

City of Saugatuck Parking Study: Executive Summary and Action Plan

Saugatuck's downtown parking challenge is real, visible, and concentrated during peak visitor periods. The study does not support immediately advancing the most expensive or disruptive options, such as a new parking structure or broad paid parking. Instead, Walker recommends a phased management strategy that uses existing assets more effectively, improves enforcement and turnover, expands remote and shared parking, strengthens the Interurban connection, manages high-value curb space, improves accessibility, and communicates parking options more clearly to residents, employees, businesses, and visitors.

Downtown parking demand is most severe from Memorial Day through Labor Day, with July and August representing the most constrained period. Stakeholders and survey respondents consistently described peak-season parking as difficult because of congestion, long search times, limited enforcement, employee use of prime spaces, inadequate accessible parking, inconsistent signage, and limited awareness of remote parking and shuttle options. Outside peak periods, the system generally functions more effectively. This seasonal pattern supports the recommended policy direction: avoid overbuilding for a limited number of annual peak conditions and instead manage demand, turnover, information, and remote capacity more aggressively.

This executive summary synthesizes the study's data, public input, stakeholder feedback, guiding principles, recommendations, implementation priorities, performance measures, and monitoring approach into a practical action plan for phased parking management.

Study Methodology and Discovery Process

The parking study began in late summer 2025 and is scheduled to conclude in summer 2026. It was designed to evaluate Saugatuck's parking system during off-season and peak-season conditions, identify the causes of user frustration, and develop practical recommendations aligned with the City's scale, character, fiscal capacity, and seasonal demand patterns.

The study area included the City of Saugatuck north of the Kalamazoo River, with inventory and mapping of public and private parking east of the river. Occupancy observations focused on the area generally bounded by the Kalamazoo River, Lucy Street, Holland Street, Francis Street, and Elizabeth Street, including the Saugatuck High School parking lots. A focused turnover and duration-of-stay review covered selected on-street spaces along Water, Butler, and Culver Streets in the downtown core.

Field work included inventory and mapping of public and private parking, posted restrictions, transit stops, bicycle facilities, loading areas, curbside conditions, ADA spaces, and occupancy patterns by zone. The study also included focused turnover and duration observations for approximately 30 on-street spaces along Water, Butler, and Culver Streets.

Summary of Core Data Points

Topic	Data Point	Planning Implication
Citywide parking supply	1,868 total publicly available spaces, including 1,502 on-street spaces and 366 off-street spaces.	Saugatuck has a meaningful existing supply, but peak-period constraints are concentrated in the most convenient downtown locations.
CBD time-limited supply	561 time-limited on-street spaces in the Central Business District.	Consistent enforcement of existing time limits can materially improve turnover before new supply is built.
Accessible parking	10 accessible on-street CBD spaces out of 761 on-street CBD spaces, or approximately 1.3 percent.	The City should increase the number of accessible on-street CBD parking spaces to approximately 30 over time, using PROWAG as guidance. <i>Note: PROWAG refers to the Public Rights-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines, federal accessibility guidelines issued by the U.S. Access Board for pedestrian facilities and other elements located within the public right-of-way, including sidewalks, curb ramps, crosswalks, pedestrian signals, transit stops, and on-street parking.</i>
Peak-season CBD occupancy	July 2026 counts show Zone 1/CBD reaching 97 percent occupancy on Wednesday, July 15, and 100 percent occupancy on Saturday, July 18, with no available CBD spaces at 6:00 p.m. on July 18.	Peak-season constraints are concentrated in the CBD, while surrounding zones retain substantial unused capacity, supporting enforcement, turnover, remote parking, shuttle, and wayfinding strategies before major new supply.
Restaurant use of curb space	About 13 high-value on-street spaces are occupied by restaurant outdoor dining under a conditional, revocable approval and license framework.	Use the City's existing approval and license process as the administrative framework, while evaluating whether the spaces should be restored to parking or repriced and managed to better reflect the public value of high-turnover curb access.
Survey response volume	618 survey responses were received, including 24 pages of open-ended comments.	The study has substantial public input documenting recurring peak-season concerns.
Visitor search time	More than 70 percent of survey takers reported spending more than five minutes finding parking during peak conditions.	Wayfinding, remote parking visibility, and turnover improvements should be prioritized.

