**The Lakewood Democratic Club**

**Minutes of Regular Meeting held June 30, 2022  
Lakewood Women’s Pavilion & Online space at zoom.us**

**CALL TO ORDER**: The meeting was called to order a few minutes late by President Erik Meinhardt. Officers present were President Erik Meinhardt, First Vice-President Maureen Dostal, Treasurer Catie McMahon. The President chaired the meeting in person. The Secretary took notes watching the Zoom recording at a later date.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The Club said the Pledge of Allegiance together.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE IN REMEMBRANCE OF MATT KUHNS:** President Erik Meinhardt called for a moment of silence in memory of former Club Secretary Matt Kuhns who passed away ten days ago on June 19. He was an activist, author and friend.

*The Club faced some technical difficulties with the Zoom connection at this point and worked to correct them.*

**APPROVAL of the MINUTES**: The body approved the minutes from May 26, 2022.

**RECOGNITION OF NOTABLES -** Councilperson Cindy Marx (newly appointed to Ward 4 seat vacated by Dan O’Malley), Councilperson Jason Shachner, judicial candidate Kevin Kelley, School Board Member Nora Katzenberger, candidate for Ohio Attorney General Jeff Crossman, Judge William Vodrey (gave introduction), County Councilperson Dale Miller (gave introduction), judicial candidate Jeffrey Saffold (gave introduction), CCDP City Leader & Executive Director Karolyn Isenhart

**Jeff Crossman:** Currently represent Ohio House District 15 in the legislature. Running for Attorney General. We are in peril in this state. We are not going to flip the legislature this year. But we have a path for the governor’s race. And we will do that with your support. We need accountability. Thanks to Lakewood City Council for pushing the Browns to take the FirstEnergy sign off the Browns stadium. We know that legislators are being bought. I am proud to have filed a criminal complaint against the Redistricting Commission. We need competitive maps. That’s what we voted for in 2015 and 2018. Our AG Dave Yost has done absolutely nothing to correct the corruption in the state. He doesn’t support labor, and he doesn’t support women. We need to elect our statewide slate and our three Supreme Court justices. We don’t want conceal carry everywhere without a permit. We need to talk to people who may not be politically active and engage them.

**Karolyn Isenhart:** We have postcards for our Ohio Supreme Court candidates! On June 18 the party elected new Chair David Brock, Vice Chair Juanita Brent, re-elected Treasurer Rudy, Secretary Andrew Mezak. On July 9 we have endorsement meeting, but doesn’t affect Lakewood.

**Gary Fry**: field organizer for our area for Ohio Democratic Party. Looking for team leaders in every neighborhood that we can and we have a lot of events. This weekend we have an event in Westlake to do some voter registration.

**PROGRAM:**

1. **In celebration of LGBTQ Pride Month, we are excited to introduce the developers of the Studio West 117 project at the east end of Lakewood: Dan Budish and Betsy Figgie.**

**Betsy:** Apologies Dan can’t be here today. Hope this presentation tonight gives a sense of joy and hope. Daniel and I were approached by the New York Times to do an interview at the end of April. We put together this presentation for them. We will be seeing a story in the Times in October.

We are trying to connect people within our community. It is a “prototype” of queer urban development. Mostly in Lakewood, but some of our assets fall on the Cleveland side.

We have extensive experience in real estate finance. I have 30 years experience with nonprofits figuring out how to build capital. If you drive down Hird Ave., you will see the construction of the fieldhouse. Daniel is all about historic preservation. We will be doing soft opening in September. It has three restaurant concepts, with the first and only rooftop patio in Lakewood. It will also have an outdoor courtyard and gymnasium. It is important that we have a safe, welcoming, affirming place for future generations to just play. We are doing this from scratch, the first of its kind in the country.

We are redeveloping the Phantasy entertainment complex. Daniel took chocolate to the owner of the property to give us a better chance to get it. Another contractor wanted to turn it into condos. We are keeping it as an entertainment complex. We’ve invested in a young Latinx woman to open her own barbershop there. We want to encourage small businesses to open here and support them. Phantasy is Phase 2 - will be happening in 2024. We just received $5 million award from state of Ohio in redevelopment tax credits. We also received $4 million to develop on NTB building - will be 2025 initiative - will be LGBT pharmacy, dental clinic, health clinic, and gender affirming care center. Also senior and workforce housing. Keep it affordable. We will ensure that everyone is like-minded and willing to lift eachother up.

We were able to lease building housing Margie’s Closet thrift store for nonbinary and trans individuals - opened in June 2021, recently featured on Good Morning America. We also leased apartments in building that houses My Friends restaurant. We needed apartments to give members of our community safe places to live. 1200 square feet, $800/month, can also provide subsidies.

Because of proximity of Fieldhouse, Phantasy and NTB building, we are applying for another source of funding to reduce our debt and mortgage. We are launching new store called The Edge, new store from owners of STEM soaps. Sixteen artists will be selling art there and working there part-time.

