



CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES January 27, 2025

The City Council met to have a Regular Council Meeting at City Hall.
102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

Call to Order:

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

Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendance:

Present: Mayor Anderson, Councilmembers Clark, Dean, Muncey, Peterson and Gardner.

Absent: Stanton.

Motion by Dean, second by Peterson to excuse Mayor Pro-Tem Stanton. Via voice vote, motion carried 6-0.

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, Zoning Director Thompson, Treasurer Bredeweg, Attorney Jake Witte and Clerk Wolters.

Mayor Comments:

Mayor Anderson expressed enthusiasm following the recent strategic planning session on Friday, highlighting the strong engagement and productive discussions between city officials and staff. She appreciated the collaborative effort in organizing the session and looks forward to receiving feedback from Maryland before revisiting and finalizing the established priorities. Mayor Anderson conveyed her satisfaction with the session's outcomes and extended her gratitude to everyone involved.

City Manager Comments:

City Manager Cummings expressed gratitude to the Council for dedicating a full day to engaging with staff and the facilitator to review past achievements and discuss priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. He looks forward to receiving Maryland's report, anticipated this week, and hopes to further discuss its findings during the next Council workshop. Additionally, he highlighted a recent update regarding short-term rental licenses, noting that a notice was published in the *Commercial Record* announcing the availability of two licenses in the Peninsula South Zoning District and two in the Peninsula North Riverside Zoning District. Cummings emphasized that the licensing process follows the policy approved in August and directed any inquiries to Director of Planning and Zoning, Luke Thompson.

Agenda Changes:

Motion by Gardner, second by Muncey to add commission member Bradd Lubbers as guest speaker this evening. Via voice voter, motion carried 6-0.

Guest Speakers:

Director Lisa Mize of the Saugatuck Douglas Convention Bureau provided an update on past and upcoming initiatives aimed at enhancing tourism and community engagement. She highlighted the bureau's extensive digital advertising efforts in 2024, including YouTube promotions, hosted video series, and a successful fall campaign in Chicago. The bureau also expanded its printed discovery guide production from 50,000 to 60,000 copies due to high demand.

Mize discussed efforts to promote year-round tourism, including winter photography campaigns and the launch of a strategic initiative to attract small to medium-sized meetings and conferences to the area. She noted increased website traffic, which grew by 15% in 2024, and emphasized the continued focus on digital advertising and email marketing in 2025.

Looking ahead, the bureau aims to strengthen off-peak tourism by working with a newly formed subcommittee and industry experts to assess local resources and opportunities. Plans for 2025 include renewed radio advertising on NPR in Chicago, ongoing guest and lodging partner surveys, and continued public outreach through local media. Additional goals include a 5% increase in lodging assessments, a 20% rise in website traffic, and expanded sponsorships and in-kind donations for community events.

Mize also announced the launch of the *Influencer Partnership Program*, designed to support lodging partners in leveraging influencer marketing. The program will provide financial and logistical assistance to bring social media influencers to the region, further promoting Saugatuck Douglas as a premier travel destination.

Allegan County District 3 Commissioner Brad Lubbers provided an update on recent developments within the county, beginning with the organizational meeting held on January 9, where Gale Dugan was elected Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners and Scott Beltman was elected Vice Chair. He acknowledged the efforts of county law enforcement and emergency personnel in managing road conditions during the recent severe winter weather, which led to multiple vehicle accidents along major highways, including US-31 and US-131. Lubbers commended their dedication to keeping roads clear and ensuring public safety. Additionally, he shared positive news regarding Jill Dunham, the County Broadband Initiative Director, who was recognized as one of 14 individuals nationwide by the White House Rural Innovators Initiative under the Biden-Harris Administration for her work in expanding broadband access. Regarding broadband expansion, Lubbers reported that the 123Net project is progressing as planned, with work already completed in areas to the north and east of Saugatuck and Douglas. The broadband infrastructure for these communities is scheduled for completion by December 31, 2025. He noted that Saugatuck and Douglas present additional complexities due to existing provider networks, which may lead to potential partnerships between 123Net and other service providers such as Comcast or Xfinity. Discussions on network access and possible agreements are ongoing.