Topic	Data Point	Planning Implication
Remote parking	The Saugatuck High School remote lot provides 116 advertised summer-weekend spaces.	Remote parking is already part of the system and was expanded during the summer of 2026. Additional remote and shared parking agreements can further increase effective capacity without constructing new downtown supply.
Interurban service and operations	The Interurban provides low-cost demand-response service and a summer parking shuttle, with expanded 2026 hours, additional stops, and added operating capacity.	The Interurban is already a meaningful mobility asset, and parking-related service improvements should be pursued through coordination with the Interurban Transit Authority and other partners.
Employee parking pressure	The employee parking data show that many businesses lack dedicated employee parking and that employees commonly park in public, semi-public, and peripheral locations. Several businesses report substantial peak-season staffing levels, and recurring comments identify demand for a dedicated employee option, concerns about the high school lot, and safety issues for late-night workers.	Employees occupy a meaningful portion of the public parking system during peak periods. A coordinated employee parking strategy is essential to free prime customer spaces, reduce visitor search time, and address employee safety and reliability concerns.
Additional remote parking candidates	Potential remote or shared parking locations include Dykstra Funeral Home, Riverside Church of Saugatuck, the Saugatuck DPW property, Douglas Elementary School, St. Peter's Catholic Church, and other willing institutional, municipal, church, school, or private properties.	These locations could support visitor, employee, or event parking if shared parking agreements, owner conditions, signage, liability, maintenance, and shuttle coordination are resolved.
Wayfinding and parking communications	The wayfinding review identified limited gateway and arrival signage, a lack of vehicular and pedestrian directional signage downtown, unclear public parking identification signage, cluttered on-street parking signs, limited map kiosks, and no dedicated downtown parking webpage on the City website.	Better signage and communications can reduce visitor confusion, improve use of existing parking, support remote parking and Interurban use, and improve voluntary compliance before new supply is added.
Parking structure cost	Planning-level estimates place a parking structure at approximately \$42,000 per space before land and unusual site costs, or roughly \$8.4 million for 200 spaces and \$12.6 million for 300 spaces. Including capital, operating, and maintenance costs,	A structure would require substantial public investment. A 300-space facility could represent roughly 15 to 20 percent of the City's annual operating budget, depending on the budget basis used, and would concentrate many spaces in one location

Topic	Data Point	Planning Implication
	the facility would require a substantial annual public commitment and could consume a meaningful share of the City's operating budget.	that may not be convenient or useful for all destinations or users.
Enforcement program cost	A seasonal ambassador program is estimated at 2,352 staff hours and approximately \$94,080 annually.	Dedicated seasonal enforcement is a comparatively low-cost strategy to improve turnover and customer experience.
Street conversion capacity	Concept-level one-way and angled-parking changes could add approximately 63 spaces on Butler Street, 22 on Water Street, 6 on Lucy Street, and 20 near Elizabeth Street.	Targeted geometric changes could add a meaningful but limited supply if confirmed through engineering review.
Future demand	Long-term demand growth is estimated at approximately 100 to 150 spaces, with the lower end considered most realistic.	Incremental demand can likely be managed through phased operations, shared parking, remote parking, and targeted capacity improvements.

May 2, 2026 Parking Occupancy Snapshot

The May 2, 2026 counts show that downtown parking was already functionally constrained before the height of summer. Zone 1, the Central Business District, reached 794 occupied spaces out of 914, or approximately 87 percent occupancy, while Zone 2, Zone 3, and Zone 4 remained substantially underused. The result points to a concentrated downtown management problem rather than a systemwide supply shortage.

In Zone 1, total occupancy increased from 516 occupied spaces at 10:00 a.m. to a peak of 794 at 5:00 p.m., out of a 914-space supply, for approximately 87 percent occupancy. On-street parking in the CBD reached 653 occupied spaces out of 761, or approximately 86 percent occupancy, while off-street parking reached 141 occupied spaces out of 153, or approximately 92 percent occupancy. At the peak, approximately 120 spaces remained available in the CBD, indicating that convenient downtown parking was functionally constrained even before the height of the summer season.

By contrast, nearby zones showed very low occupancy. Zone 2, the Hill, peaked at approximately 65 occupied spaces out of 718 spaces, or about 9 percent occupancy. Zone 3, North Residential, had only 3 occupied spaces out of 128, or about 2 percent occupancy. Zone 4, South Residential, had approximately 7 occupied spaces out of 123, or about 6 percent occupancy. These results indicate that the parking issue is not a systemwide shortage on this observation date, but a strong concentration of demand in the CBD.

