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Volume 21, Issue 05, March 5, 2025

We Hear Why It Is Bad From Nickie And Tristan Columbus Takes Away What Voters Overwhelmingly Approved

by State Rep Tristan Rader

Ohio's voters sent a clear message in 2023: legal cannabis is here to stay. Issue 2 passed by a landslide, winning 57% statewide and over 80% of the vote right here in Lakewood. It wasn't even close. The very next year after the law takes effect, the Ohio Senate has decided that the will of the people is nothing more than a minor inconvenience.

SB 56 is nothing less than a direct assault on democracy. It guts core provisions of the voter-approved cannabis law, stripping away expansions, creating unnecessary barriers, and making criminals out of ordinary Ohioans for something they just voted to legalize. Let's break down the worst of this betrayal:

1. Expungement Roll-backs: Pay to Clear a Record for a Non-Crime?

One of the biggest reasons Ohioans supported Issue 2 was the promise of auto-



matic expungement—wiping old cannabis charges off the records of thousands of people who never should have been convicted in the first place. But SB 56 throws up red tape and needless bureaucracy, forcing people to navigate a broken system to clear their names for something that isn't even a crime anymore.

And if that wasn't insulting enough? The bill makes people pay a fee to have their records expunged. As if having a record for something that's now legal—something that has dogged them for years, hindered their ability to work, rent a home, and lead produc-

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Senate Bill 56 Is Wrong For Ohio

by Senator Nickie Antonio

Despite massive opposition from Ohio residents, Senate Republicans passed Senate Bill 56 last week, undermining the over 2 million Ohio voters who overwhelmingly approved legal recreational marijuana use in the state in 2023. While many Republicans who supported this bill state that they want this change in the name of health and safety, that is solely a distraction from the real reason behind the legislation: to undermine Ohio voters.

Ohioans have had the freedom to use marijuana recreationally for over a year, and our recreational marijuana market has been operating without issue for more than six months. However, to defend this unnecessary change to the statute, GOP lawmakers have stated that Ohio voters did not understand what they were voting on when Issue 2 was on



Leader Antonio speaks before a Senate Committee.

the ballot, insulting the intelligence of their constituents. It is disrespectful to the millions of Ohioans who advocated and voted for the legalization of adult marijuana use and is yet another example of how Ohio Republicans think they know best.

This bill does not help people within our state, it hurts them. This legislation, if enacted, would strip Ohio residents of their rights by imposing unnecessary limitations, increased taxes, and

needless regulations on marijuana. Moreover, Senate Bill 56 would make smoking in public a misdemeanor, mandating that Ohioans only smoke in private residences. Are you a renter whose landlord prohibits marijuana use in your building? Under Senate Bill 56, you would not be allowed to smoke in our state. This is not what Ohioans voted for and is not what they want.

Instead of building on the success of the recreational marijuana market to benefit our state, Senate Bill 56 will move Ohio in the wrong direction, causing irreparable harm to this new part of the economy. This legislation would drive Ohio consumers to travel to other states where marijuana laws are more consumer-friendly, taking millions of dollars out of the state. No new dispensaries would be able to start busi-

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Save Our Neighborhood Schools Meeting March 16

by Monica Bruaw

Preserve Lakewood Schools is hosting a community information meeting on Sunday, March 16, from 5 -6 pm at Lakewood Public Library in the multi-purpose room. This meeting is open to all: parents from all schools, residents, business owners, etc. Learn the basics about the school district's Elementary School Task Force planning process, ask questions, and learn how you can get involved. Come join us!

Preserve Lakewood. Save our Neighborhood Schools is a dedicated community project in Lakewood, Ohio, committed to preventing the closure/repurposing of elementary schools by the Lakewood City School District. Find more information at: <https://www.preservelakewoodschools.org>

LHS Academic Challenge Team On A Roll



by Christine Gordillo

The Lakewood High School Academic Challenge team has been on a roll lately. **Some highlights from the team:**

Team captain Shannon Katzenberger recently was selected to participate in the 2025 Individual Player National Championship Tournament, presented by the National Academic Quiz Tournaments organization. Shannon will head to Chicago in April to represent Lakewood and compete against other top quiz bowl participants from across the country!

Shannon was joined by team members Nicholas Graham, Mae

Mohar and Domenico Sgambellone Feb. 15 to compete in the Solon Comet Clash Tournament, where they finished 10th of 20 teams.

Nicholas, Domenico and Alesseo Matera traveled to the News 5 Cleveland studios on Feb. 18 to tape the station's Nordson Academic Challenge show. You'll have to tune in on April 19 to see how the team fared against North Royalton and West Holmes.

Congratulations to all the AC team members and adviser Autumn Sabin for continuing to carry on the LHS Academic Challenge tradition of excellence!

Senior Qualifies For State Wrestling Championships

Senior Zayna Muntaser qualified for the Girls State Wrestling Championships in Columbus!

Zayna earned her state spot by finishing as runner-up in her weight class at the District Tournament this past weekend.

This will be Zayna's third straight trip to state! We all wish Zayna the best of luck!



Senior Zayna Muntaser

PRESIDENT’S PAGE

Celebrating Mary Warren’s 95th Birthday

Dear Neighbors,

On Tuesday, March 4th longtime Lakewood resident, lifelong volunteer, activist, all-around upstanding citizen Mary Warren celebrated her 95th birthday! As a fitting way to kick off Women’s History Month, at Monday’s Council meeting, Ward 3 Councilwoman Cindy Strebis and I introduced Resolution 2025-07 which commemorates Mary Warren’s 95th Birthday and her work with the League of Women Voters and the community. We were honored to be joined by many of Mary’s family and friends. Mary was unable to attend as she was recovering from surgery

Mary Warren was born March 4th 1930 in St. Paul Minnesota. While in Minnesota she earned a bachelor’s degree in social work, a remarkable feat in a time when women were definitely in the minority on college campuses. With her education, Mary was able to enjoy a 20-year career as a counselor, and later, after earning a Master’s Degree at the age of 63, became a licensed professional clinical counselor helping children and families.

