



CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

September 23, 2026

The City Council met for a Workshop Meeting at 4:00 p.m.

City Hall

102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Anderson at 4:00 p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Mayor Anderson, Mayor Pro-Tem Clark, and Councilmembers Dean, Gardner, Muncey, Peterson, Stanton.

Absent: None.

Agenda Changes: None.

Guest Speaker: None.

Public Comment on Agenda Items Only:

Alec Payleitner commented on agenda item #7a.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Muncey, second by Stanton to approve the minutes as presented. Via roll call vote, motion carried unanimously.

Discussion Items:

Parking Study Presentation - Summary, Recommendations, and Action Plan:

John Dorsett of Walker Consultants presented the Parking Improvements Task Force study. City Manager Ryan Cummins described it as the result of about a year of work by Walker Consultants, the engineers at Fleis & Vandenbrink, city staff and the Task Force, along with public engagement. The study's main message was that Saugatuck should make better use of the parking it already has rather than build more.

Inventory and accessibility. Dorsett said the inventory map counts 1,868 public spaces on the east side of the City, and 561 of them have time limits. 13 spaces are used for restaurant seating. The biggest gap the team found was accessible parking. The CBD has only 13 ADA spaces, and the team recommends raising that to at least 30. That figure comes from the federal Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG), which provide guidance for on-street parking rather than a legal requirement. The new spaces would mostly go toward the southern end of downtown, where there are more businesses. The team also suggested 15-minute spaces near the drugstore and possibly at restaurants for takeout pickups.

Occupancy and survey data. A count on a Saturday in May found the CBD 87% full at 5 p.m. In July it was completely full at 6 p.m., while the Hill and the north and south residential zones still had plenty of open spaces.

The survey drew 618 responses, all from locals:

- Over 80% drive downtown.
- 72% spend more than five minutes looking for a space in peak season.
- 56% would walk three or more blocks if remote parking were clear, safe and convenient.
- 54% would not pay to park.

Ten property owners and downtown leaders were also interviewed. Many of them brought up the lack of enforcement without being asked, praised the Interurban shuttle, and doubted that a parking structure would fit downtown's look or budget.

Options the team rejected or deferred. The team does not recommend a parking structure. At about \$42,000 per space, a 200-space deck would cost around \$8 million and a 300-space deck over \$12 million. The team also advised holding off on paid parking. Few nearby cities charge for it, it tends to draw strong pushback (St. Joseph was mentioned), and enforced time limits can produce turnover without fees. The current three-hour limit was described as the "sweet spot" because it allows time for lunch and shopping.

Recommendations. The team made 11 recommendations:

- A seasonal Parking Ambassador program, paired with stricter enforcement of the posted time limits
- A voluntary employee parking partnership
- More remote and shared parking, such as leasing church lots
- An expanded Interurban shuttle with a regular in-season schedule
- Better wayfinding, gateway signage and online parking maps
- More ADA spaces
- Managing curb space more deliberately
- Further study of converting Butler, Water, Lucy and Elizabeth streets to one-way traffic, which could add over 100 angled spaces
- Encouraging walking, biking, carpooling and transit

The task force could not agree on the one-way conversion and said it needs a broader community conversation. The team also noted that restaurants pay only \$200 a month for each on-street space they use for dining, which it considers well below what those spaces are worth.

Implementation and council response. The consultant proposed a draft three-year schedule. It starts with confirming the council's policy direction and assigning responsibilities, and it includes regularly measuring occupancy, aiming for about 90% at peak instead of 100%. When asked about real-time availability technology, the consultant said pavement sensors hold up poorly in Michigan winters. Becky from the Interurban reported that a new fixed-stop shuttle route helped ridership nearly double. She also said the shuttle's funding and ADA flex-route rules limit what it can do. As next steps, staff will share the full detailed report and then set up a workshop to confirm policy direction, prioritize the recommendations and identify funding.

Short Term Rental Licensing Ordinance Amendment and Resolution Updating Penalty Fee for Late Renewal Applications:

City Manager Ryan Cummins presented the background of the request that came from the owner of 534 St. Joseph and his rental agent at the July 8 workshop. They filed their renewal about 30 days after their license had already expired. Legal counsel drafted an amendment that changes the current five-day grace period to 60 days and staff prepared a resolution with a penalty of about \$100 per day. The change would apply to all property owners, would apply retroactively, and is meant to discourage late filings. Cummins discussed that frequent amendments may confuse people and weaken the ordinance.

Council discussed the need for a decision framework for handling public requests to change ordinances. Without one, the city risks setting precedents, inviting one-off requests and facing legal challenges. As one member put it, the ordinance could become "all exceptions." The mayor compared it to a new house on Maple Street that never connected to the sewer. She said this case goes beyond the earlier fix for confusion between the application and expiration dates and asked where the council would draw the line. She also said repeated changes undercut what residents said they wanted: a cap that's enforced. And the staff and legal costs end up being passed on to the license holders who follow the rules.