Working to open Community Garden and demonstration kitchen where we will invite kids to come and learn how to garden and cook.

Purchased property “the kiddie castle” on Lake Ave.

Our purpose is to create an “ecosystem” for the LGBTQ community to feel open, safe and respected. We are doing this through placemaking, to build walkable community among existing network. We want a world in which LGBTQ folx and allies are able to be themselves. We will have the first LGBT “sports week”. This will be by and for the LGBT community.

Daniel Budish has experience in urban planning, masters degrees, attended London School of Economics. Grew up in Beachwood, wanted to do something for LGBT community.

My background is in banking and finance. I’ve done over a billion dollars in transactions for nonprofit organizations. I wanted to do something I could be proud of and be a steward of for the next 30-40 years.

If you’re looking to get involved - we are looking for volunteers and positing job opportunities. We couldn’t do it without support from our elected officials, namely Senator Nickie Antonio and former councilperson Dan O’Malley.

[StudioWest117.com](https://studiowest117.com/)

**Q&A**

Q (Cindy Marx): More of a comment than question. I was fortunate to get a tour of the facility yesterday. It is beyond phenomenal. The vision they’ve created is going to put them on a world map.

Q (Karolyn Isenhart): Thank you for saving the Phantasy and the Symposium. These are landmarks.

A (Betsy): We will be saving the pirate ships. As soon as we bought the building, Dan Budish went to work getting the Phantasy registered on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Q (Nickie Antonio): You are preserving some of my historic youth. So excited for this project. Can you talk a little bit about the timeline?

A (Betsy): You won’t see a groundbreaking ceremony. We are making sure that little things are opening and activating all the time. The apartments, Margie’s Closet, etc. We have a working podcast studio in the Phantasy that you can rent out. This is all while we are working on these three large projects - The Fieldhouse (2022), the Phantasy (2024), the NTB site (2025). We are also going to subsidize 7 of the apartments to be for senior living, each of whom will be on-call one night a week, to house homeless LGBT youth. To this day, some kids are kicked out of their homes for being LGBT. We are able to house these youth for 72 hours without parental / guardian consent. This will be an intergenerational model where the elder LGBT individuals can get these youth help onsite at the facility.

This project is not just about drag shows and rooftop bars! This is a full model supporting and celebrating the LGBT community in every aspect.

Q (Cindy Strebig): Can you talk about safety & security onsite?

A (Betsy): First, physical safety. We have invested heavily in lighting, security cameras. We have great relationship with the Lakewood and Cleveland police departments. Second, emotional safety. We want people to feel comfortable to explore and be their authentic selves. We also want it to be a safe place for allies! The LGBT community is so vibrant, i think we will be attracting just as many people from the ally community as well. This is not a straight bar that puts a Pride Flag out for the month of June. This is LGBT owned and supported and will drive money back into the LGBT community and community resources.

As for venues, the Symposium will remain neighborhood dive bar. The basement of the Symposium will be a separate billiards club. “8ball Club” - has historic meaning for black lesbians in Cleveland. Would throw amazing parties, and donate the proceeds to the Westside Catholic Center to support survivors of domestic violence. We asked to use their name to honor their history. We will also house Grow Well Cleveland (counseling for LGBT individuals) and Blue International Marketing, the barbershop, the Chamber, the Chamber patio which will become somewhat of a “Goth Garden.” Upstairs, a community dance studio, podcast and broadcast studio. Phantasy nightclub and theater.

This whole project will be about $100 million investment. We want this to be fun and safe place for all generations.

Q (Maureen): Would be great to collaborate with you on political activism. We could launch canvasses from your property!

A (Betsy): yes!

Q (Catie): How will parking work?

A (Betsy): At NTB site, sketched out two levels of parking which would provide 212 spaces. Need to set aside some for tenants and residents. We will also promote other means of transportation - RTA. Neighboring businesses have been gracious in allowing us to use their parking, as well.

Q: How do demolition grants work?

A (Betsy): With demolition grant, we could not demolish anything until we had final plan of what the end product would be. With new grant for NTB site, we’d like permission to tear down to remediate environmental concerns, then we can work with city on end plan. We only have 12 months to spend the NTB grant money. We will ask city to ask for considerations like that.

Q: Do you have roots in Lakewood?

A (Betsy): My in-laws used to live in Lakewood. They were graduates of Lakewood High. Nancy and Harry Figgie, Jr. had a few homes in Lakewood. They had three boys, and I married the baby. I currently live in Geauga County, but I love this part of town.

Thank you for having me and being part of this vision!

Erik: I played volleyball with Dan Budish as part of Stonewall Sports. If you don’t know, LGBT folx don’t always feel comfortable playing sports with the “straights.” Grateful to have our own space and for these new spaces to come!

1. **We also welcome City Councilmembers to give an update about other development projects in Lakewood, including the former hospital site: City Councilmembers Jason Shachner (Ward 2) and Kyle Baker (Ward 1).**

Kyle & Jason: We are here to give an update on “The Pit” !