She met born-and-raised Lakewoodite Joe Warren in a chance encounter at Yellowstone National Park, and after their love grew into marriage, Mary & Joe Warren began making their home on Blossom Park Ave in 1952. While also raising their children, Ms. Warren immersed herself in Lakewood civic and religious life, taking on volunteer roles with the PTA, St. Malachi Catholic Church, and the Lakewood Chapter of the League of Women Voters of Greater Cleveland where she served as one of the Chapter’s most engaged, active, and long-standing members for over 60 years, and served as its president for multiple terms during that time.

With the League of Women Voters, Mary Warren has registered thousands of voters, including high-school students through numerous voter drives at Lakewood High School. At Monday’s meeting Councilwoman Strebis shared that at one such drive, in the time it took her to persuade one student to register, Mary had already registered eight! In appreciation for her many civic pursuits and her work over the years, Ms. Warren was recognized by the League of Women Voters(LWV) in 2021 with an annual scholarship named in her honor. The scholarship is awarded to select Lakewood High School seniors who follow in her footsteps and demonstrate a high level of community engagement.

Mary’s active participation in

by Sarah Kepple
President of City Council/Council Person-At-Large



City Hall and Warren Family celebrate the evening, while thinking of Mary.



Mary Warren in 2024 at Lakewood High School registering young voters, outside of her family, her second biggest passion.

Lakewood’s civic and governmental affairs over many decades provides another example of the long tradition of confident and vocal female leaders influencing public policy in Lakewood. At Monday’s Council meeting, former councilwoman and active LWV member Pam Smith shared how it was Mary Warren who first educated fellow members about the remarkable fact that women in Lakewood claimed their right to vote three years before the passage of the 19th Amendment. In 1917, the seven men on Lakewood’s City Council placed the issue of suffrage on Lakewood’s ballot, where it passed by more than 70%, enabling Lakewood women to vote in school and local issues. Mary’s stewardship of this important history led to the historical marker now placed outside the Women’s Pavilion in Lakewood Park.

Mrs. Smith also shared that when the Lakewood LWV Chapter celebrated their 100th anniversary, Mary dressed as Lakewood suffragette extraordi-

vention, the first woman to serve in a Cleveland mayor’s cabinet, the first woman to run for mayor of Lakewood, and in 1934 President Franklin Roosevelt appointed her collector of customs for the Cleveland district. The work of Mary Warren and her fellow LWV members helped remind our community of this groundbreaking woman, and in 2020, the City of Lakewood dedicated Bernie Pyke Park in her honor.

Earlier this year, Lakewood City Council became majority female for the first time in our City’s long history, a history kept alive and a democracy activated by the remarkable Mary Warren and all of those whom she has inspired. As we celebrate her 95th birthday, let us all uphold her example of life-long learning, civic engagement, fidelity to our values, and dedication to family and community.

Happy Birthday Mary Warren, and thank you.



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Your Independent Source for Lakewood News & Opinion

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THE MAYOR’S CORNER

Lakewood Fire Department Focused On Risk Prevention and Promoting Health

by Meghan George
Mayor/Safety Director, City of Lakewood

The people of Lakewood benefit from the presence of a fantastic team of first responders in our fire department who stand ready to fight fires and provide emergency paramedic care at a moment’s notice. But Chief Ryan Fairbanks and his team at Lakewood Fire Department (LFD) are equally focused on ways to prevent and limit the risk of fires and crisis medical situations. With an array of creative and cutting-edge prevention programs targeted to help Lakewood residents at all stages of life, LFD is working daily to stop emergencies before they happen.

One great example is LFD’s Neighborhood Paramedic Program, which was launched in 2022 to help Lakewood’s most vulnerable prevent injuries and address medical issues before they escalate – to a 911 call, an ER visit, or even an extended hospital stay. The program focuses heavily on Lakewood’s senior citizen population. In just the past year alone, our Neighborhood Paramedic Oliver Harper has performed nearly 200 home assessments to identify trip-fall hazards and then partner with LakewoodAlive to remedy them. While performing the

home assessments, Neighborhood Paramedic Harper also uses the opportunity to engage with that senior to assess their overall health and wellness and develop next steps to address any needs. This is just one aspect of the program, which uses everything from education and home safety work to large scale blood pressure clinics and overall well-being and prevention to make a difference for Lakewood.

On the other end of the age spectrum is our Car Seat Fit Stop Program, which is geared towards residents with young children who need help ensuring that their car seats are properly installed and meet all safety requirements. Our firefighter paramedics involved in the program each receive extensive additional training to provide the program. This low-cost, high benefit program has proven immensely popular with Lakewood residents since its relaunch in 2022, helping hundreds of families protect our communities youngest and most vulnerable mem-

bers. Our firefighter paramedics also use these interactions as ways to inform families of LFD’s other prevention programs.

LFD also provides several invaluable trainings on key safety and prevention topics to many different audiences. For older children and teens, LFD participates in H2O’s Home Alone program (covering topics such as emergencies and basic first aid). With seniors at Lakewood High School, LFD offers the Senior Safety Symposium, which educates soon-to-be-graduates on fire and residential safety and risk prevention as they move out on their own or head off to college. LFD also offers community training for any resident interested in learning CPR or in Stop the Bleed, empowering learners to take action in emergencies until medi-

cal professionals can take over.