Public Comment on Agenda Item Only: None.

Consent Agenda:

- A. Regular Meeting Minutes – January 13, 2025.
- B. Memorandum of Agreement - Fee for Collection of 2025 Summer Taxes.
- C. Request for Right of Way Sign – Saint Patrick’s Day Pub Crawl.

Motion by Dean, second by Peterson to approve the consent agenda. Via roll call vote, motion carried 6-0.

Staff Reports, Boards, Commissions & Committees:

The City Manager, Treasurer, City Clerk, Director of Planning & Zoning, Department of Public Works, Engineer and Police submitted status reports of current activities since the last regular council meeting on January 13, 2025, for their respective departments.

Fire District Administration Board, Dan Fox:

Dan Fox, the Saugatuck city representative to the Saugatuck Township Fire District Board, provided a report summarizing key updates from the department’s December and year-end review. The department recorded a total of 1,146 calls for the year, marking a 17% increase and setting an all-time record. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) calls made up 58% of all incidents, with falls being the most common category. Motor vehicle accidents surged by 44%, with incidents on Interstate 196 increasing by 84%, largely due to winter weather conditions. The district’s drone team saw a 50% rise in responses, primarily assisting with missing persons searches. Additionally, two lives were saved by fire district crews using CPR and AEDs. Financially, the department secured \$41,000 in grants and received \$108,000 in donations. Cost recovery efforts from highway incidents brought in \$7,400 in December, and the district received an \$8,500 insurance dividend. Fox also discussed upcoming equipment upgrades, including the planned replacement of a Ford Explorer emergency vehicle. The decision was tabled for a future meeting, but the replacement vehicle is expected to maintain similar capabilities. Regarding emergency response coordination, Fox emphasized the importance of the 911 dispatch system, which determines which agencies respond based on availability and location. He also underscored the value of the department’s TMA (Truck-Mounted Attenuator) vehicle, which enhances safety during highway incidents, and noted interest from the Holland Fire Department and the Michigan Department of Transportation in adopting similar equipment.

Interurban Board, Councilmember Muncey:

Councilmember Muncey reported that first-quarter ridership reached 14,422, marking the highest in history for that period. The fiscal year runs from October to October, and the expanded late-night service, particularly on New Year's Eve, contributed to a 107% increase in ridership that night, with 361 passengers utilizing the service. The long-anticipated building grant process is finally moving forward, with plans to break ground in the spring. Project manager’s coordination is underway to meet design-build requirements, and preliminary drawings are expected within the next two months. Muncey also addressed budget challenges, noting a projected 15% reduction in state grant funding, which could significantly impact financial planning. A committee will meet on February 11 to assess potential budget adjustments. Options under consideration include increasing the existing 0.5-mill levy, which has been in place for 15 years, for a potential November ballot proposal. The goal is to sustain service expansion, maintain short wait times, and keep fares affordable. Despite a solid cash reserve, careful financial planning is necessary, especially with anticipated costs associated with the new building. Muncey assured continued updates on the financial outlook and invited interested parties to the

budget meeting at the Interurban hub on Wiley Street on February 11 from 1 to 2 PM.