The May 2 data support the broader recommendations in this executive summary. First, the CBD operates at or above the 85 percent threshold commonly used to indicate practical capacity, reinforcing the need for turnover management, enforcement, employee parking strategies, and better wayfinding. Second, nearby underused areas may support remote, peripheral, or shared parking strategies if they are clearly signed, communicated, and

connected to downtown. Third, the sharp difference between CBD and surrounding-zone occupancy underscores the importance of directing demand, not simply adding new supply.

July 2026 Parking Occupancy Snapshot

July 2026 counts confirm severe peak-season constraints in the CBD. Zone 1 reached 97 percent occupancy on Wednesday, July 15, leaving 30 spaces available at 6:00 p.m., and 100 percent occupancy on Saturday, July 18, with no available spaces at 6:00 p.m.

The shortage was concentrated rather than systemwide. On July 18, Zone 2 peaked at 47 percent occupancy, Zone 3 at 5 percent, and Zone 4 at 11 percent, indicating substantial unused capacity outside the CBD.

These results reinforce the recommendation to improve turnover, remote parking, Interurban connections, wayfinding, enforcement, and curb management before advancing major capital solutions.

Summary of Survey Results

The survey received 618 responses and confirms a sharp seasonal difference in the parking experience. More than 80 percent of respondents reported using a personal vehicle to travel downtown, and nearly 79 percent reported using street parking. During peak season, approximately 72 percent reported spending more than five minutes finding parking, while off-season parking was generally easier. Respondents prioritized ease of finding parking and distance to destination, and 56 percent reported willingness to walk three or more blocks during peak season if remote or peripheral options are clear, safe, and convenient.

More than 80 percent of respondents reported using a personal vehicle to travel downtown, and nearly 79 percent reported using street parking. During peak season, approximately 72 percent reported that finding parking takes more than five minutes, while only about 4 percent reported finding parking immediately. By contrast, during the off-season, approximately 53 percent reported finding parking immediately, and approximately 43 percent reported finding parking within one to five minutes. This confirms a sharp seasonal difference in the parking experience.

The survey also shows that parking availability and location matter more than parking-space type. Respondents ranked ease of finding parking and distance from destination as the most important factors influencing parking decisions. During peak season, 56 percent reported being willing to walk three or more blocks to reach a destination, suggesting that remote and peripheral parking can be viable if it is clearly communicated, perceived as safe and convenient, and connected to downtown through signage, maps, and shuttle service.

Opinions on paid parking were mixed and often unfavorable. Approximately 54 percent of respondents said they would not pay to park in Saugatuck, including those who would rather park farther away and walk and those who would never pay to park. Approximately 23 percent said they would pay if the price were reasonable, while others indicated they might pay occasionally but not consistently. These results support keeping paid parking as a future policy option rather than making it the first implementation step.

Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Stakeholder interviews reinforce the same central conclusion as the survey and technical analyses: Saugatuck's parking problem is most acute during the peak visitor season, but stakeholders did not coalesce around a single large infrastructure solution. The 10 interviews included representatives of downtown businesses, short-term rental interests, event and arts organizations, marina operations, schools, and other community-serving organizations. These stakeholders identified broad concerns about summer congestion, limited turnover, weak enforcement, confusing information, employee use of prime spaces, and insufficient accessible parking. At the same time, they repeatedly emphasized that the system generally functions better outside peak periods, making year-round or high-cost solutions less compelling.

Several areas of consensus emerged. Most stakeholders agreed that enforcement is minimal or inconsistent and that posted time limits lose effectiveness when users know they are unlikely to receive a citation. Many stakeholders also supported better signage, maps, website information, and active communication about where visitors should park. Remote parking and the Interurban were generally viewed as important assets, but stakeholders noted that the shuttle system needs clearer promotion, more predictable service, better pickup and drop-off information, and stronger coordination with additional remote lots.

Employee parking was another recurring theme. Several stakeholders believed employees and business owners should not occupy the most convenient downtown spaces during peak periods, while others cautioned that remote employee parking could create fairness, safety, commute, and workforce-retention concerns if poorly designed. The most practical approach is not a punitive mandate, but a coordinated program that combines employer outreach, designated remote options, reliable shuttle service, clear expectations, and reasonable enforcement.

