

LAKEWOOD LIFE

Fall 2026

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A Note From Mayor George

We have made it through another fun, beautiful, and eventful summer season. Thank you to everyone who helped make our concerts, festivals, and summer events such a success!

Unfortunately, the ongoing reliability issues with FirstEnergy's power grid continue to be one of the most significant challenges facing our city. Lakewood residents have endured serious and prolonged power outages over the past few years, and the City remains committed to holding FirstEnergy accountable. In July, on behalf of the City of Lakewood, I filed another complaint with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), demanding both meaningful, permanent grid repairs and financial penalties for the unacceptable service disruptions our residents and businesses have experienced.

After PUCO issued a finding of Probable Non-Compliance for the second consecutive year, FirstEnergy responded with a proposed grid replacement plan. While this proposal is an encouraging step forward, I have made it clear to PUCO that long-term improvements alone are not enough. Our community needs immediate action and short-term repairs to strengthen the existing system and prevent the recurring outages that have impacted homes, businesses, and daily life for far too long.

Please know that the City's Law Department, City Council, and I remain fully committed to securing real and lasting improvements to our electrical infrastructure. We will continue to advocate aggressively on behalf of our residents and will not stop pushing for solutions until this problem is resolved.

Thank you for continuing to make your voices heard by filing complaints with PUCO and sharing your experiences. The progress we have achieved so far has been the result of a true team effort, and your engagement remains critical as we work toward a more reliable future for Lakewood.

You can read more about the City's ongoing efforts and advocacy inside this edition of Lakewood Life.



Meghan F. George



Holding FirstEnergy Accountable

Lakewood's Fight for Reliable Power

On August 7, PUCO issued a Probable Non-Compliance notice to FirstEnergy recommending a $3 million forfeiture penalty and six corrective actions to address reliability problems in Lakewood. PUCO's investigation identified numerous equipment failures, over 18,000 customer outages, and FirstEnergy staff routinely using lawn-watering sprinklers to cool the Lauderdale substation on hot days.

This follows more than a year of persistent efforts by the City to address FirstEnergy's reliability problems. In 2025, Lakewood filed a complaint with PUCO regarding severe outages; PUCO investigated and found they were caused by equipment failures rather than weather. PUCO required FirstEnergy to install two new transformers by the end of 2026, inspect and repair pole equipment, report all outages, and improve communications with residents.

Earlier this year, Lakewood formally intervened to oppose FirstEnergy's application to reduce its reliability standards, and PUCO sided with the City, denying the company's application. The City also filed a motion to intervene against FirstEnergy's proposed rate increase. Most recently, Mayor George updated Lakewood's complaint to demand readily available short-term emergency capacity if FirstEnergy's equipment fails again.

While Ohio law gives PUCO sole oversight authority over public utilities, Lakewood has successfully used the PUCO process to advocate for residents, document reliability problems, push for and secure grid updates, and obtain a potential multi-million-dollar financial penalty against FirstEnergy. The City will continue these efforts and keep residents informed as the process moves forward.

Residents experiencing significant outages should report them to PUCO to help document the scope and impact of the problems with FirstEnergy's grid in Lakewood. The City has established a website with key information and a timeline at: lakewoodoh.gov/electricity-and-power-outages.

Timeline of City Actions Concerning FirstEnergy

June 27, 2025
Mayor George partners with Cleveland Councilman Slife and Councilman Kazy to formally petition PUCO for an investigation into the outages that occurred the week of June 23, 2025.

July 1, 2025
PUCO launches formal investigation into FirstEnergy.

July 25, 2025
PUCO investigation results in letter of Probable Non-Compliance to FirstEnergy. Noted that severe outages in Lakewood were caused by equipment or line failure and not weather-related events. It also identified a significant amount of older infrastructure compared to surrounding areas.

August 11, 2025
FirstEnergy leadership holds a town hall meeting in Lakewood for the public. Residents share their experiences and feelings about the numerous outages.

October 1, 2025
PUCO formally orders FirstEnergy to install two new transformers at a Lakewood substation and complete inspection and repair of pole equipment no later than the end of 2026.

October 7, 2025
City of Lakewood files legal intervention to oppose FirstEnergy's application to lower its reliability standards with PUCO.

December 1, 2025
City Council issues resolution supporting intervention in FirstEnergy's petition to lower reliability standards.

December 5, 2025
Mayor George submits affidavit and supporting evidence in opposition to FirstEnergy's petition to lower its reliability standards.

February 26, 2026
Lakewood Law Director Ernest Vargo participates in PUCO hearings on reliability standards and cross-examines FirstEnergy officials.

