



CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING September 14, 2026

The City Council met to have a Regular Council Meeting at City Hall at 6:30 p.m.
102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Anderson at 6:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Attendance:

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

Absent: None.

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, Attorney Witte, Zoning Director Moor, Treasurer Bredeweg and Clerk Williams.

Mayor's Comments:

Mayor Anderson offered welcoming remarks about the season, noting that she loves this time of year in Saugatuck — the community still has some tourism and "a little buzz of summer," but things are cooling down and quieting, and the weather has been spectacular. She added that it sounds like businesses had a good year and everybody's in a good mood, concluding that "Saugatuck is thriving, and it's great to be here".

City Manager Comments:

City Manager Ryan Cummins began with an update to the Park Street planning open house, which was well attended, with a group Q&A with the engineers followed by one-on-one time for residents to discuss specific properties and areas of concern; many comment cards were returned, and he and the engineers are reviewing that feedback to prepare a more detailed report with options and recommendations, similar to what was done for Elizabeth and Maple Streets.

He reported that Elizabeth St. design engineering continues, with intersection-by-intersection recommendations from Allegan St. up to Francis St. in front of the school included in his written report, and the engineers reaching out to the school to confirm it is comfortable with the design and to gather any additional feedback. On Maple St., all underground work is complete, sidewalk is largely installed and looking great, restoration is underway, and the east lane has been crushed so road prep is beginning; he expects rapid progress over the next couple of weeks and, weather permitting, possible completion in late September or October rather than the originally anticipated November.

He closed by reminding council that the downtown water valve work remains scheduled for October 19–20, with the following Monday and Tuesday as a weather backup, and that notice went out with a lot of positive feedback. He also said that the next workshop will be a big meeting, as the Parking Improvements Task Force

presents the culmination of a year's work — both the study findings and its recommendations — on a topic that has been discussed in the community for many years.

Agenda Changes:

Motion by Gardner, second by Stanton to add County Commissioner Brad Lubbers as a guest speaker. Via Voice vote, motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Peterson, second by Gardner to add Dan Fox as guest speaker.

The council briefly discussed the motion and Mayor Anderson suggested Fox speak during public comment instead, and council committed not to raise a point of order if Fox ran past three minutes. Peterson said the arrangement was acceptable to her.

Peterson withdrew her motion.

Guest Speakers:

Superintendent Mark Neidlinger:

Mr. Neidlinger presented Saugatuck Public Schools' November bond proposal, joined by Board President Amanda Frank.

The school has a \$49.5 million, 25-year bond on the November 3 ballot with no tax rate increase — an existing bond drops off next year, so securing this one now avoids an additional increase. He noted Saugatuck currently has the second-lowest tax levy in Ottawa and Allegan counties, behind Grand Haven. Councilmember Gardner asked what happens if it fails, he confirmed it would mean a tax reduction for the community. They purchased a 50-acre Wiley Road property about a year ago using contingency funds set aside from the 2020 bond. A community rec center has long been part of the tri-community plan and the district's five-year steering plan. This year the district ran two surveys, both of which came back favorably, and the board passed a resolution in July to move to a November ballot.

The bond spreads funding across three sites — the Wiley Road property, Douglas Elementary, and the middle/high school:

- **Community rec center** with indoor basketball and pickleball courts, walking track, fitness center, and meeting spaces, plus outdoor baseball, softball, soccer fields and outdoor pickleball courts. A priority is getting young athletes home sooner, since limited practice fields keep teams stacked late. Membership would be available to community members. On revenue, Neidlinger confirmed they are looking at a tiered fee structure. An indoor pool is "not likely," though he'd love an outdoor pool if funds allow; No conceptual site layout exists yet.
- **Early childhood:** rehabbing the now-empty old central office next to the elementary for three-year-old programming (the district already has four-year-old preschool), which Neidlinger would like to run as a Montessori curriculum to draw young families.
- **Facilities:** middle school auditorium sound and lighting upgrades, safety and security upgrades to new facilities, additional teaching and learning technology, resurfacing the unsafe and repeatedly patched community tennis courts, and the high school parking lot (the one project left over from the 2020 bond).
- **Transportation:** a new bus and possibly a van or two for the aging, inefficient fleet, and relocating the bus lot from Blue Star to the Wiley Road property.

