumley says when he impounds an animal, he puts a photo in the program and attaches it to their profile. It gives the animal an ID number with animal control. If the animal is a potential match for a lost animal, the owner and the shelter will get notified. Information from the previous report system rolled over to the new system, so there is some history. ACO Crumley asks the board if they received the information he forwarded regarding the Lakewood Systems Management Model that was sent to the city by a concerned resident. The board discusses that there are discrepancies in the document and inquires if the

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individual would like to attend a meeting to discuss concerns. Board Chair Binder relays that an invitation was previously extended, but was not acted on. Councilperson Steiner asks if Shelter Pro can register animals other than cats and dogs. Board Member Christescu notes there are only options for dog/cat on the website. ACO Crumley is not sure, but he will investigate if it is a possibility. Board Chair Binder discusses the hen program article and thanks ACO Crumley for his work. ACO Crumley notes people need to pay the license fee to keep their chickens. Councilperson Steiner notes that the article mentions Lakewood currently has 44 active hen keeping permits, which is close to the 50 allowed.

IV. Committees and Initiatives
   a. Community Events
      i. The Pet Food drive will be on 14Nov2026. Board Member Christescu will contact the Lakewood Community Services Center regarding the current status of the food drive. Board Chair Binder asks Board Member Peters if she could assist with spearheading the event while Board Member Russell is unavailable. Board Member Peters agrees. The board discusses the need to advertise for the event and flyers are handed out for distribution. The yard signs will also need to be placed in high traffic areas. The board will let Councilperson Steiner know when signs are going to be put out so they do not get taken down by the city. Historically, citizens can also donate cash during the food drive, and the total LCSC received during the event is noted for documentation purposes only. Board Chair Binder asks about the QR code that is on the flyers and if it is specific to the food drive. There is currently no way to track money that is donated with the QR code as it is not specific for the pet food drive. Board Chair Binder plans to ask a few places, including Fit Works in Rocky River, if they can host a bin for the food drive for a few weeks. Board Member Christescu asks if we should ask H2O to assist like the last food drive, and the board agrees that the group was helpful. Board Chair Binder and Board Member Peters will discuss what additional tasks need to be handled prior to the event. Board Chair Binder will reach out to Board Member Russell to let her know the progress.

V. Communications – Social Media Posts/Articles
   a. Merlin Project
      i. Ashley Warner is the founder of the Merlin Project and is attending the meeting to give a presentation about the platform. Ashley invites the board members to pull up the webpage to explore the platform. The first page includes the status board as well as options for registering a cat, reporting a cat, browsing cat profiles, and the cat map. Ashley recommends residents register their cats before they go missing. When a cat is marked as lost, a message is sent out to a three mile radius. The system will also cross references the status board. Merlin project currently has 26 resolved cases. One can open the cat map to view the cats registered to the platform in the area. Ashley notes this platform mitigates cats who are cared for/owned being taken to shelters when they are lost, and can help identify lost cats, stray cats, and found cats. ACO Crumley asks Ashley about privacy. Ashley states information is kept private and privacy and safety are important. There is an internal messaging system where the owner can share their phone number. Every user is verified via email address when registering. When adding a cat, the platform asks the owner to add the block location instead of actual address – a pin dropper pops up and the owner can put the pin where they want. Additionally, an owner can create other pin locations for family member pets or feral/community cat that they take care of. The user dashboard allows the owner to add a new location or another animal. Once on the animal profile, the owner can click a

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button to report the cat as lost, which can include a customized note ("Merlin Alert"). Members of the platform would get an email that an animal was reported as lost, which would include the owner's message and whatever contact info the owner chooses to share. Board Member Christescu asks if this platform is for profit. Ashley specifies no money is made from the webpage and she created it because she saw a problem that could be helped. Board Member Christescu asks about owned cats being free roaming, as the owner can be ticketed if an animal is allowed to be outside unattended. Ashley asks how we identify what cats are lost, feral, or owned in general. Board Member Christescu specifies ear tip is universal sign of a TNR cat. Members agree that it is irresponsible for owners to let a cat outside knowingly. Board Member Christescu and ACO Crumley specify dogs and cats cannot free roam. Ashley says there is not a system at the level of the neighborhood for pet reunification. ACO Crumley specifies we have the Shelter Pro system where residents can register their pets. Ashley asks ACO Crumley about the 40 cats that were recently euthanized by the shelter. ACO Crumley specifies that was from a hoarding situation with sick cats, not stray cats. Ashley brings up Ordinance 326 which defines community cat caregivers and she claims it bans outdoor feeding. Board Member Christescu specifies the ordinance does not include a ban on outdoor feeding. Ashley notes that people can hide their community cats from view in the Merlin Project system, but the caretaker can still track their colony. Councilperson Steiner specifies this is in contrast to the ordinance and we do not want to encourage colony expansion. Board Member Christescu specifies TNR is legal but it is not a city program. The ordinance was updated to protect community volunteers. Ashley specifies the Merlin Project was not built specifically for Lakewood and there are other communities where colonies are more prominent. Ashley states that in her research she did not find information about cats decimating wildlife populations and says cats can help mitigate rodent populations. Ashley notes a recent occurrence where an owl died after a mouse trap was found stuck on his foot. Ashley thinks mouse traps/poison is more of a problem than having cats control the rodent population. ACO Crumley specifies the city does not promote businesses as he saw a post where Ashley was asking for donations regarding the project. Board Chair Binder asks what Ashley is asking for from the city regarding Merlin project. Ashley says she would like to see the program grow. The Merlin Project currently has 483 registered users in Lakewood and 688 registered cats. There are currently 26 open status board posts which could include roaming (poster just saw the animal go by), deceased, or found (the poster has the animal in his/her possession). Ashley states there is an estimated 15,000 owned cats in Lakewood and approximately 7,000 community cared for cats. Ashley said she would like to see less people bring animals to the shelter. ACO Crumley says the animals should go to the shelter and be put through Shelter Pro to reunify. Councilperson Steiner asks Ashley what she wants Merlin Project's roll to be in the city. Ashley says she would potentially like to see the city incorporate the Merlin Project and potentially have the program interact with Shelter Pro in the future. Board Chair Binder recommends Ashley get in contact with Shelter Pro to see if there is any potential for Merlin Project to be integrated. Councilperson Steiner specifies the city will likely not use Merlin Project, but residents could be encouraged to use it. Ashley wants to eventually have partnerships to grow the platform. ACO Crumley says Merlin Project could encourage its users to utilize both Merlin Project and Shelter Pro. Board Member Garleb asks Ashley if there is a mechanism in place to request the poster to take the animal to the shelter if an animal is marked as found

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but there is no resolution in a specified timeframe. Ashley said she can look into making that an option and notes suggestions for Merlin Project are welcome and she can work to incorporate ideas that may be beneficial.

Motion is made to adjourn; motion passes. Meeting adjourned at 07:47 pm.

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