June 23, 2026
New transformer delivered to Lakewood substation (Athens Avenue) in direct response to PUCO order from October 1.

June 24, 2026
PUCO sides with Lakewood and denies FirstEnergy's application to lower reliability standards.

July 6, 2026
Mayor George submits complaint to PUCO to reopen its investigation seeking additional penalties against FirstEnergy including the creation of an escrow system for customers' bills.

July 20, 2026
Lakewood Law Department presents to City Council summarizing the actions taken by the City in response to FirstEnergy's actions related to power outages.

August 7, 2026
PUCO issues a new Letter of Probable Non-Compliance in response to the City of Lakewood's complaints regarding the July 2026 power outages.

August 20, 2026
The City of Lakewood files a motion to intervene in FirstEnergy's application to increase customer rates before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO).

August 21, 2026
CEI (FirstEnergy) issues its response and corrective action plan relating to the PUCO's Probable Non-Compliance finding of August 7, 2026.

September 25, 2026
Mayor George sends PUCO a supplement to the City of Lakewood's July 6 complaint demanding an order that FirstEnergy implements an interim capacity plan to avoid outages while long-term investments are made.



Strengthening Technology, Security, and Accessibility

Technology evolves rapidly, and along with it, the digital threats facing local governments. The City of Lakewood is working to stay ahead of these risks while introducing new digital tools to make daily interactions with City Hall easier and more efficient.

Finance Department In Midst of Upgrade

The City's Finance Department is working to upgrade its now 25-year-old finance system to improve efficiency across every City department. Once in place, the system will improve all financial functions including purchasing, budgeting, accounting, HR, and payroll.

With this upgrade, residents will see a new water billing system that will go live in the Summer of 2027. The new system will allow residents to see their water usage online and offers easier methods to pay their bill.

Enhancing Cybersecurity At City Hall

The City of Lakewood's IT Department has worked hard to modernize the government's computer infrastructure and keep up with those who might stage a cyber-attack. As Mike Coletta, IT Director for the City, explains:

"We've been moving to what is known as a zero-trust model – the same approach the federal government now requires of its own agencies. Instead of assuming anything inside our network is safe, users and devices have to verify who they are and only get access to what their job requires."

Throughout the City's Departments as well as Police and Fire, every employee must complete regular security training. Said Coletta, "Residents trust the City with their information, and we've built our security program around earning that trust every day."

New Lakewood Website Focuses On Digital Accessibility

In June of 2026, the City launched its redesigned website, lakewoodoh.gov. The new design offers a more organized page structure, enhanced navigation menu, and incorporates digital accessibility features for users who use assistive technology.

The new website helps the City to comply with upcoming accessibility rules that will go into effect in April of 2027. The design was created in-house, saving the City money and granting the ability to make updates, change the design, and create new helpful features.



Painting The Town

Lakewood expands Public Art Program with new installations

It is difficult to travel more than a few city blocks in Lakewood without coming across a work of art. By the end of 2026, four new installations will have been added to our growing outdoor gallery: the "All Good Dogs Go To Lakewood" mural, thirty new traffic signal boxes, five new bus shelter pieces, and the Birds of Birdtown street sign sculptures.

As you head west down Madison past Madison Park, you really can't miss **"All Good Dogs Go To Lakewood,"** the two-story mural painted on the side of the building that houses SuperScript Comics. The mural was painted by Brushworks Garage artists Derek Brennan and Chad Fedorovich.





Following 2025's successful **traffic signal box art program**, the City added pieces to thirty more boxes in 2026. Contributing artists included Chi-Irena Wong, Sequoia Bostick, Thao Nguyen, Debbie Clapper, Mickey Mencin, and Nathalie Bermudez Pineda.

Finally, the **Birds of Birdtown artwork** has been designed and are scheduled for placement in November 2026. Through this project, decorative three-dimensional birds designed by artist Arlin Graff will be installed atop street signs in Lakewood's Birdtown neighborhood.



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Fall Leaf Collection

The City's fall leaf collection takes place November 1, 2026 through approximately December 15 or as long as weather conditions allow. The Streets and Forestry team collects leaves from every street in Lakewood multiple times. In 2025, streets were visited by the collection team approximately every seven days until winter weather weather arrived.

To ensure that your leaves are collected, residents should place their leaves in a loose pile on their tree lawn no farther than 6 feet from the curb. We also ask that residents avoid parking vehicles on the street between 8 AM and 4 PM to make sure collection crews can reach all leaves. Certain streets with heavy street parking volume may be posted with temporary "No Parking" signs before collection.

More information about the leaf collection program and an interactive map of recent and pending collections can be found at **www.lakewoodoh.gov/leaf-collection**.

