



CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES

September 9, 2026

The City Council met for a Workshop Meeting at 4:00 p.m.

City Hall

102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Anderson at 4:00 p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Mayor Anderson, Mayor Pro-Tem Clark, and Councilmembers Dean, Gardner (*arrived at 4:02 p.m.*), and Stanton.

Absent: Councilmembers Muncey and Peterson

Motion by Stanton, second by Dean, to excuse councilmembers Muncey and Peterson from today's meeting. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0. Gardner was not present for vote.

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, Attorney Witte, Zoning Director Moore, DPW Director Ondersma and Deputy Clerk Williams.

Agenda Changes:

Motion by Clark, second by Stanton to remove item 7H, Short-Term Rental Licensing Ordinance Amendment and Resolution Updating Penalty Fee and Late Renewal Application, from today's agenda, as it's pretty important that all council members are present while discussing policy. Via voice, motion carried 4-0. Gardner was not present for vote.

Guest Speaker: None.

Public Comment on Agenda Items Only:

Nancy Kimble commented on agenda item 7b.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion by Stanton, second by Muncey to approve the regular city council workshop minutes and the city council closed session minutes from August 24, 2026. Via roll call vote, motion carried 5-0.

Discussion Items:

Proposal for Deer Cull at Oval Beach:

The council held an in-depth discussion on implementing a professional deer cull at Oval Beach to address the region's high deer population and related issues (vegetation damage, ticks, car collisions, and resident complaints). City Manager Cummins outlined prior work by the Tri-Community Wildlife Committee, recent weapons ordinance changes, and consultations with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), United States Department of Agriculture, and the Allegan County Sheriff's Office, noting strong indications from the DNR that a substantial reduction is warranted. After exploring other models (using local law enforcement or

sharpshooters), staff recommended contracting with Berg's Animal and Bug Control, represented by Mike Berg, who described his team's extensive experience, yearly training and qualification standards, and strict safety protocols (night operations, thermal optics, suppressors, clear backstops, communication procedures, and suspension of shooting if people or pets enter the area). His proposal is an all-inclusive \$495 per deer (permitting, baiting, shooting, dressing, processing, and distribution for human consumption, largely via food banks and churches). With the current \$30,000 deer management budget, the city would remove up to 60 deer, though the DNR has encouraged applying for a higher number. Council members broadly supported moving forward, but emphasized:

1. The need to treat this as an ongoing management program rather than a one-time fix;
2. Coordination with interested private properties (Shorewood, Dunegrass, Oxbow) and neighboring Douglas to maximize regional impact;
3. Developing metrics and feedback loops (resident reports, crash data, possible thermal flyovers or counts) to gauge effectiveness and adjust future targets;
4. Parallel public education on discouraging feeding deer and using deer-resistant landscaping. Formal action is expected at the next regular council meeting, pending final scheduling and permit steps.

Proposal for Conservation Services at Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area:

The council reviewed a proposal from the Outdoor Discovery Center (ODC) for conservation services at the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, focused on restoring habitat and improving trail management. Public Works Director Ondersma explained that ODC's plan would address numerous "rogue" trails that have developed over time, which are damaging dune vegetation and contributing to erosion. The project would formalize a smaller, sustainable network of designated trails, add wayfinding signage (including distances and loop information), and use native plantings and signage to close and heal informal paths – while respecting nearby private property boundaries that have been a recurring concern. Council members, along with Parks and Public Works Chair Kimble, and input from the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, stressed balancing protection of sensitive dunes with preserving the area's natural, unobtrusive character – favoring as few, low-profile signs as necessary. It was also noted that work would be funded from the Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area endowment, consistent with its purpose, and that there is potential to better connect and sign adjacent access routes like the Crow's Nest and Fishtown trails in future wayfinding efforts.

Proposed Warming Station at Mize Rose Garden

City Council heard an update on the proposed Warming Station at the Mize Memorial Rose Garden, a project funded entirely by the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), not the remaining Mize endowment. Presenter Ashley Siebelink from the CVB, explained that the design has already been approved by the Parks and Public Works Committee and the Historic District Commission (with one abstention due to a design conflict) and shared additional historical context about the Mize family's gift that created the garden. The station is designed as a low-profile, sculptural feature using vertical stainless-steel elements surrounding a mesh enclosure so users cannot reach directly into the heat source; removable panels will allow DPW to clean out leaves and debris. It will be user-activated via a push-button with a timer, intended mainly for shoulder-season use rather than summer, with details on operating hours and safety control still being finalized in consultation with the fire chief and city staff. Council questions focused on long-term maintenance, operating costs (especially gas usage), and confirmation that the garden's character, name, and existing plantings would remain intact, with only minor additional landscaping around the installation.

