



PARKS AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

December 17, 2024

The Parks and Public Works Committee met for a Committee Meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Saugatuck City Hall

102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Committee member Stanton at 9:00 a.m.

Attendance:

Present: Committee members Charak (9:30am), Hoffman, Kimble, Roche, Stanton, & Thiel.

Absent: None.

Others Present: DPW Superintendent Herbert & Deputy Clerk Williams.

Approval of Agenda:

Motion by Hoffman, second by Kimble, to approve the agenda for December 17, 2024. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Kimble, second by Thiel, to approve the minutes from the October 22, 2024, regular meeting as amended. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0.

Public Comments (agenda items only): None.

Review/Discussion:

A. Adoption of Parks and Public Works Committee Bylaws.

DPW Superintendent Herbert provided an update on changes to the committee bylaws, particularly regarding Article 4, which specifies the process for electing a chair and vice-chair annually in January. The process will involve nominations, seconds, and votes, similar to procedures at the council level. Herbert noted that this was the only substantive change, that they were polishing up the bylaws a little bit to tighten the

language up so that they are in compliance. Committee member Roche had questions regarding Article 6 focusing on two issues. The first was public art in parks and whether it should be governed by the committee or the council. Herbert noted that the art could reasonably fall under the committee's purview but may require council involvement.

The second issue was endowments and concerns regarding who should handle them. Herbert suggested that while the committee could discuss and make recommendations, council approval is required for any decisions due to the advisory board's non-funded status. The committee debated whether these responsibilities warrant committee attention or should they directly involve city staff or council. It was proposed to seek input from legal counsel or the city manager to clarify roles and streamline future processes. The consensus was to adopt the current bylaws to facilitate the January meeting, during which officers will be elected. The committee agreed that amendments could be made later if necessary, pending further feedback.

Motion by Kimble, seconded by Hoffman to approve the Parks and Public Works bylaws as presented. Upon roll call vote, motion carried 4-0.

B. Department of Public Works Updates by DPW Superintendent Herbert:

DPW Superintendent Herbert provided an update on recent activities and preparations during the seasonal transition. Staff have completed the winterization of parks, including blowing out irrigation systems and closing seasonal restrooms. They have removed the fall decorations and have installed the Christmas decorations around the city. Herbert explained that there was significant effort in managing heavy leaf fall around Thanksgiving. Staff have also finished the conversion and preparation of equipment for snow removal operations. Their focus has shifted to overdue maintenance of public works equipment. Herbert noted that these tasks were the primary focus over the past month. No additional updates or questions were raised.

C. Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area:

The committee discussed the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area (SHNA) and its current status. No new updates were provided during the meeting. In previous discussions, it was noted that the 2012 SHNA management plan required revisions. Helen and Ryan had worked on redlining the existing plan, and the revisions were submitted via email approximately a month ago.

The next steps for the Management plan are to send it to City Council for review and approval before further actions can be taken. Clarification is needed on whether SHNA will be managed by a study group appointed by the committee or directly by the city council.

There are outstanding questions that the committee had:

- What is the current status of the revised plan?
- Are city attorneys reviewing the document?
- What are the procedural next steps after council approval, specifically regarding the formation and oversight of a study group or management body?

The committee agreed that these questions need to be resolved to determine the next steps for SHNA's management and oversight. An update from staff or council is anticipated in the future.

D. Willow Tree at Cook Park:

DPW Superintendent Herbert discussed the iconic black willow tree in Cook Park, following an arborist's recommendation due to safety concerns. The tree canopy has been pruned to reduce weight and improve safety temporarily. They expect to remove the rest of the tree in January or February. The tree's stump will require specialized equipment to remove due to its large size.

With the willow tree being a focal point, the committee viewed its removal as an opportunity to consider new uses for the park. Some of the ideas discussed included:

- Planting a single native mature tree or a group of trees to replace the willow.
- Creating a "circle of trees" inspired by designs seen in California, to foster a peaceful space.
- Adding natural features, such as shaded areas, that align with native species.
- Maintaining the park's simplicity to preserve its use for events like Fourth of July celebrations and harbor festivities.
- Considering the addition of a fire pit surrounded by benches for community gatherings.

The committee then discussed repurposing the Willow Tree wood from the tree that has been removed. DPW Superintendent Herbert said that the wood has been preserved at the Public Works site, sorted into various sizes for potential use.

Suggestions for the wood included:

- Crafting benches with plaques commemorating the tree.
- Creating smaller items, such as jewelry, for keepsakes.
- Allowing public access to the wood, with priority given to individuals with personal connections to the tree, such as a couple who married under it.
- Community engagement event – inviting the community to obtain pieces of the tree as memorabilia.

- Suggestions to involve volunteers to manage the process and reduce the workload on DPW.
- Possibility of using the event to raise funds for parks through donations.