Our fire department is also proactive in seeking out grants and partnerships to make their efforts more impactful and provide value to residents. One great example is our partnership with the Red Cross to provide a steady supply of smoke detectors that LFD installs for Lakewood seniors. Our work with seniors is also immensely benefitted by LFD’s partnerships with our local health care providers, nonprofit service agencies, senior building owners, and of course our other city departments (e.g., Human Services, Building & Housing, and Police).

Through LFD’s innovative and determined prevention efforts, Lakewood residents are staying safer, facing fewer emergencies, and maintaining health in their homes. I encourage you to visit the Lakewood Fire Department website to see how these programs and initiatives might benefit you or someone you care about: lakewoodoh.gov/fire/.



Lakewood Firefighters and Paramedics working with teachers at Lakewood High, giving them life saving lessons, things to look for, and what to do in an emergency.

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LAKEWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY EVENTS

Children’s And Youth Services

by Jeffrey Siebert
Family Weekend Wonders

Main Library- Fridays and Saturdays at 10:30 a.m.
Madison Branch- Fridays at 10:30 a.m.
Looking for weekend entertainment for the whole family? Look no further! Drop in to the Library’s special weekend story time. Your whole family will enjoy these programs full of enthusiastic stories, engaging activities, entertaining music and clever crafts. Family Weekend Wonders Drop-In Story Time is offered every weekend throughout the year and features a different theme each week to keep things engaging. No registration is required.

Just Baby ‘N Me
For You and Your Birth to 24-Month-Old Baby
Main Library - Mondays- 10:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.
Wednesdays- 10:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.-6:30 p.m.
Thursdays-10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.
Madison Branch - Thursdays- 11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Just Baby ‘N Me is a lap-sit story time ideal for babies from birth through early walkers. The focus is on rhymes, songs, finger plays and exploring short books together. No registration is required.

Pre-school Story Time
For You and Your 2 to 5-Year-Old Pre-schooler.
Main Library - Tuesdays: 10:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.
Wednesdays: 11:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.

Madison Branch - Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.
Children and their parents will enjoy stories, movement and songs for thirty fun filled minutes. The focus is on early literacy skills. No registration is required.

Pajama Party
For You and Your 2 to 6 Year-Old Child
Mondays: 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Tuesdays: 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Make the Library a part of your bedtime routine with an evening story time. Children are encouraged to wear their favorite pajamas and bring their stuffed animal friends to snuggle. Join us as we wind down for the night with quiet books, movement, fingerplays and songs. No registration is required.

Learn About Albania Scavenger Hunt For Youth of All Ages
February 1, 2025-March 31, 2025
Discover many different aspects of everyday life in Albania by hunting for signs throughout the children’s area of the Library. Enter your scavenger hunt sheet into a drawing to win a prize. The scavenger hunt will be ready for hunting at the Main Lakewood Public Library and the Madison branch of the Lakewood Public Library. No registration required.

Bricks and Books
Sunday, March 9, 2025 6:00pm - 7:30pm in the Main Library Activity Room
For Students in Kindergarten through Fifth Grade. In this hands-on experience, kids will use Lego building bricks, gears, and figures to design and construct amazing structures and imaginative creations. Alongside their building, we will be exploring the library’s extensive collection of Lego-themed books, offering inspiration, challenges, and stories for all levels. No registration required.

Senate Bill 56 Is Wrong For Ohio - Nickie Antonio

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ness in Ohio if Senate Bill 56 passes, stunting economic growth and locking people out of the industry.

In addition to economic setbacks, Senate Bill 56 would also weaken social equity within Ohio. This legislation includes language to expunge pre-Issue 2 marijuana possession convictions, but adds a \$50 dollar filing fee to have the record expunged with no financial assistance appropriated to help cover the cost of those processing removals. This specifically targets Ohioans who are already financially distressed and does not explain how the state plans to cover these costs.

The Senate Democrats offered several amendments to ensure that the bill would have respected the will and

rights of Ohio voters. The amendments would have removed financial barriers to expungement, explicitly stated marijuana would be subject to the same smoking laws as cigarettes, increased the limit on homegrown plants from 6 to 9 per household, reestablished the THC content and milligram serving limits to current law, and returned the dispensary license distribution to current law. Nevertheless, these amendments were tabled in committee without the consideration they deserved.

Ohio has a real chance of positive and equitable change to make our state better for our current and future generations. Listening to the will of people and respecting their freedoms, as well as opinions, is the true way to make Ohio a state where everyone loves to live. Ohioans do not want Senate Bill 56, and

as legislators, we need to respect and honor their voices. This legislation now advances to the Ohio House for consideration which means there is still time for Ohioans to speak out to demand that the legislature respect the will of the people while removing financial barriers to record expungement.

State Senator Nickie J. Antonio (D-Lakewood) is honored to be serving in the Ohio Senate, representing District 23, and in leadership as the

Minority Leader. Antonio, who was elected to the Senate in 2018, previously spent eight years in the Ohio House of Representatives, where she served District 13 and was also a member of leadership. Antonio has served as a Lakewood City Councilmember, Executive Director of an outpatient drug and alcohol treatment program for women, Adjunct Professor, and a teacher for children with special needs.

Senate Bill 56 - Tristan Rader

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tive lives—wasn’t punishment enough. Now, the Ohio Senate wants to shake them down for more money just to clear their own names. It’s outrageous.

2. Home Grow Restrictions: Criminalizing Ohioans for Growing a Legal Plant

Voters explicitly approved home grow. They understood that safe, legal access means allowing people to cultivate their own cannabis without fear. SB 56 rips that right away, dramatically reducing the legal limits on home grow and making it illegal to share cannabis with friends or family. That’s right—pass a legally grown joint to a buddy, and you could be charged with a crime. The Senate has effectively re-criminalized the same activity voters just decriminalized. This isn’t lawmaking—it’s spite.