Stakeholders also raised broader mobility and curb-management issues, including bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian safety, multimodal access, low-speed vehicle rules, informal parking, restaurant-occupied curb spaces, and inadequate ADA parking. Collectively, the interviews support a layered strategy: enforce existing rules, improve communications, expand remote and shared parking, strengthen the Interurban connection, manage employee parking, address ADA needs, and manage curb space more deliberately.

Key Findings

Parking supply is constrained in the downtown core during peak periods, but the system-wide issue is primarily one of management, distribution, turnover, and communication. The public parking inventory identifies 1,868 total spaces citywide, including 1,502 on-street spaces and 366 off-street spaces. Within the CBD, 561 on-street spaces are time-limited, giving the City a substantial existing management tool if rules are consistently communicated and enforced. The most valuable spaces are those closest to the commercial core, where turnover is essential for customer access. However, time limits are not consistently enforced, employees and business owners can occupy prime spaces for long durations, and visitors often lack clear information about where to park or how to use remote options. These conditions make the system feel more constrained than the raw supply numbers alone suggest.

Public input confirms that parking is a peak-season frustration and affects downtown behavior. The survey record includes 618 respondents and 24 pages of open-ended comments. More than 80 percent of respondents reported using a personal vehicle to travel downtown, and nearly 79 percent reported using street parking. During peak season, approximately 72 percent reported that it takes more than five minutes to find parking, and 72 percent reported rarely or never finding parking where they prefer to park. At the same time, 56 percent reported willingness to walk three or more blocks during peak season, suggesting that remote and peripheral parking can be effective if well communicated and connected. Respondents cited outdoor dining in parking spaces, limited public lots, lack of enforcement, employee use of preferred spaces, confusing signage, accessibility limitations, and inadequate visibility of remote parking and shuttle options as recurring concerns. Stakeholders similarly reported that parking reaches or approaches capacity on many summer days and increasingly during shoulder-season weekends.

Employee parking is a significant contributor to peak-period parking pressure and requires a dedicated strategy. The employee parking data indicate that many businesses do not have sufficient private or dedicated employee parking and that employees commonly park wherever space is available, including on Butler Street, Water Street, side streets, the hill, church lots, the SCA area, the high school lot, and other public or semi-public locations. Several businesses report large peak-season staffing levels, including shifts of 10 to 15, 15 to 20, 25 to 35, and as many as 50 daytime and 75 nighttime employees. Even allowing for carpooling, walking, biking, private spaces, or possible double-counting across multiple jobs, the data indicate that employee parking consumes a meaningful share of public parking during the busiest periods. This reduces availability for customers and visitors in the most convenient areas, underscoring the need for a coordinated employee parking program.

The same data show why the employee parking strategy must be practical rather than punitive. While there is strong demand for a designated employee lot, the high school lot is not a complete solution for all workers. The employee parking summary identifies 44 references indicating that the high school lot is not feasible or not used, 42 conditional references to its use, and recurring concerns about the lot being full, shuttle wait times, shuttle hours ending too early, lighting, sidewalk conditions, and late-night safety for workers leaving with cash or after bar and restaurant shifts. These findings support a strategy that combines designated employee parking, reliable shuttle service, improved lighting and walking conditions, employer participation, clear rules, and reasonable enforcement.

Enforcement is the most immediate and cost-effective lever available to the City. The City currently relies heavily on complaint-based or ad hoc enforcement, undermining the credibility of posted time limits and allowing all-day parking in short-term spaces. A seasonal parking ambassador program would improve turnover, provide customer service, educate visitors, support voluntary compliance, and reduce reliance on sworn law enforcement. Planning-level assumptions indicate that a Memorial Day-to-Labor Day program with two staff on duty for 12 hours per day would cost approximately \$94,080 annually and could generate approximately \$41,650 in gross seasonal citation revenue during initial implementation, with citation volumes expected to decline as compliance improves.

A parking structure is not recommended at this time. Planning-level estimates indicate a substantial capital cost, ongoing operating and maintenance obligations, and a large annual public commitment relative to Saugatuck's seasonal demand pattern. A structure would also concentrate many spaces in one location that may not align with user destinations, mobility needs, or preferred walking distances. Structured parking should remain a long-term option only if future demand, funding, location, community support, and public value change materially.