DPW Superintendent Herbert then discussed Kiln-drying the wood could make it immediately usable but would involve additional expenses. Alternatives such as using a portable sawmill to slab the wood were discussed, through liability and logistics (e.g., chainsaw use, location) need to be addressed. Herbert said that DPW prefers to remain minimally involved in processing and distribution.

The committee discussed created uses for the wood with ideas including turning the wood into Christmas ornaments or other items, leveraging local retirees and woodworkers with talent. Encouragement to informally reach out to the community members for potential interest and involvement was discussed. They emphasized the potential for the project to foster goodwill within the community while preserving a piece of local history.

The Committee encouraged members to bring additional ideas to future meetings. Strategic Planning discussions were proposed to align new park features with the broader needs of the community and the park system. The discussion emphasized preserving the community's connection to the tree while considering ways to enhance Cook Park's usability and appeal.

E. Study Group and Other Staff Updates:

1. Invasive Species:

Committee member Hoffman, along with members Charak, and Kimble have been working on a comprehensive list of invasive species (with common and Latin names) and native species are being compiled, complete with photos. The goal is to create a Google document that can be shared with the public via the city website. This resource will include guidance on identifying invasive species and steps for removal or treatment, emphasizing responsible disposal to prevent further spread (e.g., avoiding composting seeds, proper trash disposal).

Recommendations for handling invasive species like Japanese knotweed (cutting repeatedly, mulching) and using degradable materials like newspaper for suppression were discussed. The need for a practical guide on disposal methods was highlighted including alternatives to burning. The discussion included the identification of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) in winter (white waxy spores on branches) and its treatment. The city has previously budgeted and treated forested areas for HWA and milfoil, with some treatment costs covered by donations, including \$10,000 from the Rotary Club.

The Committee members discussed public education and outreach for the community. They would like the website to include links to state resources, such as videos identifying HWA and other invasive species, to educate private property owners. Social media and other communication platforms will be used to promote the guide and tips for managing invasive species.

There is a budget of \$100,000 allocated for invasive species management, with portions used for treatments like milfoil. There may be surplus funds available for additional initiatives, depending on treatment costs. Strategic planning will evaluate whether the current budget is sufficient or requires an adjustment based on the city's needs.

The discussion emphasized creating a robust educational tool for residents and ensuring sustainable invasive species management strategies while considering budget restraints.

2. Airport Property:

DPW Superintendent Herbert said that there was no significant update on the airport property. It was noted that City Manager Cummins plans to contact the Outdoor Discovery Center (ODC) to inquire about the project schedule, including the timeline for the parking lot construction and other developments. The committee is awaiting further updates from the ODC on these items.

3. Blue Star Multimodal Path:

Committee Member Kimble reminded the committee that MDOT informed the city of tribal concerns related to the path, which is currently the primary issue preventing progress. Efforts to gather detailed information about these concerns have been unsuccessful to date.

Kimble stated that there is a meeting scheduled for Thursday with MDOT, City Manager Cummins, Daniel Defranco from Saugatuck Township, Richard Donovan, and others to receive an update. While only limited information is expected, the tribe has indicated a willingness to meet with a small group next year to discuss concerns.

The City applied for a grant to fund a traffic light at the Lake Street and Blue Star Highway intersection, but they did not receive the grant. Other grant opportunities are being explored. Some committee members believe the city should prioritize funding the traffic light even without a grant. Progress hinges on resolving tribal concerns and exploring alternative funding options for the traffic light.

4. Village Square & Playground:

The committee discussed a potential donation for improvements to the Village Square basketball courts. The donor has expressed interest in funding upgrades for the Village Square courts, favoring a quick turnaround. The donation amount is unspecified but likely insufficient for full compliance with regulation standards.

The existing basketball court dimensions (42x96 ft) do not meet regulation size (50x94 ft plus 3 feet of out-of-bound space). Resurfacing is an option but would not bring the court into compliance with modern standards for accessibility and size. A full upgrade to compliance, including new infrastructure and seating, is estimated to cost \$300,000.

The options the committee considered are as follows:

- Accept the donation for basic resurfacing and minor improvements (e.g., new hoops)
- Explore other potential funding sources or grants for a full upgrade, though success may be limited due to community income level criteria.
- Investigate the possibility of reallocating city funds, such as from the parks budget, which currently stands at \$1 million.

The committee discussed community and strategic considerations. There is public interest in maintaining basketball courts that have been expressed through letters. Suggestions included transforming the area into a multi-sport court (e.g., basketball and futsal). They discussed reengaging with community groups for input and long-term planning. Alignment with broader strategic planning for city parks and prioritizing future improvements were emphasized.

The next steps include obtaining confirmation from the donor about flexibility in the donation's scope. They should present specific cost estimates and project options to the donor. Priorities for Village Square will be discussed during upcoming strategic planning sessions. The committee is leaning toward accepting the donation for the resurfacing while continuing to explore long-term plans for broader improvements in alignment with the public and council priorities.