3. Needless Red Tape: The Senate is Gaslighting Ohioans

Instead of following the will of the people, SB 56 drowns legalization in bureaucratic nonsense, making it

harder for businesses to operate, harder for consumers to access safe products, and harder for Ohio to reap the economic benefits of a thriving cannabis industry. Ohioans voted for legalization with clear expectations. They did not vote for a corporate-friendly, government-controlled version that blocks access, limits personal freedom, and keeps people tied up in unnecessary legal battles.

4. A Slap in the Face to Democracy
Let’s be crystal clear: this is not about "fixing" Issue 2. This is about Republican politicians ignoring the will of the people because they didn’t like the outcome of the vote. If over 80% of people in Lakewood support a law, and the Senate immediately guts it, what does that say about their respect for democracy? About their respect for us?

SB 56 is a betrayal of the voters, a rejection of personal freedom, and a return to outdated, failed policies that criminalize ordinary Ohioans. The people spoke. The Senate refused to listen.

Ohioans won’t forget this attack on their rights.

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LAKEWOOD EDUCATION

Hayes Second Graders Celebrate Ramadan



by Christine Gordillo

Two Hayes Elementary second graders in Ms. Perez's class shared a special presentation with their classmates about Ramadan, highlighting some of the traditions observed by their families during this important month for Muslims. They spoke about fasting, family gatherings, and acts of kindness that are part of the celebration. To help bring the traditions to life, Shahim's mother helped teach the class how to create their own lanterns — a beautiful decoration often used by Muslim families during Ramadan.

What a wonderful way to learn about holidays and celebrations that may be different from our own!



Horace Mann's Planetarium

by Christine Gordillo

Horace Mann first graders enjoyed a special treat last week as part of their astronomy unit as teachers Patti Cramer and Julie Harkness magically transformed a closet into an amazing planetarium! The students really enjoyed reading and learning even more about space while feeling like they were IN space. Talk about creative!

LHS History



Lakewood High School was one of the only high schools in the country with a full size planetarium. When built it was one of the few planetariums in North America. Lakewood Observer Archives

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COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Steimle Takes A Seat At The Table

by Tracy Marie Greenberg

In 2023, the Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities (Cuyahoga DD) established the Leadership Council, appointing five individuals with developmental disabilities who are also receiving services from Cuyahoga DD. The Council's purpose is to gain the perspectives of people with DD who are compelled and willing to share their voices and advocacy to benefit their community.

The Leadership Council was also established, in part, to prepare for a new law in Ohio. The new rule requires that at least one seat be reserved on every County Board of DD for an individual with a developmental disability. Until now, board members have been parents, caregivers or family members of those with disabilities.

Beginning at the February Board meeting, a person with a developmental disability will have a role on the Cuyahoga DD Board. It's a seat at the table and a groundbreaking moment for the DD community.

"I think it is important for someone served by Cuyahoga DD to sit on the board, especially when what is being discussed has a direct effect on them and the other individuals being served," says Sara Steimle who



The Cuyahoga County Council voted unanimously to appoint Steimle as a Board Member, making her the first person with a developmental disability to serve in this role at Cuyahoga DD.

has served as Secretary on Leadership Council since the beginning.

Her first term with Leadership Council, however, will be cut short as she moves on to a bigger role. On January 28th, Cuyahoga County Council voted unanimously to appoint Steimle as a Board Member, making her the very first person with a developmental disability to serve in this role at Cuyahoga DD.

"We are very excited to welcome Sara to our Board," said Cuyahoga DD Superintendent and CEO Dr. Amber

C. Gibbs. "People with disabilities should be represented on boards that make decisions about things that affect them."

Sara Steimle has a long history of service and professional experience working for the disability community. She has earned a Bachelor of Science majoring in Rehabilitation Services from Wright State University. Since then she has been employed by Youth Challenge as their Alumni Program Coordinator. In addition, Sara also serves on the Cuyahoga County Advisory Committee on Persons with Disabilities (CCACPD).

"Sara has already made significant contributions to Cuyahoga DD through her membership on our Leadership Council," said Superintendent Gibbs. "Her professional experience and her demonstrated commitment to the disability community will make her an asset to the Board. I look forward to the many ways she will continue to contribute to our agency in this new role."

With her experience in serving the disability community and being a person affected by cerebral palsy, Sara has both lived and professional experience to understand the needs of her community to help with directing the decisions made by the board.

"I am excited to serve the disability community in this way. My perspective is unique," Sara says. "Not only do I receive services due to my disability, but professionally I serve people with disabilities. I am familiar with both providing services and the services that are provided to me personally."

Sara took her seat at the table when she was sworn in at the February 27 board meeting.

Tracy Marie Greenberg is a Singer-Songwriter, Disability Rights advocate and 23-year Lakewood resident.



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Coffee With State Rep. Rader Pulls In Mayor George And Many, Many Neighbors



State Rep Tristan Rader's talks with residents have been informative and enjoyable. Mayor Meghan George joining in at Propaganda Coffee on Detroit, only made it twice so.

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LAKEWOOD CARES

Lakewood Tree Giveaway Program Returns This Spring

by Matt Bixenstine

Calling Lakewood residents: We need your help in growing our city’s tree canopy. The Lakewood Tree Giveaway Program returns with 200 free trees available this spring, and YOU are eligible to receive a beautiful, native tree for planting at your home.

Online ordering goes live at 10 am on Thursday, April 3. In less than 10 minutes, you can reserve your tree (limit one per resident) by visiting arborday.org/lakewoodoh and selecting a shade or ornamental species that fits your yard (note: not for planting on treelawns). Each tree has a starting height of 4 to 5 feet, a size which allows for easy transport and planting while still making an immediate impact on your landscape.

The following species will be available as part of the Spring Tree Giveaway: Allegheny Serviceberry, Black Tupelo (Black Gum), Chinquapin Oak, Hornbeam, Pagoda Dogwood, Redbud, River Birch, and Sweetbay Magnolia.