Paid parking should remain a future option, but it should not be the City's first major implementation step. Peer resort-community comparisons show that many Michigan lakefront and resort communities rely on posted time limits, targeted enforcement, signage, permits, remote parking, and peripheral long-term options rather than paid on-street parking. Paid parking can improve turnover, generate revenue, provide better data, and reduce reliance on punitive enforcement, but it also raises political, customer service, equity, technology, maintenance, and streetscape concerns. If implemented, paid parking should be seasonal, targeted to the highest-demand areas, paired with clear reinvestment commitments, and preceded by improved enforcement and communications.

Wayfinding, signage, and communications are foundational tools for parking management. The wayfinding evaluation found that Saugatuck lacks a complete, coordinated parking and downtown wayfinding system. Key issues include limited arrival and directional signage at City entry points, no clear directional guidance into downtown at important decision points, limited vehicular and pedestrian directional signage within downtown, unclear or undersized public parking identification signs, cluttered on-street regulatory signs, limited map kiosks, and no dedicated downtown parking webpage on the City website. These gaps increase confusion for first-time and infrequent visitors, reduce the effectiveness of the existing parking supply, and make remote parking and shuttle options harder to use. Signage and communication improvements should therefore be treated as near-term implementation priorities rather than aesthetic enhancements.

Recommended wayfinding improvements should connect physical signs, parking facility identification, pedestrian information, and online communication. The wayfinding evaluation recommends a coordinated parking and downtown information system: updated gateway and directional signage, clear public parking identification, simplified on-street regulatory signs, map kiosks at key pedestrian exits, consistent facility names, permanent shared-parking signage where appropriate, and a dedicated downtown parking webpage with an interactive map.

Remote parking, shared parking, and the Interurban provide the strongest near-term capacity strategy. The Saugatuck High School lot has functioned as the primary advertised remote parking resource, providing 116 spaces during summer weekends. During summer 2026, amid this study, the Interurban expanded the remote parking and shuttle program to include the Saugatuck Drug Store/pharmacy stop, Beery Field, and Douglas Elementary School lots, along with additional buses and service hours. Other candidate remote or shared parking locations include Dykstra Funeral Home, Riverside Church of Saugatuck, the Saugatuck DPW property, Douglas Elementary School, St. Peter's Catholic Church, and other institutional, municipal, church, school, and private properties. Several of these locations could add dozens of spaces each if agreements are reached and shuttle service is coordinated. Formal shared parking agreements would allow the City to make underutilized private or institutional lots available during defined days and hours while addressing insurance, liability, owner priority, blackout periods, maintenance, signage, compensation, and termination. The same approach could also support designated employee parking lots, helping move long-duration employee parking out of prime customer spaces while providing safer and more reliable options for workers.

The Interurban is a major asset, but it must be easier to understand and more predictable during peak periods. The system already provides low-cost demand-response service and a summer parking shuttle. Recent service expansion and added stops create a strong platform for a more visible parking-support role, especially if shuttle information, remote-lot signs, maps, app instructions, lodging materials, and ambassador scripts are coordinated.

Accessibility is a priority and should be addressed proactively. The CBD currently has 10 accessible on-street spaces out of 761, or approximately 1.3 percent. Using PROWAG as a practical planning benchmark, approximately 4 percent of the CBD on-street supply would equal about 30 accessible spaces. The recommendation is reinforced by Saugatuck's older resident and visitor profile, including a resident population in which 36.9 percent are age 65 or older, and a visitor survey profile in which approximately 40 percent of respondents are age 60 or older. Survey comments and stakeholder interviews also identified concerns about the number, location, enforcement, and usability of accessible spaces.

Curb space should be managed as a flexible public asset. Approximately 13 high-value on-street spaces are currently used for restaurant outdoor dining, reducing public access to scarce curbside parking in the downtown core. The City already administers this use through a defined process that includes special land use approval, Historic District Commission approval, and a revocable license agreement. Because the use is conditional and revocable, the policy question is not whether an administrative framework exists, but whether the City should continue, discontinue, or reprice the use to better reflect the public value of high-turnover curb access.