5. Park Street, Mt. Baldhead Improvements, & AT&T status:

DPW Superintendent explained that he doesn't have any significant updates. The city is still proceeding with the planned restroom installation. There have been recent discussions about electrical updates in the area, which

may relate to potential future plans for the upper platform. However, the engineering team is still working on permitting for the upper platform. No further updates were provided beyond what was shared in the previous meeting.

6. Maple Street:

The update on Maple Street involves recent discussions between the city and the township regarding a potential cost-sharing agreement for the project. The township is planning a drainage project and additional sidewalk work on the east side of Blue Star Highway in the fall of 2025, which will coincide with the Maple Street project. Since Blue Star Highway work may lead to detours through Maple Street, the two projects cannot proceed simultaneously. The township is still evaluating funding sources for their share of the project, as they are not financially prepared at this time. Although the project was initially planned for 2025, it may be delayed until 2026. Design and survey work have been included in this fiscal year's budget so some preparations will begin even if construction starts later.

F. Priorities/Strategic Planning:

The committee discussed strategic planning and setting priorities for upcoming projects. The group suggests holding their own strategic planning session in early January before the City Council's strategic planning meeting, which is scheduled for late January. This would allow them to review potential priorities, referencing the five-year plan, and brainstorm new ideas. There is also consideration of involving an outside moderator, as the City Council does for their sessions, to help guide the planning process.

While some projects are already in progress, such as the Mount Baldhead upper platform and restroom developments, others, like the bathrooms and fish cleaning station at Coughlin Park, are considered lower priority and may be deferred. The group discussed focusing on what comes after this year and reviewing all parks' needs, including Village Square Park.

There is some confusion about whether they should be setting priorities before or after the City Council's meeting. The group agrees they should be proactive in generating ideas and presenting them to the Council. Specific items, like the Saugatuck Natural Area and Michigan Green Communities program, may not require substantial funding but need Council approval to proceed.

The next step is for the group to consult with Ryan to determine if a strategic planning session can be scheduled before the Council's meeting, possibly with the same moderator as the Council's session, to align their priorities effectively.

Public Comments (Limit 3 mins): None.

Correspondence: None.

Member Closing Comments:

- Kimble – A warm welcome was extended to Lauren, who is taking over for Baldwin. Kimble raised the idea of the community pursuing a “dark sky community” designation. This stems from a streetlight on Spear Street, historically non-functional, was recently repaired with LED lighting. This has caused concerns among residents about light pollution. Benefits of dark sky initiatives include reduced energy consumption, improved visibility of stars, and support for wildlife. She would like to form a study group or initiate a conversation on this long-term initiative. Kimble also mentioned that the Peterson Preserve needs attention to address invasive species and enhance its appeal. Current challenges include insufficient upkeep and invasive plant growth. She suggests allocating more resources to maintain and improve the Peterson Preserve. She also made a personal contribution and planted native species in a neglected bed to set an example for improvement. The topics were presented as potential priorities for further community discussion and development.
- Roche – A warm welcome was extended to Lauren, along with gratitude for joining the committee. Special thanks were given to outgoing Chairwoman Baldwin for her dedicated service, acknowledging her significant contributions and the impact of her departure. It was noted that the naming process for the airport property, as mentioned in previous minutes, still requires council involvement. With the property set to open in the spring, it was suggested to establish or finalize a process for naming, highlighting it as an opportunity for community engagement and creativity.
- Stanton – She let the committee know that the chairperson role does not require a council member, allowing for broader eligibility within the group. Selection of the chairperson will occur in January. Stanton said that she does not seek the chairperson role, suggesting that it should go to someone with

more experience in the group. Appreciation was expressed for the group's hard work and accomplishments over the years, recognizing their dedication and results-driven efforts.

- Charak - Apologies were made for arriving late. He said that work has started on cataloging invasive species, including plants, insects, and tree diseases. Initial data was recorded in Apple Numbers but will be transferred to Google Sheets for accessibility. A printed version will be shared, and the Google Sheet will be distributed for collaborative contributions. Specific invasive plants and challenges were mentioned in relation to Peterson Preserve, though details were not fully articulated during the discussion. Charak proposed creating a "Friends of the Park" program that could facilitate donations, community feedback, and volunteer involvement for local parks. Establishing a 501(c)(3) organization would enable tax-deductible donations and broaden participation beyond city residents. Previous experience with similar organizations, such as Friends of the Library group, was shared to illustrate feasibility. He thinks that it would be great to involve the community in the airport renaming project.
- Hoffman – He is looking forward to the strategic meeting.
- Thiel – She thinks that a strategic meeting ahead of the regular PPW meeting in January would be a great idea. Thiel shared a personal experience regarding streetlights on their street that were previously non-functional but were later repaired with LED lighting. Similar to others concerns, the preference was for the lights to remain off or be dimmed to reduce light pollution and align with dark sky community goals.

Adjournment:

*Motion by Charak, second by Kimble, to approve adjournment of the meeting.
Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0. Committee member Stanton adjourned at 10:17 a.m.*

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Williams, City Deputy Clerk & DPW Admin. Assistant