Restroom Renovations at Wicks Park and Village Square

The Council discussed options for restroom improvements at Wicks Park and Village Square, focusing mainly on whether to renovate or replace the aging Wicks Park facility. Public Works Director Ondersma, explained that while the existing Wicks building could technically be repaired, its low, flood-prone location, deteriorating structure, outdated electrical layout, and overall condition make renovation less cost-effective than constructing a new elevated, ADA compliant restroom similar in quality to the successful Mount Baldhead facility. Council members generally favored building new to "future proof" the investment, improve accessibility, and ease DPW

maintenance, while recreating the iconic mural on the new structure through a competitive process (possibly exploring modern methods like a high-quality wrap). They also emphasized the ongoing need for restrooms at Wicks Park despite the nearby Village Square bathrooms and briefly discussed future possibilities for a restroom/fish-cleaning facility at Coghlin Park. Staff will work with the city's engineers to refine a proposal and cost estimate that treats Wicks and Village Square as related but separable projects, with detailed options to come back for formal council action.

Engineering Designs for Village Square Improvements

The discussion centered on preliminary engineering designs from Fleis & VandenBrink for Village Square park improvements, supported by a \$100,000 donation from the Julie & Kirk Cousins Foundation and a \$150,000 DNR Recreation Passport grant. The plan retains a combined tennis/pickleball court with dual striping and an adjustable net, adds a new shuffleboard court, and enlarges the basketball court to high-school regulation size, while integrating rain gardens and native plantings to handle stormwater. Engineers outlined which existing pavement, fencing, and vegetation would be removed, how grading would change (while preserving trees), and where new seating and ADA companion seating and a water bottle filling station at the restroom would be located. Council input focused on limiting full-perimeter fencing to keep the space flexible for art and craft events, ensuring pickleballs are contained via layout and landscaping as much as fencing, maintaining or relocating the dog-waste curb area, and protecting the existing flagpole. Staff will now get feedback from event organizers, fine-tune the layout and fencing, and then move the project to bidding with a target of spring construction.

Request for AED Placement at Mount Baldhead Park

Conversation on the AED placement at Mount Baldhead Park focused on locating a unit where it would best support frequent medical emergencies near the stairs and new restroom. Public Works Director Ondersma recommended mounting the AED cabinet on the side of the new restroom building facing the stairway, noting it can be powered by running conduit up into the soffit without damaging the brick, and that the city's only ongoing cost would be roughly \$5 per month in electricity. The unit, supplied and monitored by the Heart Safe initiative, includes communications to alert them if the battery is low or the cabinet overheats. Council member supported the location and asked broader process questions about speeding up approvals for future public-safety installations and adding more AEDs at Wicks Park and Village Square, as well; as eventually placing one at the top of Mount Baldhead in conjunction with future platform design work.

Kayak Launcher at Spear Street Launch

Discussion on the Kayak Launcher at the Spear Street launch centered on accepting a donated unit (via the Rotary Club, with an available platform identified by the Outdoor Discovery Center) and confirming the preferred location. Public Works Director Mark Ondersma explained that, after comparing sites at the City's so-called "shopper docks" and Spear Street, staff and the DNR agreed Spear Street is the better fit because it avoids reducing boat slips that were funded under a prior DNR grant and is easier for DPW to install, maintain, and potentially remove seasonally. Council members noted that the current cement area is already used informally for launching kayaks, that this side of the river complements the trailer launch, and that a future kayak rack or secure storage area would encourage Kalamazoo River Greenway users to come ashore, walk into town, and safely leave their boats while visiting downtown.

Public Comments: None.

Council Comments:

Councilmember Gardner said it was a good council meeting, and he thanked his colleagues for the discussion and for considering what he called his "sometimes out there" ideas, explaining that he asks questions mainly to test assumptions and explore options.

Mayor Pro-Tem Clark and Councilmember Dean did not have comment.

Councilmember Stanton wished good luck to all participants in the upcoming Mount Baldhead Challenge and thanked the many volunteers and city staff from both Saugatuck and Douglas who support the event along the route. She highlighted that the race and its after-party at Coghlin Park are fun community events that also bring business to the area, something local business owners especially appreciate.

Mayor Anderson closed by thanking the Parks and Public Works Committee, Public Works Director Ondersma, and his team for handling a large volume of complex items on the agenda. She also specifically thanked Councilmember Dean and City Manager Cummins for their extensive work on the deer cull proposal, noting it involved a significant amount of effort over many months on an important community issue.

Adjournment:

*Motion by Gardner, second by Clark to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried 5-0.
Mayor Anderson adjourned the meeting at 5:44 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Williams, Deputy Clerk