Saugatuck is unusual in already having a community recreation millage (0.25 mill), up again in 2028, bringing in roughly \$250,000–\$700,000 annually. The district holds about \$600,000 in reserves that would serve as startup money for staffing.

Next steps include three open houses, all at 6 p.m.: September 22 at the high school, October 13 at Douglas Elementary, and October 27 at the high school. Board President Amanda Frank asked council for their support and help spreading accurate information, directing anyone with questions or misgivings to the district website or to Neidlinger.

County Commissioner Brad Lubbers:

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He covered five county topics:

- **Budget** — It's budget season, and the county is looking at a 7.3% increase in both revenues and expenditures, matching its equalization numbers, with only minor tweaks otherwise.
- **Parks shortfall** — Higher staffing, equipment replacement, and infrastructure costs continue to outpace funding. Because parks aren't one of services the county is mandated to provide and the county may need creative or alternative funding.
- **Election equipment** — The Secretary of State has floated requiring all local municipalities to replace election equipment, averaging about \$15,000 each. No official timeline yet, but the county has built in a budget buffer to potentially help municipalities that couldn't float that cost on short notice.
- **Transportation** — Declining federal and state funding leaves roughly a \$420,000 gap to maintain current service levels, even as ridership has grown 10–20% annually. Asked how this interacts with Interurban, he explained the two systems coordinate scheduling, so whichever is already running a given route takes the rider; Councilmember Muncey noted that arrangement started this year with 67 trips in his last monthly report.
- **West Side Park steps** — The north side steps will be removed and replaced in the next four to six weeks under an approved bid of about \$133,000. The current three-foot treated-lumber steps will become five-foot aluminum sections delivered pre-assembled in pods, so the bottom section can be lifted to the parking lot during high water and reinstalled later.
- **Flock cameras** — Relaying a sheriff's office report to counter misinformation: only about four or five county-run cameras exist countywide. They're used for missing people, Amber Alerts, and investigative work — not connected to the DMV and not issuing automatic traffic tickets. Pulling footage in an investigation requires probable cause and a judge's warrant, and data is kept only 30 days.

He closed by promoting Allegan County Fair week and encouraging people to attend, while noting the county doesn't own the property or run the fair.

Public Comment on Agenda Item Only:

Dan Fox commented.

Consent Agenda:

A. Approval of City Council Workshop Minutes – September 9, 2026.

B. Kayak Launcher at Spear Street Launch.

C. Plaque for Palette Sign Bike Rack.

D. Special Event – Havana Club Bike Ride.

Motion by Dean, second by Clark to approve the consent agenda as presented. Via roll call vote, motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Accounts Payable:

Motion by Dean, second by Clark to approve the accounts payable in the amount of \$1,401,294.62. Via roll call, motion carried unanimously.

Public Hearing: None.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business:

Proposal for Deer Cull at Oval Beach:

Motion by Stanton, second by Clark to approve the deer cull service agreement with Berg's Animal & Bug Control for a deer cull at Oval Beach at a cost of \$495 per deer, in a total amount not to exceed \$30,000, and authorize the City Manager to coordinate implementation of the program, subject to receipt of all required permits and approvals, including approval of the final safety plan by the Allegan County Sheriff's Office. Via roll call vote, motion carried unanimously.

Proposed Warming Station at Mize Rose Garden:

Motion to approve the proposed Mize Rose Garden warming station and associated site improvements in accordance with the plans approved by the Historic District Commission and to authorize the Convention and Visitors Bureau to continue managing the project and to be solely responsible for all third-party costs associated with the design, permitting, construction, and completion of the project, with no City financial contribution toward such costs; to authorize the City Manager to coordinate final City review and any necessary permits or approvals and authorize acceptance of the completed improvements as a donation to the City, subject to satisfactory completion and final inspection by City staff and/or the City Engineer. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-2. Yes – Anderson, Clark, Dean, Muncey, Stanton. No – Gardner, Peterson.

Proposal for Conservation Services at Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area:

Motion to approve the ODC Network proposal for the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, including trail remediation, habitat restoration- hybrid approach, signage & wayfinding program (design & fabrication), and establishment maintenance, in an amount not to exceed \$78,300, with project costs to be reimbursed from the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area endowment fund. Via roll call vote, motion carried unanimously.

