



CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

April 14, 2025

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

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

Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendance:

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

Absent: Clark, Peterson

Motion by Stanton, second by Muncey to excuse Councilmember Clark and Councilmember Peterson. Via voice vote, motion carried 5-0.

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, Zoning Director Thompson, Treasurer Bredeweg, DPW Superintendent Herbert, Clerk Wolters, Attorney Witte and Engineer Moxey.

Mayor Comments:

Mayor Anderson welcomed everyone and acknowledged that Councilmember Peterson might join online and is welcome to make public comments. She reflected on the recent gas outage, describing it as an incredible experience of teamwork and problem-solving. She praised how quickly city staff, especially City Manager Ryan and Fennville Town Administrator Katie Beemer, responded to the crisis. She expressed deep appreciation for the collaboration among municipalities, utility companies, and first responders. Mayor Anderson also highlighted the outstanding contributions of Lisa Mize, who managed communications on social media and local news, effectively advocating for local businesses during the outage. She noted how everyone brought their best selves to the situation, despite occasional tension, and emphasized the sense of unity and professionalism across the tri-communities. She closed by welcoming back those who were away on spring break.

City Manager Comments:

City Manager Cummins reflected on the whirlwind of the past few days, tying the recent gas outage response to a timely crisis management session he and Fennville Administrator Katie Beemer attended at the Michigan Municipal League's capital conference. That session emphasized the importance of direct communication in emergencies, prompting them to exchange phone numbers—which proved crucial when the outage hit.

Cummins detailed how the response unfolded, starting with a tip from Council Member Clark about residents without gas. He had just received a press release about a significant break and evacuations, which was quickly confirmed when Katie called. From there, multiple levels of government sprang into action. The county partially activated its Emergency Operations Center, helping coordinate updates and resource sharing. He praised the utility companies for their swift and massive response—bringing in 200 crew members from across the Midwest and even Pittsburgh. They mobilized like an “army,” going door to door to shut off meters safely before restoring service. A command center was set up in Fennville, and their efforts were captured on social media. Cummins also recognized the local fire departments and the community-led pancake breakfast hosted by the township fire departments, Ganges, and Fennville, which helped build camaraderie and support for the workers. He emphasized the community's patience, understanding, and spirit of cooperation, which he said truly revealed the character of the tri-community during a crisis. Cummins noted that this outage was larger than others many of the utility workers had experienced and stressed the importance of learning from the situation. While there were things that could have gone better, a debrief will help improve future responses. Crews will remain available, including on weekends, to restore service to second homes or seasonal properties as people return.

Agenda Changes:

Motion by Dean, second by Stanton to add Commissioner Lubbers as guest speaker for tonight's meeting. Via voice vote, motion carried 5-0.

Guest Speakers:

County Commissioner Brad Lubbers echoed the appreciation shared by others, highlighting not just the residents, but also the local businesses that generously donated food to utility workers during the gas outage — unprompted and greatly appreciated. He noted that while such emergencies are never welcome, from a county emergency management perspective, they are valuable learning experiences. This event serves as a practical reminder of the importance of preparation, especially with Palisades Nuclear Plant planning to reopen soon — making future drills and readiness even more critical. On a lighter note, he shared that Saugatuck was named the 9th best small town in the Midwest by USA Today, alongside other Michigan destinations like Grand Haven (7th) and Mackinac Island (10th), further cementing Saugatuck's appeal as a tourist destination. In county personnel news, Jennifer Tein, formerly Douglas' Treasurer and a previous member of the county clerk's office, will become the Assistant County Treasurer, replacing the retiring Sally Brooks. Lubbers also shared two more sobering updates - During the outage, an elderly woman went missing and was later found deceased in a nearby lake, a tragic event during an already difficult time. The county health department received notice that its remaining federal COVID-19 relief funds have been cut, effective immediately. While the financial impact is small relative to the overall health department budget, it signals the beginning of potential future cuts, which may force the county to consider difficult decisions about funding, scaling back, or cutting certain programs. He closed by expressing readiness to take those challenges on as they come.