Walker recommends that the City evaluate the existing restaurant outdoor dining approval and license process against current parking-management goals. The City may choose to restore the spaces to public parking, continue the existing process, or revise the fee structure and operating conditions. If continued, the use should remain seasonal where appropriate, consistently administered, supported by design, safety, ADA, insurance, inspection, and operating standards, priced to reflect the public value of occupied curb space, and expressly revocable when the City needs the space for parking, utilities, infrastructure, or other public purposes.

Targeted geometric and curbside changes can add meaningful but limited capacity. Concept-level analyses indicate that converting Butler Street to one-way traffic with angled parking on one side and parallel parking on the other could add approximately 63 spaces between Lucy and Culver Streets. Water Street one-way conversion and selected parallel-to-angled conversions could add approximately 22 spaces. Lucy Street could add approximately 6 spaces, and Elizabeth Street near the school campus could add approximately 20 remote-support spaces. These concepts require field measurements, traffic and public safety reviews, striping plans, and stakeholder coordination before implementation.

Future growth does not appear to justify a large new parking facility. The future-growth analysis concludes that Saugatuck's development pattern is expected to remain incremental, focused on infill, redevelopment, preservation, walkability, and small-scale reinvestment. The city's permanent resident population peaked at 1,079 in 1980 and was 865 in 2020, with a reasonable 2030 planning range of approximately 850 to 950 residents. Long-term parking demand may increase by approximately 100 to 150 spaces, with the lower end considered the more realistic planning scenario. Much of this demand is expected to be seasonal and manageable through shared parking, remote parking, operational changes, improved turnover, and targeted adjustments rather than major new supply.

Recommended Strategic Direction

The recommended strategy is layered, phased, and fiscally disciplined. The City should improve the existing system first, expand effective capacity through partnerships and remote parking, and revisit pricing or structured parking only if measured conditions show that lower-cost strategies are insufficient.

1. **Do not advance a parking structure at this time.** Stakeholder feedback showed broad skepticism toward a garage because of cost, seasonal utilization, aesthetics, site availability, access distribution, and potential effects on Saugatuck's small-town character. A structure would require a large capital commitment, carry substantial annual all-in ownership costs, and concentrate many spaces in a single location that may not meet the needs of all users or destinations. The City should continue to treat structured parking as a long-term option only if future demand, funding, location, community support, and public-value considerations change materially.
2. **Do not implement broad paid parking as the first step.** Stakeholders were divided on paid parking, with some supporting seasonal or limited paid areas and others opposing it due to resident, employee, visitor experience, and character concerns. The City should preserve paid parking as a future tool, but first focus on actions with broader stakeholder alignment: enforcement, turnover, communications, shared parking, remote parking, and shuttle service.
3. **Implement a seasonal parking ambassador and enforcement program.** Stakeholders repeatedly stated that enforcement is minimal, inconsistent, or not visible. A seasonal ambassador model should address this concern directly by pairing enforcement with education, warnings, wayfinding assistance, and customer service. This approach improves compliance without making the program feel overly punitive.
4. **Formalize employee parking management through a partnership rather than a mandate alone.** Stakeholders and employee parking data frequently identified employee and business-owner use of prime spaces as a problem. The employee parking data show that many employees park wherever they can, including in public and semi-public spaces near downtown, and that several businesses have substantial peak-season staffing levels. At the same time, the data also identify fairness, safety, shuttle reliability, lighting, and late-night employee concerns. The City should work with employers to direct long-duration employee parking to designated remote or peripheral locations during peak periods, supported by reliable shuttle access, clear expectations, employer outreach, safe walking conditions, lighting improvements, and reasonable enforcement.
5. **Expand remote and shared parking in response to stakeholder support for lower-cost capacity.** Many stakeholders favored remote lots, school and institutional partnerships, church lots, municipal sites, and private shared-use opportunities over a new garage. The Interurban's summer 2026 expansion to the pharmacy/Drug Store stop, Beery Field, and Douglas Elementary School lots demonstrates that remote parking can be expanded incrementally. The City should secure written shared parking agreements with schools, churches, institutions, municipal properties, and private owners where appropriate, including candidate locations such as Dykstra Funeral Home, Riverside Church of Saugatuck, the DPW property, Douglas Elementary School, and St. Peter's Catholic Church. Agreements should identify whether spaces are intended for visitors, employees, events, or mixed public use, then promote those locations through consistent signage, maps, online tools, and shuttle coordination.
6. **Strengthen coordination with the Interurban and make shuttle information more predictable.** Stakeholders generally viewed the Interurban as a valuable asset but said it needs clearer promotion, more predictable service information, better pickup/drop-off information, later hours, and stronger connections to remote lots. The current flyer already provides useful customer information, including regular summer hours, extended event dates, fares, the free parking shuttle operating window, remote parking stops, the call-to-ride number, and the Interurban Transit App. The City should work with the Interurban Transit Authority to align this information with parking maps, signs, website content, lodging materials, event communications, ambassador scripts, and remote-lot signage. Expansion options should