Kyle: Previous developer had way more ambitious plan from the site. There was some environmental contamination from the hospital. The site is able to accept redevelopment as long as we comply with “covenant not to sue,” which with modern building standards is easy to do.

Jason: In April of this year, the city came to us with “term sheet” to approve. Asked for permission to start negotiations with North Point Realty for development. Spent month of April going over every aspect of this. Created “Council Priority Sheet” which was attached to resolution approving term sheet. Councilpersons Kyle Baker and Sarah Kepple were driving forces behind this.

Kyle: Council is made up of seven people with seven different perspectives and constituencies. In 2017, the city did a market study of what the site could absorb. Considered the tax revenue and foot traffic that the hospital brought to the city. We wanted to see if there were some areas around the edges that we could push the Administration to improve the deal and get a better term sheet. We created “Council Priorities” document. We focused on density (more affordable housing units and more business units), community space in middle of site (keeping retail sites on the corners), preserving Curtis block (historic building), sustainability (electric appliances, etc.), more multi-bedroom units with eye on accessibility.

Jason: The Planning Commission then approved the plan with improvements - 30 more units.

Kyle: Lakewood Zoning allows “planned unit development” for certain projects. The Planning Commission gave preliminary approval to the developer. Now it goes to Architectural Review Board to review in more detail. Much focus will be on the Curtis block. ARB could reject plan based on these details. Then it will go back to the Planning Commission and City Council for approval JUST FOR ZONING. Development Agreement will be totally different document / approval. I’m still pushing for more office space.

Jason: The developer said prospective tenants are already expressing interest. The new plan also created seven for-sale townhomes.

Senator Antonio: Can you go over the Curtis block again?

Jason: There’s been a lot of activism around it. Originally, developers came in with costs and plan. Developers really want continuous commercial space. At last Council meeting, told that North- & East- facing sides of the building to be fully preserved.

Kyle: This is what historical activists pushing for. Historical activists also pushing for building to be stepped back off top of the building. Developer plans to build three extra stories; historical activists not for this. That’s where fight will be.

Senator Antonio: Historical Society does great job of preserving structures in our community. The main focus is keeping that historically relevant Northeast corner.

Jason: The developer plans to maintain artistic features of the building, including wells that let light in.

Nora: Can you elaborate on plan for community space?

Jason: Planning Commission agendas have drawings that are more illustrative of what space will look like. Size of baseball diamond infield.

Kyle: Outdoor space at Church & State in Ohio City is their inspiration. Need to make sure we have public restroom and continuing funds to upkeep it. Come to meetings to give your input!

**REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

President: Erik -

First order of business is a Vote. Usually for endorsements we would make sure all voting members have met requirements. Midterm election year, we are already through the primary for most races. Our statehouse officials are unopposed in their primary. We are able to have a vote by acclamation to endorse the Democratic nominees in each race. Can I have motion from the floor? Karolyn Isenhart moves, Senator Nickie Antonio seconds. All in favor.

Club shirts - If you march with us in Fourth of July parade, they are free. If not, they are $10 for members and $20 for non-members. Union-printed here in Lakewood at Madison Graphics.

Fourth of July Parade kicks off at 10am. Six people signed up right now. We need more people. If you want to sign up, sign up with Jeff Pigot or respond to survey that was emailed out.

First Vice President: Maureen - thanks to speakers tonight. Uplifting!

Political Activism: Jay - The biggest thing you could be doing right now is to be involved with local candidate’s race.

Book Club: Maureen - Carol not here. tuesday July 19th, 7pm at Bottlehouse Brewery, Jan 6th committee public hearings. We will be discussing second half of “Undelivered: The Never-Heard Speeches That Would Have Rewritten History” by Jeff Nussbaum.

Second Vice President: Mark - Our Summer Supper will be July 28th at 6pm at Immigrant Son Brewery. Tickets are $50. Sponsorship levels at $100 and $250. Keynote Speaker will be Cheryl Stephens, candidate for Lieutenant Governor. Fundraising goes to our sample ballot that we mail out.

Treasurer: Catie - We have about $7,500 in the bank and over one hundred members. To send in money for Summer Supper, we take check and paypal.

Secretary: Nicole (not present)

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATES**

Statehouse: Senator Antonio - Also looking for volunteers to march in the parade with me. You will also get one of my campaign shirts for free! It’s been a rough week. I am hopeful, because you all come to this room and we figure it out together. We continue to fight for our democracy. The Supreme Court just gave us a gift of people being energized and awake. Happy Fourth, let’s save our democracy!

State Board of Education: No report.

County Council: No report.

Lakewood City Council: No report.

Lakewood School Board: No report.

CCDP: No report.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING - Summer Supper July 28, 2022; next traditional meeting August 25, 2022.

**GENERAL UPDATE:** Cindy Strebig -League of Women Voters celebrating 100 years in Lakewood this year!

ADJOURNMENT - The meeting was adjourned.

Event notes prepared by Nicole Parke on July 17, 2022.

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Secretary Approval: sign date

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President Approval: sign date