Kalamazoo Lake Sewer & Water Authority:

Barry Johnson, the city representative on the Kalamazoo Lake Sewer and Water Authority (KLSWA), provided an update on recent meetings and key developments. At the January 14 meeting, the board reviewed progress on lead service line replacements and the submission of distribution system material inventories for Saugatuck, Douglas, and the township, with Lake Town's submission still pending. Additionally, a sewer capacity report was distributed, indicating that the city utilizes approximately 30% of the system's capacity, Douglas accounts for 50%, and the remaining portion is used by the township. Capacity levels are continuously monitored to ensure efficient operations. Johnson also reported on the authority's financial audit, which was positive overall. However, he emphasized the ongoing challenge of maintaining competitive pay scales for licensed plant operators. Employees require certifications to manage water and sewer treatment facilities, and while KLSWA funds their training, larger municipalities like Holland and South Haven often recruit them with higher salaries. To retain staff, the board is prioritizing competitive wages and emphasizing strong benefits packages in recruitment efforts. During the budget hearing on January 21, the board approved the budget, which includes necessary rate increases to support capital improvements. The most significant future expense involves the maintenance of the sewage lagoons, which require periodic dredging every 10 years. If the processed waste meets regulatory standards, it can be used as fertilizer at a cost of under \$1 million. However, if contamination levels exceed acceptable limits, disposal in a landfill becomes significantly more expensive. To fund these infrastructure projects, water rates will increase by \$6.98 per meter equivalent unit, with an additional charge of \$0.35 per 1,000 gallons. Sewer rates will rise by \$6.50 per meter equivalent unit, with a \$0.60 per 1,000-gallon surcharge. Larger users, such as breweries with higher water consumption, will see proportional increases. Johnson acknowledged the city's ongoing infrastructure investment efforts, including lead line identification and replacement, and commended their proactive approach to maintaining and upgrading essential services.

Kalamazoo Lake Harbor Authority, Councilmember Peterson: None.

Zoning Board of Appeals, City Manager Cummins:

They met but did not have any cases. They voted on Chair and Vice Chair and reviewed their year-end report.

Historic District Commission, Councilmember Gardner:

The next meeting is a week from Thursday, the 6th at 6 p.m.

Planning Commission, Councilmember Clark:

Councilmember Clark provided an update on recent zoning ordinance changes and ongoing discussions regarding accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and short-term rentals (STRs). He noted that the council previously approved modifications to ADU regulations, including the removal of the minimum size requirement. Further adjustments are being considered, particularly regarding ADUs seeking STR licenses. One key recommendation, which was unanimously approved for recommendation at the last meeting, proposes removing the requirement for ADUs to meet current zoning and building codes if they were legally constructed under previous regulations. Many existing ADUs do not align with current standards but were compliant when built, making this adjustment necessary to accommodate STR licensing. The proposed language change will be reviewed at an upcoming workshop, either at the

next session or the following one.

Additionally, Clark mentioned that discussions continue regarding potential zoning language revisions for bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), specifically their ability to use accessory structures for occupancy. Progress is being made, and he anticipates that a recommendation to the council may be ready by the next meeting.

Parks & Public Works Committee, Mayor Pro-Tem Stanton: None.

Tri-Community Non-Motorized Trail Study Committee, Councilmember Dean:

Councilmember Dean Man provided an update on the progress of the Blue Star Trail project, acknowledging potential delays this year. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that the route does not disturb any artifacts or culturally sensitive areas. While the project had been discussed during the recent strategy session, Man noted that it may move at a slower pace due to these considerations. The Friends of the Blue Star Trail have informed their membership of the anticipated delays, and MDOT has expressed understanding and support for the delay. He was reassured that the grant funding remains secure, but the project's timeline will be extended to address concerns related to historic preservation.

Water System Operations Contract Advisory Committee, Councilmember Gardner and Councilmember Clark:

Councilmember Gardner noted conversations are still ongoing and there will be another draft of the contract soon.

Wildlife Management Committee, Councilmember Dean:

Councilmember Dean informed the council that the next meeting is February 5. They will review the survey results as the survey closes on January 31.

Approval of Accounts Payable:

Motion by Dean, second by Clark to approve the accounts payable in the amount of \$260,559.69. Via roll call vote, motion carried 6-0.

Public Hearing: None.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business:

Sea Wall and Concrete Repairs - Proposal for Design Engineering & Bidding Assistance in the amount of \$17,200.:

Motion by Gardner, second by Muncey to approve the proposal submitted by Fleis & Vandenbrink to assist the City with design engineering and bidding assistance for sea wall and concrete repairs in the amount of \$17,200.