A Tree Giveaway Pickup event will be held on Saturday, April 26, from 10 am to 1 pm at Bernice Pyke Park (1320 Belle Avenue in Downtown Lakewood), during which tree planting demonstrations will take place. Learn more by visiting lakewoodoh.gov/tree-advisory-and-education-board.



Trees are a vital part of our community, improving our quality of life in many ways. Trees clean our air and water, cool our environment, reduce flooding, lower energy costs, increase property values, and provide habitats for nature. Lakewood's legacy as a longtime 'Tree City USA' serves as a source of community pride, but we need your help to replenish our aging tree canopy.

The Lakewood Tree Giveaway Program takes place this spring while supplies last. All orders are subject to approval and must be at a Lakewood, Ohio address. Thank you for helping to grow our city's tree canopy!

Lakewood Parks Coalition To Host 'How To Start A Park Group' Workshop On March 27

by Matt Bixenstine

Looking to get involved in your local community? Want to inspire a greater sense of connection, improve safety, and contribute to the vibrancy of your city?

It all starts in our neighborhood parks.

The Lakewood Parks Coalition is pleased to announce a free workshop "How to Start a Park Group" taking place Thursday, March 27 from 7 to 8:30pm at the Madison Branch of Lakewood Public Library, 13229 Madison Avenue.

Attendees will gain insights on:

- Best practices for establishing a group
- How to sustain community involvement
- Resources for, and benefits of, park stewardship

Community members are encouraged to attend and ask questions.

The event will be moderated by Tim Dewald, Friends of Merl Bunts Park, and will feature a discussion and Q&A. Panelists include:

- Missy Toms – Kauffman Park Friends
- Kris Williams – Kauffman Park Friends
- Matt Bixenstine – Friends of Madison Park



Kate Catanese – Friends of Impett Park

City parks are the lifeblood of our neighborhoods, providing vital access to recreation and nature, improving physical and mental health, and offering community-building opportunities in a welcoming, inclusive environment. "Friends of" groups can play a variety of roles in city parks, like hosting community events, addressing park issues, and advocating for improvements.

How to Start a Park Group is a collaborative undertaking of Lakewood Parks Coalition, Kauffman Park Friends, Friends of Madison Park, Friends of Merl Bunts Park, and Friends of Impett Park. We hope to see you on the evening of March 27th!

Matt Bixenstine enjoys all things Lakewood, especially walking his basket hound through Madison Park.

Lakewood Black Caucus Community Event Telling Our Stories - Snack And Chat March 15th

by Shirley Nelson

You are invited to join us for a community gathering to learn how the plight of homelessness is being addressed by DNA RISING, a non-profit Black owned and operated organization seeking to house veterans and single mothers rising out of homelessness. DNA RISING provides safe, renovated bridge housing and they are an essential component to building a healthy and happy life which is the “Foundation of Home.”

LaToya Smith, one of three founding partners of DNA RISING and a Vice President at Fifth Third Bank, will speak at the March 15th gathering to tell her story of personal triumph as a young woman raised up in Cleveland’s inner city. She is a graduate of Shaw High School and Cleveland State University. Be inspired by her journey and her passion for bridging the gap in housing for veterans and single mothers.

In this casual, laid-back environment, attendees will also be encouraged to tell their own stories of overcoming life challenges or the stories of their ancestors and loved ones. Telling our stories is the bedrock of African American culture to help keep



our foundation strong. Come join us for light snacks, cookies, and sweet potato pie. Bring your favorite non-alcoholic beverage.

Lakewood Black Caucus is a Black grassroots organization dedicated to the mental health and well-being of our Black community, while also providing all citizens of Lakewood with stimulating educational programs for the betterment of our entire community.

Saturday, March 15th at 1:00 – 4:00 pm, at Lakewood Presbyterian Church, 14502 Detroit Avenue, Lakewood, OH.

This event is FREE and OPEN to the public. For more information go to www.dnarising.net or phone or email shirley.nelson@live.com - phone 216-978-2626.

Rev. Shirley Nelson is the Lakewood Black Caucus President.

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Seeking Forever Homes!

by Stephanie Jarosz

Meet Zorro, a one-year-old Domestic Shorthair! He's a gentle and independent boy who enjoys affection and playing with his spring toy. Though a bit reserved at first, Zorro quickly warms up and loves napping alongside his human friends. He's also comfortable with other cats and doesn't mind being picked up. Zorro would make a loving and easygoing companion!

Visit Zorro, and the other animals at the Lakewood Animal Shelter located at 1299 Metropark Drive, just past the Dog Park. Contact the shelter at (216) 529-5020.

Lakewood Animal Shelter hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday, closed on Sundays.

This message is shared by the Citizens Committee for Lakewood's Animals and Shelter (CCLAS). CCLAS is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization committed to safeguarding and enhancing the lives of Lakewood's companion animals. We provide financial assistance and other resources to



Zorro

the Lakewood Animal Shelter for the quality care of abandoned, orphaned, sick and injured animals. In addition, we promote adoptions and advocate for animal welfare through community outreach and education. We treat animals with empathy, kindness, and respect and recognize that they can experience pain, suffering, and other emotions. Learn more at cclas.org.



Male and Female Cardinals

Backyard Birds



Blue Jay

by William J. Jacobec

This Winter with all the snow and ice, it is important to feed and supply water for our beautiful birds.

Photography by Bill Jacobec



Red-bellied Woodpecker

Swim-A-Thon A Success



A great turn out all morning for Rotary's Swim-A-Thon. Here everyone takes a short break for a group photo. Over 60 photos online at LakewoodObserver.com.