Public Comment on Agenda Item Only:

Klesyk Krzysztof commented on item #14A.

Councilmember Peterson commented on item #14A.

Kate Quick commented on item #14A.

Consent Agenda:

- A. Approval of Workshop Meeting Minutes for April 9, 2025.
- B. Additional Historic Marker at Coghlin Park.
- C. Arbor Day Proclamation.
- D. Fireworks Permit – Independence Day Display.
- E. Fireworks Permit – Venetian Festival Display.
- F. Temporarily Designate Scott Herbert to act as City Manager while City Manager is on Honeymoon from May 2-11.

Motion by Stanton, second by Dean to approve the consent agenda. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Staff Reports, Boards, Commissions & Committees:

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

Fire District Administration:

Dan Fox presented regarding the recent workshop meeting, not the upcoming full board meeting scheduled for next week (Thursday at 4:00 at the station), though everyone is welcome to attend.

- The fire district has just started geo-locating their calls—specifically fire calls, not ambulance calls, which are tracked separately. He shared maps showing call locations.
- There's no specific analysis or conclusions being drawn yet—Dan sees it more as an educational snapshot to better understand the distribution and volume of calls.

Interurban Board:

Councilmember Muncey shared that Director Becky Carten-Crandell attended the Rural Transit Managers Workshop in Mount Pleasant for the next few days. He reminded everyone that the next meeting is on April 22, not April 15 as originally planned.

He briefly recapped transit updates from the previous meeting for those who may have missed them:

- Expanded hours:
 - Weekdays: 7 AM – 7 PM
 - Weekends: 9 AM – 7 PM
- New service areas starting May 1:
 - Laketown Township: Door-to-door rides within a 30-mile area for \$1
 - Fennville: Stops at Wagner's, the post office, and Ladders of Hope for \$1
 - Winery route: \$5 trips from downtown to Virtue Cider, Fenn Valley Winery, and Modales Winery

The pilot program is aimed at serving students with limited transportation options and providing safe travel for residents enjoying local attractions. If successful, the goal is to have it continued with voter approval in 2026.

Kalamazoo Lake Sewer & Water Authority: None.

Kalamazoo Lake Harbor Authority: None.

Zoning Board of Appeals:

Zoning Director Thompson informed that Singapore Yacht Club requested a variance to replace their existing pool fence. The ZBA granted the variance, allowing the club to build a solid fence within 25 feet of the water.

Historic District Commission:

Councilmember Gardener presented that at the Historic District Commission meeting on Thursday, April 3 at 6 PM, three items were originally on the agenda:

- 131 Griffith Street: A re-roofing project was moved to Administrative Approval.
- 673 Lake Street: Proposed updates included a pool, pool house, patio, fire pit, fencing, and resurfaced deck. The fire pit was removed from the application. Detail discussion about the pool house, originally a design that didn't align with the historic character. The Commission ensured that materials used (particularly for the deck) would match the house's character and the project was approved.
- 120 Mary Street: The applicant scaled back their proposal at the last minute and the request was approved.

Councilmember Gardner praised the Commission's collaborative approach and the work of staff, especially Luke, in preparing applicants and facilitating productive conversations.

Planning Commission:

Zoning Director Thompson noted the commission had a fairly long discussion and first steps on several ongoing planning topics including the master plan and temporary signage.

Parks and Public Works Committee:

Mayor Pro-Tem Stanton noted the next meeting will be April 22.

Tri-Community Non-Motorized Trail Study Committee:

Councilmember Dean did not have any other notes other than what is included on the city manager's staff report.

Water System Operations Contract Advisory Committee:

Councilmember Garnder noted the topic is on the agenda to discuss.

Wildlife Management Committee, Councilmember Dean:

Councilmember Dean noted the topic is on the agenda to discuss.

Approval of Accounts Payable:

Motion by Stanton, second by Dean to approve the accounts payable in the amount of \$123,093.95. Via roll call vote, 5-0.

