



PARKS AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 24, 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 Chair Baldwin at 10:00 a.m.

Attendance:

Present: Chair Baldwin, Committee members Charak, Kimble, Roche, Thiel.

Absent: Hoffman.

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, DPW Superintendent Herbert, Deputy Clerk Williams.

Approval of Agenda:

Motion by Charak, second by Kimble, to approve the agenda for September 24, 2024. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Kimble, second by Charak, to approve the August 27, 2024, regular meeting minutes as presented. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0.

Public Comments (agenda items only): None.

Review/Discussion:

A. Department of Public Works Updates:

- Annual tree assessment completed with local arborist.
- Tree planting planned for early November (15 trees).
- Water service line verification work is ongoing.
- New equipment operator hired: Scott Morrow.
- Concrete work scheduled for third week of October.
- Staff attended salt spreader training.

B. Benches for Village Square Park:

The Committee discussed placement of five benches around the new playground at Village Square Park. The plans will be submitted to the Historic District Commission for approval. Kimble suggested adding more benches due to the park's popularity, and Herbert agreed to consider it. The group also discussed adding picnic tables in the future.

C. Update on Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area:

City Manager Cummins reported that after consulting with legal counsel and reviewing previous documents, they determined the process for updating the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area plan. This update is necessary to access endowment funds from the Community Foundation. The Conservation District has agreed to the City Council updating the plan, provided they have input in the process. They're currently working on updating the natural features inventory, which is expected to be completed by the end of October. Once the updated inventory is received, committee members Baldwin and Roche will likely provide feedback and suggested changes. The updated plan will then be discussed with the City Council for additional input before finalization.

There was also mention of the need for an updated list of invasive species on the property for the Master Plan. This ties into the broader discussion about invasive species management in the area. Additionally, City Manager Cummins provided an update on the conservation easement for the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, mentioning that draft easement language was expected soon.

D. Study Group and Other Staff Updates:

1. Invasive Species:

The Committee expressed an interest in educating the community about invasive species. They are considering using resources from the State of Michigan website, which provides information and pictures of invasive plants. Charak suggested creating a simplified spreadsheet with invasive species information, including names, brief descriptions, and pictures. He proposed involving local students in this project. There was mention of discouraging people from buying and planting invasive species, as some can be attractive but harmful to the local ecosystem. The Committee discussed the need to inform residents about identifying invasive species in their own yards and how to remove them. The idea of presenting information about invasives in smaller, more digestible chunks was proposed, possibly through the city's e-news. This could involve focusing on different categories like vines, trees, aquatic plants, and shrubs separately. The Committee also touched on the importance of promoting native species as alternatives to invasives. They seem keen on developing a comprehensive approach to invasive species education and management, involving both community outreach and hands-on efforts.

2. Airport Property:

On September 20, roughly 66 eighth-grade students visited the airport property for an educational outing. The event was well attended by various community leaders, including Saugatuck City Manager Cummins, Department of Public Works staff, school representatives, and parents. The students were divided into groups, with some working at the Tails and Trails dog park area. What was

important about that is that the kids are actually putting in their middle school cross country trails right now, so they actually got to be an active part of creating that and then they also worked on habitat management and invasive species removal. The other half of the students at the airport property were the first to walk the trails that are planned to open to the public in the spring, pending completion of work by the Outdoor Discovery Center. The ODC conservation experts were present to guide the students and point out interesting and natural features. Roche, who reported on the even, described the student's energy and enthusiasm as being at an "all-time high." The kids were excited to be outdoors with their peers and actively participating in community projects. The event also included work on removing autumn olive, an invasive species, with the removed plants being moved to the DPW compound for disposal. Overall, the comments reflected a successful and engaging community event that combined education, environmental stewardship, and youth involvement at the airport property.

City Manager Cummins gave an update on the conservation easement for the airport property. He reported that attorneys have begun drafting the conservation easement language for a portion of the property, which is expected to take about a month. Once drafted, the language will be reviewed by the City Council to ensure their comfort with its terms. Cummins also mentioned that surveyors are expected to complete boundary work for the conservation easement area within the next 4-6 weeks. This area primarily includes the eastern portion of the property, which consists of ravines, steep grades, floodplains, and wetlands.

3. Blue Star Multimodal Path:

Committee Member Kimble reported that construction estimates for the Blue Star Multimodal path came in higher than initially expected. This may result in the deferral of certain aspects of the project. They are exploring ways to manage the budget while still achieving the project's core objectives. City Manager Cummins provided an update on the project's status, mentioning that tribal and environmental reviews were still ongoing. Despite the higher costs, there is hope that construction could begin next year. The Committee also touched on the traffic light portion of the project. An update on potential grant funding for this aspect was expected soon.