From left to right Rocky River Fire Chief Aaron Leinhart, Rocky River Mayor Pam Bobst, Lakewood Fire Chief Ryan Fairbanks, and the man behind it, Harlan Radford.

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LAKEWOOD OBSERVER FORUM

Inside the Elementary Planning Task Force: Should You Trust This Process?

by Caitlin Solomon

Lakewood City School District is currently considering repurposing (closing) one or even two of our neighborhood elementary schools. The Superintendent has convened an Elementary Planning Task Force, which has met since August 2024, to study this issue and make a recommendation. The Task Force consists of residents, community leaders, all five school board members, and many employees of Lakewood City Schools, and its meetings are closed to the public.

I was able to connect with a member of the Task Force, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, to shed some light on what it is like inside these closed meetings. For reference, FutureThink is the Columbus-based consulting firm engaged by Lakewood City Schools to create possible scenarios on how to utilize the current seven elementary schools in Lakewood.

The scenarios presented at the first Task Force meeting on August 28, 2024, are as follows:

- 1) **Reinvent Lincoln** (repurpose/close Lincoln to create a standalone building to house all of Lakewood's Pre-K students), and modify current school boundaries
- 2) **Reinvent Roosevelt** (repurpose/close Roosevelt to create a standalone building to house all of Lakewood's Pre-K students), and modify current school boundaries
- 3) **Reinvent Grant** (repurpose/close Grant to create a standalone building to house all of Lakewood's Pre-K students), and modify current school boundaries
- 4) **Reinvent Grant and Roosevelt** (repurpose/close both Grant and Roosevelt to create a standalone Pre-K building, as well as a community recreation building), and modify current school boundaries
- 5) **Reinvent Lincoln and Roosevelt** (repurpose/close both Lincoln and Roosevelt to create a standalone Pre-K building, as well as a community recreation building), and modify cur-

rent school boundaries

- 6) **Reinvent Lincoln and Grant** (repurpose/close both Lincoln and Grant to create a standalone Pre-K building, as well as a community recreation building), and modify current school boundaries
- 7) **Modify current school boundaries**

This interview was started before the most recent Task Force meeting on February 19, 2025 and the interviewee changed some of their responses after that meeting by using the note "edit:".

What was the first Task Force meeting like?

"It was interesting. There were a number of familiar faces from the community and the district, so I knew a number of them. We did an ice breaker where we were asked to go meet 10 people we didn't know. Then Superintendent Niedzwiecki introduced the issue and then the people from FutureThink/Impact Group laid out their part in all this. The superintendent took over again and presented all seven scenarios. We were then asked to discuss at our tables our initial reactions to the scenarios. We were also asked to take notes and write down any other ideas we could come up with. At this point, I had a good feeling about everything. It seemed like we could surely come up with a better solution than the scenarios as they were presented. I walked through the door with a pocket full of ideas."

How have meetings unfolded through the course of the process? What is the overall tone of the meetings?

"At first, we thought we were there to help solve the problem; but then as time went on, we weren't doing any of that. It seemed like we were there more to find obstacles the district would face when rolling this out to the community. We were asked to decide at our tables which of the seven we'd remove from consideration. Shockingly, many tables said that they'd take Scenario 7- redistricting (the only scenario not involving repurposing) - off of the table because they felt if we

don't do something now (consolidate), we'll just have to meet and do it later. The fourth meeting confirmed what I thought I knew: We were there to brainstorm questions and obstacles the administration might face at the community meetings. We were there to help smooth the way."

What hurdles has the Task Force faced?

"The biggest obstacle the task force faced in my opinion was that everything we saw seemed to stack the deck toward not just one of these seven predetermined outcomes but rather one of the six that involved repurposing one or two buildings.

The data and information we were presented was done in such a way that there was only one conclusion: to consolidate and repurpose.

It's hard to see things clearly when everything seems shaded. It doesn't seem balanced. So you have to look past the presentation and see what they're not saying or what and why they shared things in a certain way.... Or why did they share this but not this? And then you come to other conclusions that weren't on the list of 'acceptable' ones."

Did Task Force members ever suggest alternate scenarios?

"We were encouraged to add questions or suggestions of any kind. I don't know that I would call them 'alternative scenarios' per se, but close enough. Each meeting had a table talk or two. Each table had a method to submit questions and/or suggestions. Usually we had a note sheet we used for reporting out. We were to submit whatever on those. On two occasions, we had large presentation post-it sheets where we answered the questions for the group discussions. We could add things to that or stick a post-it note on it. Some questions were answered via a FAQ. I can't tell you what others suggested being compartmentalized at tables the way we were, but some got into, "Why can't we..." questions that were at least partially answered during the large group discussion portions. I know I made suggestions. Heck, I went in with a whole list of them not

knowing about the predetermined scenarios beforehand.

No alternative scenarios have yet made it to the discussion to my knowledge.

Perhaps some of these will be in the next round. Other than the FAQs and the questions that were answered live, I have no idea how admin took alternative suggestions since, to my knowledge, they've never publicly acknowledged any of them."

Did Task Force members ever request additional data?

"What you have is 7-8 individual tables with around 7 people at each. One or more tables will conclude they need more information like a traffic study or building floor plans and they'll write that down on the note sheet we turn in. Then you'll have another group that's homogeneous in nature and they don't need any more information because in their mind they've seen enough. Some Task Force members asked for floor plans. And some asked for a traffic study. To date I have seen neither. I have heard, not sure where, that Superintendent Niedzwiecki told someone floor plans are not practical or relevant because it wouldn't have the necessary info on it (such as special needs spaces). I also haven't seen any data presented on a traffic study or how kids are currently getting to school."

Do you trust that this process will unfold fairly and with input from all parties taken into consideration?

"I'm not sure. They've said again and again that decisions have not been made, and yet, it seems as if it was designed to come to a limited set of conclusions.