Request for AED Placement at Mt. Baldhead Park:

Motion to approve the placement of a publicly accessible AED at the base of Mount Baldhead and the restrooms in partnership with the Saugatuck Douglas Heart Safe Initiative and a partnership agreement with the Saugatuck Douglas Heart Safe Initiative. Via roll call vote, motion carried unanimously.

Staff Reports, Boards, Commissions & Committees:

Monthly department activity reports were provided by the City Manager, Zoning Director, City Clerk, DPW Director, Treasurer, Engineer, and police.

Public Comment:

Diana Decker provided comment.

Correspondence: None.

Council Comments:

Councilmember Stanton praised the Mount Baldhead Challenge held the previous weekend as fantastic. She thanked the volunteers who put it on, calling them incredible people who put a lot of work into making it happen, and highlighted how polite the runners were — thanking volunteers' even mid-race. Stationed at the Red Dock parking lot where runners had about a mile left and were visibly tired, she was struck that they were still so gracious. She added that the event brings a buzz to the area and a bump in business, since many participants stay the weekend and visit local bars, restaurants, and shops.

Councilmember Muncey also enjoyed the race, helping at Gary Medler's well-known station. He thanked Tony Schippa and the Heart Safe Initiative for coming out to do CPR training and raise awareness there. He echoed Commissioner Lubbers' plug for the Allegan County Fair, saying he loves an old-fashioned county fair, that it's open until 10:30 through the week, and that he planned to go get an elephant ear that evening. He then noted he and others will start downtown fall decorating. They'll decorate roughly 30–32 downtown corners — as he's done for over 20 years — plus the Palette sign. He invited volunteers to reach out to help.

Councilmember Dean echoed the compliments to staff, Rotary, volunteers, and runners for a very good Mt. Baldhead Challenge. He then called out how much council accomplished during the meeting, noting the results reflected a lot of hard work — in some cases over a year's worth — from committees, staff, and outreach to the private sector, other entities, and the fire department. He emphasized that many of the approved items came at

very little or no cost to taxpayers, which he said was something to be proud of, and expressed satisfaction with the council's efficiency.

Mayor Pro Tem Clark echoed both Dean and the mayor, reflecting that it had been a great, busy summer and noting this was likely the council's last meeting before the official start of fall. He wanted to make sure the many people who helped make the summer successful for the town — especially city staff — know they're appreciated.

Councilmember Gardner called it a good meeting with good actions, then shared that he worked at the top of Mount Baldhead, his traditional post as he has for several years. What stood out to him this year was the number of local runners he personally recognized as they passed. He clarified his "no" vote on the warming station. He supports creating welcoming year-round public spaces and thinks a warming station may be a good concept for Saugatuck but does not believe the Mize Memorial Rose Garden is the right location — particularly because the project requires removing the existing wrought iron fence and closable gate. He argued the Rose Garden is not just another open downtown space but a quiet, protected memorial garden as the Mize family intended, and that the fence frames the space, protects the plantings, and signals a place for reflection rather than general gathering or overflow seating. He raised practical concerns about protecting the roses during the busy summer season, noting the gate is closed at night and that without it the garden would be more exposed to vandalism, trampling, litter, and after-hours misuse. He also worried the proposed low masonry seating walls would create another late-night collection point directly outside a very popular bar, bringing noise, trash, and maintenance needs, and said he believed a better spot could have been found.

Councilmember Peterson said she agreed with everything Gardner said, then reflected on what a wonderful place Saugatuck has been to live in. Since Labor Day there have been events such as the Cove Party, the Mt. Baldhead run, and the gallery walk, with bands playing and perfect weather. She joked that if they ever add a crawling event to the race, she'll be there.

Mayor Holly Anderson echoed Dean's point that council got a lot done, reflecting months of work involving nearly everyone in the room. She thanked Mark and Amanda for coming to present the school district's proposal and thanked the larger-than-usual audience for attending in person, saying it's nice to see people in person rather than on Zoom.

Adjournment:

Motion by Muncey, second by Peterson to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried unanimously. Mayor Anderson adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Jamie Wotlers, City Clerk