be evaluated as partnership opportunities, beginning with a predictable peak-season parking loop, increased weekend and event frequency, added remote-lot stops, extended evening service on high-demand nights, employee shift-change service, and formal coordination between shared parking agreements and shuttle operations.

7. **Improve signage, wayfinding, and public information.** Stakeholders repeatedly described the parking system as confusing or under-communicated, and the wayfinding evaluation confirms that the City lacks a complete, coordinated sign and communication system. The City should create a simple visitor-facing parking system with updated gateway signs, downtown vehicular and pedestrian directional signs, named public parking facilities, clear parking identification signs, simplified on-street regulatory signs, map kiosks at pedestrian exits from parking facilities, shared parking signage at the high school, a dedicated downtown parking webpage, and an interactive parking map. These improvements should be coordinated so physical signs, maps, website content, and remote parking messaging use the same names, symbols, and visitor instructions.
8. **Increase accessible parking over time.** Stakeholders and survey respondents identified insufficient ADA parking as a recurring concern. The City should use PROWAG as a guiding framework and expand accessible on-street parking in the CBD toward approximately 30 spaces, distributed near key destinations and supported by enforcement to prevent misuse.
9. **Manage the curb deliberately and transparently.** The City should treat curb space as a flexible public asset serving parking, loading, accessibility, safety, and limited seasonal uses. Restaurant outdoor dining already operates through the City's special land use, Historic District Commission, and revocable license process. The City should use that existing framework to decide whether to restore the affected spaces to public parking, continue the use under current terms, or revise fees and conditions so the program better reflects the public value of scarce curb space.
10. **Advance targeted street and striping concepts only after technical and public review.** Some stakeholders supported angled parking and one-way street concepts, while others raised concerns about safety, circulation, and character. The City should conduct field measurements, traffic reviews, emergency-access reviews, pedestrian-safety analyses, concept striping, and public communication before implementing one-way or angled-parking conversions.
11. **Include broader mobility options as part of the parking strategy.** Stakeholders encouraged bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian safety improvements, multimodal access, and evaluation of low-speed vehicle regulations. These options should be treated as complementary demand-management strategies that reduce short vehicle trips, support park-once behavior, and reinforce Saugatuck's visitor-oriented character.

Guiding Principles Applied to the Recommendations

The recommendations are grounded in the guiding principles developed for Saugatuck's parking system. Those principles emphasize practical, fiscally responsible, character-sensitive actions that improve the existing parking and mobility system before the City considers major capital investment or broad paid parking.

Guiding Principle

How It Is Applied in the Action Plan

Optimize existing assets before expanding supply.	The recommended approach focuses first on enforcement, turnover, remote parking, shared parking, signage, communications, Interurban coordination, curb management, and targeted restriping before considering a parking structure.
Reserve convenient spaces for priority users through managed time limits.	The action plan emphasizes consistent time-limit enforcement, parking ambassadors, employee parking management, ADA improvements, and selective 15-minute spaces so the most convenient spaces serve customers, visitors, accessible users, and quick-turnover activity.
Maintain clear and enforceable rules.	The recommendations call for simplified on-street parking signs, better public information, an ambassador program, warning and citation procedures, and a formal approach to restaurant use of on-street parking.
Partner with employers on employee parking.	The strategy recommends employer outreach, designated remote or peripheral parking, shuttle coordination, clear expectations, and reasonable enforcement rather than a punitive employee-parking mandate.
Support a balanced access system.	The action plan combines parking management with Interurban service, remote parking, shared parking, walking, biking, pedestrian improvements, low-speed vehicle evaluation, and wayfinding improvements.
Protect accessibility and equitable access.	The recommendations call for expanding accessible on-street parking toward approximately 30 CBD spaces over time, improving distribution near key destinations, and enforcing against misuse.
Manage the curb as flexible public space.	The plan recognizes the City's existing approval and license process for restaurant outdoor dining in curb spaces, recommends evaluating whether those spaces should be restored to public parking or continued under revised fees and conditions, and balances parking, loading, accessibility, safety, and seasonal uses.
Balance downtown vitality and livability.	The recommendations support visitor and customer access while avoiding overbuilding, minimizing neighborhood spillover, improving communication, and preserving downtown character.
Avoid overbuilding for occasional peaks.	The action plan defers structured parking and broad paid parking while testing lower-cost, seasonal, and operational strategies targeted to peak conditions.
Manage parking as a data-informed system.	The document establishes KPIs, a monitoring plan, post-season reporting, and decision points to guide future action based on measured occupancy, turnover, shuttle use, enforcement activity, ADA use, and public feedback.
Commit to continuous improvement.	The phased timeline treats the first peak season as a pilot, followed by post-season evaluation, program refinement, and future policy decisions based on performance.
Emphasize customer service.	The ambassador program, improved signage, website updates, interactive maps, Interurban information, and visitor-facing communications are designed to improve compliance through assistance and education, not only enforcement.