Why doesn't the Task Force get to consider any other solutions for this issue despite the district asking for input from both the task force AND the community? Are we to believe no other ideas were submitted? I KNOW that to be false.

Even if we believe what they're saying, then why present the information in such a way that we must do something at the elementary level to fix it when the elementary schools aren't bad off and it's clear the community prefers their neighborhood system to consoli-

continued on page 10



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LAKEWOOD OBSERVER FORUM

Inside the Elementary Planning Task Force: Should You Trust This Process?

continued from page 9

dation?

There's the talk about enrollment dropping, and it's true. Why did it drop? What happened? Officially: population is decreasing all over, but Lakewood is sought after. People are having less kids, sure. But are we so sure that the kids won't come back if this district is marketed more? Are there other reasons that could explain the drop? I think so, but we didn't explore that either. Could it be that consolidating to 7 schools and creating pockets that must walk much further chased families away? Will we make it worse if we consolidate to five? Could it be policies the school adopted since COVID chased families away? Could it be policies that the city enacted- like the handling of Lakewood Hospital redevelopment or approving other developments largely focused on 1 bedroom apartments- chased families away? Why does the district think the loss to private schools in the last 5 years is minimal to non-existent when we all know several kids from our streets who go to private schools? Is the district blind? Do they really not know, or is it something else?

Why is the district not providing things the Task Force asked for, like traffic studies and safety studies and floor plans? Why the secrecy?

Why do school board members tell community members who are at the microphone at a Community Conversation meeting to stop asking questions?

Why does the district insist on adhering to legal definitions instead of functional definitions?

For example, legally, districts don't have to provide transportation under two miles as the crow flies, but studies show elementary kids stop walking and start getting rides to school at under 1 mile.

Legally, capacity is determined by the max number each classroom is designed to hold (usually 25) instead of the individual pop caps set by the district. Why is the district committed to less than ideal (according to most studies) class caps, instead of asking the community to fund something closer to ideal? This would also help in teacher movement and class size differences, but we're told it's too expensive yet they didn't even ask the community at any time. Edit: as of mid-February, the district has since changed the way they view capacity to a more realistic approach.

Why was the Task Force asked to go talk to the community to answer and ask questions but not tell them the whole story? Why do some Task Force members feel the need to ask permission to talk to the community or fear reprisals?

All of these things of great and little consequence add up to something not quite right in this process and that's why I am not sure the process will work out in the community's favor.

Edit by interviewee: After the most recent task force meeting in mid-February, the district has made some changes. Based on community feedback and how that meeting went, I am now cautiously optimistic that things will work out in the community's favor and I encourage everyone to keep speaking up. This is a critical pivot point for the future of Lakewood."

Caity Walsh Solomon, LHS '05, is a Lakewood homeowner, business operations specialist, and mother of three in the Lakewood City Schools.

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March

ARIES: The Sun is behind the scenes for the Ram this St. Patty's Day, but Jupiter, the bringer of good fortune, sits in your local community; visit your local Irish pub, & order a pint of Guinness.

TAURUS: The Bull has the Luck of the Irish; Jupiter's landed in your house of finances, bringing you a Pot of Gold; come out of the Bullpen, share the wealth with the lads & cailini.

GEMINI: The Twins are blessed with the Sun shining on your career. However, leave the office early and bring the whole gang. It's time to paddy this brew-ti-ful St. Patty's Day. Cheers!

CANCER: The Sun is shining on the Crab's 9th house of legal affairs, bringing you a bit of the Luck of the Irish, while Jupiter is working behind the scenes; keep that four-leaf clover close by.

LEO: The Lion/Lioness has a bit o' luck coming to his/her Jungle from other's resources, invite the rest of the Jungle from over the rainbow to share in the celebration, bring on the bagpipes.

VIRGO: The Sun is beaming its rays in Virgo's house of relationships, both business & personal, whether it's at the office or walking in the parade. Wear your Kiss Me I'm Irish shirt.

LIBRA: The Sun is shining in Libra's house of health this St. Patrick's

Day; although you can't seem to decide to go out or stay home, don't worry, beer happy, just take it easy on the pints.

SCORPIO: It's time for the Scorpion to put away the stinger for St. Paddy's Day; the children are emphasized: take the little leprechauns to the parade, let them have a Shamrock Shake.

SAGITTARIUS: The Centaur is best staying home this St. Patrick's Day; Jupiter is sprinkling its Irish Fairy Dust on your home & relationship sector; share that love with "Mo Anam Cara."

CAPRICORN: The Goat has the Sun shining on romance & creativity this St. Patrick's Day; it's time to make some Irish coffee, served with Bailey's Irish Truffles, and call it a night.

AQUARIUS: Aquarians are known for being a bit on the wild side; this St. Paddy's Day, it's time to get sham-rocked & roll, wear the Kilt, bring the bagpipes & do a little Irish jig for the crowd.

PISCES: It's all about the Fish this month; you get to decide whether you want to throw the Ceilidh at your Lake or have someone else host at their pond, either way, go have some Craic.

Eva Starr, the local astrologer, has been studying the moon & stars since she could read. You can reach Starr at evastarr@evastarr.com & her website evastarr.com

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COVE COMMUNITY CENTER



Uncover The Weird At Cove Community Center Science With Dan

by Nancy Feighan

Get ready to dive into the weird, wild, and wonderfully unexplained with Science w/ Dan! We're introducing a fun new way to explore fringe science topics like Bigfoot, Shapeshifters, and UFOs (now known as UAPs—Unidentified Aerial Phenomena).

Join us for upcoming sessions on

Fridays at 10 AM:
March 7th: Hot takes on the latest science headlines.
March 21st: A deep dive into a fascinating new pseudo-science topic.
Curious? Don't miss out—join us at Cove Community Center for a fun, mind-bending exploration of the unknown! See you there!