Audit Engagement Letter/Proposal for 2025, 2026, and 2027.:

Motion by Muncy, second by Peterson to approve the audit engagement letter with Berthiaume & Company for 2025, 2026, and 2027.

Muncey and Peterson withdrew their motions.

Motion by Muncy, second by Clark to deny the request to maintain hardscaping within the city's

right of way at 560 Mill Street on the basis that the hardscaping at issue encroaches upon and may interfere with the city's current and planned use of Mill Street right of way for vehicular traffic and parking. Via roll call vote, motion carried 6-0.

Correspondence:

David Isljamovski and Chad Dupont regarding Maple Street.
Bill and Lynne Hybels regarding Maple Street.

Council Comments:

Councilman Clark expressed his appreciation to the city manager and staff for organizing a highly successful event on Friday. He also commended staff members for their detailed and well-prepared reports, noting how helpful it was for him to hear directly from them, which allowed him to better understand their roles and responsibilities. He emphasized the value of the discussion around prioritizing projects, acknowledging the significant workload and the many projects already in progress, with more on the horizon. His main concern was ensuring the city's workload remains manageable, as overburdening could negatively impact all projects. He concluded by thanking the city manager, his fellow council members, and staff for their contributions

Councilmember Dean echoed the positive comments made by fellow council members regarding the recent meeting, praising the discussions and Lisa's presentation from the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). He also expressed his appreciation for Dan's presence, highlighting the opportunity to start early on planning for event security. In light of recent headlines about events being targeted, Councilmember Scott emphasized the importance of preparing for public safety, noting that the city has the chance to be proactive in this area. He also pointed out that with the date for the event and fireworks already set, they can focus on planning to ensure both safety and a great experience for attendees. Additionally, he acknowledged parking as an important factor that will need attention as part of the event preparation.

Councilmember Muncey began by complimenting the team for their excellent work in organizing the recent meeting, noting the quality of the sandwiches and acknowledging the need for printed napkins. He expressed that the meeting served as an important team-building opportunity and looked forward to the workshops and detailed discussions that were agreed upon. He highlighted the strategic aspect of council meetings as an exciting part of his role and praised the value of such sessions for effective governance. He also wished Michigan a belated happy birthday, recognizing the state's 188th anniversary. In addition, he encouraged support for the Saugatuck Public School Drama Department's production of Willy Wonka, which would be held at the high school auditorium. He praised the talent of the students, noting that their performances stand out from typical high school productions. Councilmember Muncey also invited the community to visit South Haven for their 31st annual Icebreakers Festival, which features events like ice sculpting, cardboard sled racing, a chili cook-off, and a fashion show. He mentioned that the festival has grown significantly and recommended checking out the ice sculptures and various activities, suggesting the event is a fun and worthwhile trip. Councilmember Dean.

Councilmember Gardner echoed the positive comments about the session on Friday, emphasizing that it was a great opportunity for him to spend more time getting to know Councilmember Joe, as well as Sarah Williams and Nikki, the new treasurer. He expressed that it was a productive and enjoyable experience overall.

Councilmember Peterson echoed the positive sentiments about the meeting, noting that it was a great day. She humorously remarked on Marilyn's attempt to prioritize items, mentioning how one priority would be tackled, only for another to be raised. She pointed out that, in the end, they only managed to get bike racks off the list. Regarding staff reports, it would be beneficial if the Sheriff's department could give statistics similar to the fire department.

Mayor Anderson expressed gratitude for the strategy session, highlighting his earlier appreciation. He thanked everyone for their efforts in securing the Yacht Club as the venue, noting that it was a wonderful location and that having daylight during the meeting was a refreshing touch.

Adjournment:

Motion by Dean, second by Peterson to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried unanimously. Mayor Anderson adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Jamie Wolters, City Clerk