4. Village Square Playground:

City Manager Cummins said that they have a meeting Thursday, September 26th with engineers and the donor's representative. The engineers took an initial look and said the concrete courts are in good shape. They would like to discuss the scope of the project with the potential donors because if they fully replaced the courts the cost would be pretty dramatic. The size of the court isn't to today's specs as far as having extra areas outside of the court itself. They would like to discuss that as well as have a discussion about what the resurfacing looks like as far as painting the lines on the courts and then what are some estimates for some additional things that we would like to see there. They have discussed fencing, bleachers and making the courts multi-purpose. Cummins is hoping that they can have a little further discussion on Thursday before the engineers put together a scope of services to work on. They would really like to know their true budget so they can make their plans around the potential dollars that are there.

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

City Manager Cummins said that the AT&T project is progressing, and that AT&T sent an updated response to the State Historic Preservation Office and the tribes. AT&T continues to work through that significant piece of the project. The next project as it relates to bathrooms is the permitting process regarding the critical dunes and there are a lot of environmental sensitivities. Cummins said that work should begin soon.

For Mount Baldhead, there is a focus on erosion mitigation. The Committee discussed potential involvement of the Rotary Club for tree planting to help with this issue. There are also plans to improve the viewing deck and replace the chain link fence, aiming to enhance both functionality and aesthetics.

Regarding Park Street, a project interest form has been submitted for an EGLE grant. This grant is related to coastal management and will support design work for improvements along Park Street. The Committee recognizes the need for these improvements to address erosion issues, enhance visitor experience, and maintain the area's natural beauty while accommodating necessary infrastructure upgrades.

6. Maple Street:

City staff and engineers held a successful open house for the Maple Street project, where they received feedback from residents. Their main focus was on the need for dedicated sidewalks or wider shoulders to improve pedestrian safety. There was discussion about the township considering adding sidewalks along Blue Star Highway, but not on Maple Street itself. DPW Superintendent Herbert mentioned that currently, he sees about four students either walking or riding their bikes on Maple Street to school, but he thinks that number would increase with sidewalks. Committee members expressed concerns about the overall condition of Maple Street and emphasized the need for repairs. They discussed the importance of creating pedestrian-friendly infrastructure while also considering long-term maintenance requirements. Some committee members were initially worried about the cost and DPW's ability to maintain new sidewalks. However, Herbert pointed out that snow removal equipment already drives on Maple Street to reach other sidewalks, so maintaining additional sidewalks wouldn't be a significant issue.

Public Comments (Limit 3 mins): None.

Correspondence:

Committee members reviewed letters from local students, Dew Ebron and Hudson Rodewald regarding recent city improvements and their favorite things to do or places to visit in Saugatuck.

Member Closing Comments:

- Kimble – She thinks that things are going well, and she is appreciative of all the work that is being done.
- Roche – She suggested that the committee reach out to the public and have them vote on a name for the property. She thinks it would be good to brand the property and have the

public take some ownership over it. Roche also brought up the Michigan Green Communities program, which is the state's initiative for sustainability. Roche said that Fennville and Saugatuck Township are doing well in this program, and she would like to present it to City Council. She sees this as an opportunity for Saugatuck to demonstrate its environmental values to residents and visitors, with little downside. She would like to put this on the agenda for the next meeting to discuss moving forward with it.

- Charak – He said that he would contact middle school principal, Mark Neidlinger, per Roche's recommendation, regarding involving students in the invasive species work. Charak has already been to the Michigan State website for information on invasive species. He really likes the idea of the airport having a name and thinks it would be great to involve the community in the naming process.
- Thiel – She mentioned that she had the opportunity on Sunday, along with Nancy Kimble, to attend the community conversation at All Saints. She said the ODC did a great job engaging everyone about their purpose and the grassroots work being done on the airport property, and how people can get involved. Thiel said that she had never met Dave before, but he was a great speaker, and the conversation went really well. She estimated that there were about 30 people in attendance.
- Chair Baldwin – Baldwin said that she was delighted to participate in the airport property event and is grateful to have such great committee members who were able to put that event together and fully participate. She said that the event was just a fabulous day, and it made her remember why everyone gets up and does this work. She expressed that she is fully on board with the Michigan Green Communities program that Roche proposed. Baldwin also said she loves the fact that the committee is moving forward with the airport property and thanked everyone for their great work.

Adjournment:

Motion by Charak, second by Kimble, to approve adjournment of the meeting. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0. Chair Baldwin adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Williams, City Deputy Clerk & DPW Admin. Assistant