Some expressed support for the amendment. Several members disagreed with earlier comments, saying ordinances are "living" documents that the council can change by vote. In their view, five days was never enough for anyone, and the earlier discussion had shown majority support. Others said the ordinance is only two years old and was poorly communicated at first. An example was compared to liquor licensing, where a late filing brings a reminder rather than losing the license. Others pointed out that the city did send notice, though this owner reportedly never received it.

The council agreed by consensus to hold the vote until all seven members attend, without sending it back to a workshop. The mayor stressed to the property owner and manager that nothing has changed and that where members stand today doesn't guarantee the final vote.

Councilmembers Muncey and Stanton left meeting at 5:50 p.m.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Create a New Definition for Enhanced Bed and Breakfast and to Regulate Enhanced Bed and Breakfasts:

Zoning Director Grayson Moore explained that the Wickwood Inn had worked with staff and the Planning Commission for a long time on expanding its bed and breakfast. Because a text amendment applies citywide, not just to one property, the effort became a broader proposal. The amendment would let previously approved bed and breakfasts in the R4 Transitional District apply for a special land use permit as an "enhanced" B&B. Moore added that it would apply only to R4 lots that border a commercial district. R4 lots surrounded only by residential property would not qualify.

Key limits. The amendment would allow:

- One guest unit per 1,500 square feet, including accessory guest units
- An accessory restaurant with seating up to twice the number of guest rooms, open only between 8 a.m. and 10 p.m.
- Events booked by an overnight guest. Non-guests may attend, but attendance can't exceed three times the number of guest rooms.

Parking would follow stricter rules for hotels and inns. The Planning Commission could decide case by case whether an existing building's parking is adequate.

Gardner, speaking for the Planning Commission, called it a good compromise reached after a lot of back-and-forth. The applicant's original idea for a new "boutique inn" zoning category was dropped in favor of the enhanced B&B. Guest and parking ratios were also scaled back. The Wickwood has 14 rooms, which would allow up to 42 guests, down from the 125 it first requested. It could expand to 16 rooms but has no near-term plans to.

Council asked what counts as an "accessory event facility," since the amendment doesn't define it. Moore said it's open to interpretation and could be defined more precisely. City legal counsel explained that "accessory" is already defined in the zoning ordinance and well established in case law. It means a use that is customarily incidental and subordinate to the main use, and smaller in scale and intensity.

Request for Proposals – Website Redesign and Development:

City Clerk Wolters presented the RFP for a new city website. She asked for approval to publish it with one month for submissions.

The project is in this year's strategic plan with a \$40,000 budget. The current site was redesigned in 2021 on a basic site that the Clerk's Department maintain themselves, and it has become overloaded. New ADA accessibility requirements take effect in April 2028, so starting now leaves plenty of time to work with a professional firm. The launch can also line up with the city's new branding.

Jamie listed what the new site needs to do:

- Be easy to navigate and search for both residents and tourists. Right now visitors have to know how local government is organized to find anything.
- Be mobile friendly, ADA accessible and more secure.
- Be easier for staff to maintain. Building a single page can take a day, and too many documents are piled onto the site.

- Offer more online services, such as payments and better ways for residents to contact staff, including texting instead of only email.
- Have room to grow with the city.

Gardner called the project something the city "absolutely needs". He said the city isn't as tech-enabled as it should be and thanked the Clerks for years of maintaining the site. Another member praised the RFP as well written. He especially liked that it requires the firm to build, launch and support the site before handing it over to the city.

Public Comments: None.

Council Comments:

Councilmember Peterson thanked Gregory and the task force and singled out the signage recommendations as "wonderful." She wants more information on the shuttle and liked Alec's idea of tracking parking spaces. She joked that he often drives around town spotting places where spaces could be added and agreed the ambassador program was good idea. She also informed Council that she will miss Monday's meeting because she'll be on Mackinac Island.

Councilmember Gardner echoed the praise, calling the task force's work fantastic, data-driven and common sense. He thanked Alec, others who have been involved over the past year, and Councilmember Muncy for reporting to the council. He stressed that most of the recommendations are about managing existing parking better, not spending a lot of money, though some spending will be needed.

Mayor Pro-Tem Clark thanked the many task force volunteers who took on a difficult task. He said the information was well thought out and well presented.

Councilmember Dean thanked the full task force and Councilmember Muncey. He said there's no concern about the report sitting on a shelf because it's full of things the city can act on.

Mayor Anderson acknowledged the criticism the council took for hiring parking consultants but called it "money well spent". She praised the consultant's expertise, the quality of the data and the common-sense solutions, and predicted a "phenomenal" return on the recommendations. She said she looks forward to putting them in place.

Adjournment:

Motion by Clark, second by Dean to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried 5-0. Mayor Anderson adjourned the meeting at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie Wolters, City Clerk