Public Hearing: None.

Unfinished Business: None.

New Business:

Ordinance No. 250414 – A: Short-Term Rental Licensing Ordinance Amendment:

Motion by Stanton, second by Muncey to approve Ordinance No. 250414-A to amend the City of Saugatuck's Short-Term Rental Licensing Ordinance, Ordinance No. 240229-B, as

amended, to provide for the imposition of late fees for late applications for short-term rental licenses, to update penalties for violations, and to authorize certain Via roll call vote, motion carried 4-1. Yes – Dean, Gardner, Muncey, Stanton. No – Anderson.

Resolution No. 250414 – A: A Resolution Formally Recognizing the Recommendations of the Tri-Community Wildlife Committee:

Motion by Stanton, second by Muncey to approve Resolution No. 250414-A: A Resolution Formally Recognizing the Recommendations of the Tri-Community Wildlife Committee. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Maple Street Agreement:

Motion by Muncey, second by Dean to approve the Maple Street Cost Share Agreement with Saugatuck Township. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Sewer Capacity Agreement:

Motion by Gardner, second by Stanton to approve the Sewer Capacity Lease Agreement with Saugatuck Township. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Design Engineering services for Maple Street Amendment:

Motion by Muncey, second by Dean to approve the proposal from Fleis & Vandenbrink for design engineering services for Maple Street improvements. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Renaming Old Airport Property:

Motion by Muncey, second by Dean to rename the old airport property to the new name of Saugatuck Wilds Nature Preserve. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Public Comment:

Kate Quick commented on short-term rentals.

Chris Peterson commented on the last council workshop.

Correspondence: None.

Council Comments:

Councilmember Gardner: While visiting Holmes Beach, Florida, Gardner attended a city commission meeting and found similarities to Saugatuck's operations. He noted their strong embrace of short-term rentals (STRs) as an economic engine and suggested Saugatuck could learn from their more advanced regulatory approach. He also appreciated their public comment format, which allowed for dialogue. Gardner also responded to past comments implying council decisions were made outside public meetings, firmly stating that in his 25+ years of service, decisions have always been made transparently in public forums.

Councilmember Dean defended prior comments about informal decision-making, stating he was told directly that things were once handled "with a handshake at the Butler." He then praised the mayor and city manager for their strong leadership and communication during the recent gas leak emergency, highlighting their coordination with other municipalities and first responders. As someone with experience in oil and gas, he expressed deep appreciation for their efforts.

Mayor Pro-Tem Stanton began by referencing a local saying about how things "used to get done" through casual conversations at the Butler, a sentiment shared by a local resident while chatting. She clarified that it was a nostalgic comment often heard around town and not meant to be taken too seriously. She then shifted to express sincere gratitude for the swift and effective response to the recent gas leak, especially during cold weather when many residents were without heat. While she was away on spring break in warm weather, she was concerned about her children and pets back home. She thanked Ryan and Holly for their constant updates, responsiveness to media inquiries, and outstanding coordination, calling the collaboration "incredible."

Councilmember Muncey expressed heartfelt appreciation for the strong community response during a recent challenge, saying it wasn't surprising because it reflects the town's long-standing spirit and history of coming together. He shared stories from longtime residents like Ralph Troutman as reminders of that resilient spirit. Muncey gave special thanks to Michigan Gas Utilities for their outstanding communication and quick response, noting how rare and appreciated that level of service is. He also reminded everyone that the Douglas Easter Parade and Egg Hunt has been moved to Saturday (instead of Easter Sunday) this year. It will begin around noon, with the parade starting at 1 p.m. near the Douglas Fire Department and Respite Coffee area. He encouraged everyone to join in the Easter fun and wished all a happy Easter.

Mayor Anderson noted it is humbling and she was very proud to represent the city and was very grateful for city manager Cummins for his steady hand and great communication.

Adjournment:

Motion by Stanton, second by Dean to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried 6-0. Mayor Anderson adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

Jamie Wolters, City Clerk