Empowering Our Community: Key Insights From Rep. Shontel Brown's Team

by Nancy Feighan

Last week, Erin and Amber from Rep. Shontel Brown's team joined us at Cove Community Center to share valuable insights on federal benefits. They're committed to supporting our

community every three months, so be sure to mark your calendars for May 28, August 20, and November 12. Together, we're strengthening our community with knowledge and action!

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Meet Me At Cove: James Williams, Redefining Maintenance

by Nancy Feighan

James has been with the City of Lakewood for 13 years, starting as a custodian and working his way up to Maintenance at Cove Community Center. Before that, he spent 10 years with Lakewood City Schools.

What James loves most about working at Cove is the positive atmosphere and the people. He thrives in environments filled with support and camaraderie, especially among staff, seniors, families, and the community. James is the go-to person for maintenance, custodial duties, and groundskeeping, ensuring everything runs smoothly each day. If something needs fixing, cleaning, or moving, James is the one to handle it. He's also a team player, always ready to pitch in, particularly during busy times like the Fourth of July. After the fireworks, James works with a team through the night to clean up Lakewood Park and prepare it for the next day.

While James is always ready to lend a hand at Cove, he also shares his talents beyond work. In addition to his maintenance duties, he's well-known for his cooking skills, especially his expertise on the grill. With a true passion for BBQ, he creates mouthwatering sauces, ranging from classic to sweet and spicy. He also brews world-class coffee that's earned him quite a following among local coffee lovers. You can try to join his coffee club (if it ever becomes a thing) but be warned—you might need to wait in line!

In addition to his BBQ and coffee, James also makes a killer Pico de Gallo salsa, packed with fresh ingredients and a fiery mix of peppers. His secret recipe has earned him a reputation, with fans coming back for more—or scrambling for milk if they can't handle the heat!

James' talents don't stop at cooking, he's always been a handy person. When he was in 7th grade, he built a homemade security system for his science fair project. With help from his dad, he created a working system with a control box, receiver, keypad, and detectors. His project won the Science



James Williams

Fair's Superior Award, and he was even interviewed by Fox 8 News!

Beyond his hands-on skills, James has some knowledge of multiple languages. He speaks Spanish, Mandarin, and a bit of Japanese, which helps him connect with people from different backgrounds and cultures.

When he's not maintaining Cove or cooking up a storm, James enjoys long rides on his 500cc scooter. He's traveled to Toledo for chili hot dogs at Tony Paco's, Amish Country, and even the islands—Kelley's and Put-in-Bay. He loves the different perspective biking gives him, getting lost while still being aware of his surroundings.

James is a true asset to the City of Lakewood, not just for his hard work and dedication but also for the vibrant energy he brings to everything he does. Whether he's maintaining Cove, cooking up something delicious, or sharing his multilingual skills, James embodies the spirit of community. We're lucky to have him on the team!

Nancy Feighan is Project Specialist II, Department of Human Services, City of Lakewood.



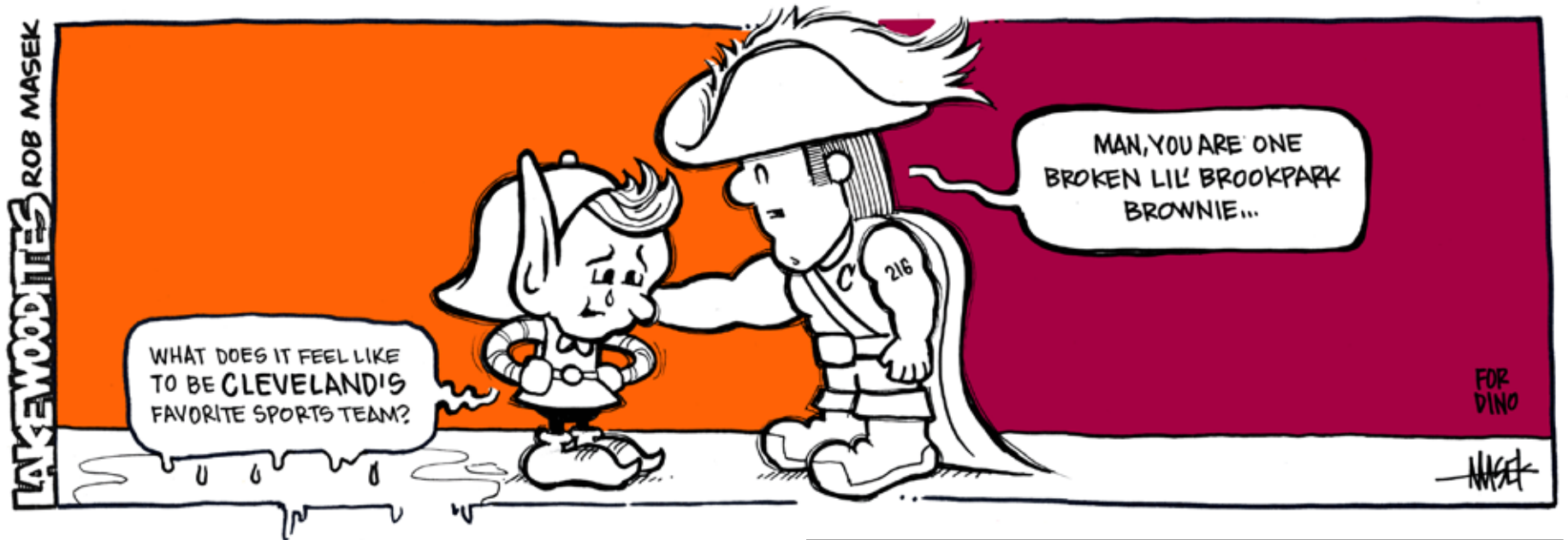
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