Guiding Principle

How It Is Applied in the Action Plan

Align solutions with fiscal capacity.

The recommendations prioritize lower-cost management, shared parking, remote parking, and Interurban coordination before major capital investment, recognizing that a garage would carry significant all-in ownership costs.

Communicate clearly and consistently.

The plan calls for coordinated gateway signs, directional signage, parking identification signs, facility naming, map kiosks, a dedicated parking webpage, an interactive map, and partner-distributed parking information.

Preserve Saugatuck's character.

The strategy avoids premature large-scale infrastructure, emphasizes context-sensitive signage and operations, and prioritizes solutions that fit Saugatuck's seasonal, walkable, visitor-oriented downtown environment.

Implementation Priorities

Near-term priorities should focus on management, communication, enforcement, and employee parking preparation. The City should establish the ambassador framework, clarify time-limit rules, update visitor-facing parking materials, improve key signage, begin employer outreach, and identify candidate locations for additional accessible spaces and short-term loading zones.

Mid-term priorities should expand effective capacity without major construction. Over multiple seasons, the City should negotiate shared parking agreements, expand remote lot availability, coordinate with the Interurban Transit Authority on parking-related service, pilot employee parking with willing employers, and test selected curb-management changes. These efforts should proceed as staff capacity, partner agreements, funding, and operational readiness allow.

Longer-term priorities should be driven by measured performance. After implementing lower-cost actions, the City should monitor occupancy, turnover, citation activity, shuttle use, remote lot utilization, accessible-space use, stakeholder feedback, and business impacts. If peak-period constraints remain severe after these actions, the City can revisit more intensive strategies, including targeted seasonal paid parking, additional one-way street conversions, permanent remote parking improvements, or, only if strongly justified, structured parking.

Implementation Next Steps

The following next steps translate the recommended strategic direction into an implementation sequence that City leadership, staff, the Parking Improvements Task Force, and partner organizations can use to move from policy direction to action.

1. **Confirm policy direction with City leadership.** Present the executive summary and recommended strategic direction to the Parking Improvements Task Force and City Council. Seek agreement that the initial implementation program should prioritize enforcement, communication, remote and shared parking, Interurban coordination, ADA improvements, and curb management before advancing paid parking or a parking structure.

2. **Create a peak-season implementation work plan.** Convert the recommendations into a task list with responsible parties, target dates, estimated costs, required approvals, and key decision points. Organize the work plan around near-term, mid-term, and longer-term actions so the City can distinguish immediate operational improvements from items requiring additional study or funding.
3. **Develop the seasonal parking ambassador program.** Define ambassador duties, staffing levels, hours of operation, training, uniforms, customer-service expectations, warning procedures, citation authority, data collection responsibilities, and escalation protocols. Determine whether the program should be City-operated, contracted, or coordinated through another entity.
4. **Prepare a parking communications and wayfinding package.** Update the City website and public-facing materials with parking maps, time limits, remote lot information, Interurban instructions, ADA parking locations, short-term loading areas, and employee parking guidance. Create or update a dedicated downtown parking webpage, add a prominent parking link or icon on the City homepage, develop an interactive parking map, establish consistent public parking facility names, and prepare simplified materials for hotels, short-term rental hosts, businesses, event organizers, the visitor bureau, and other partners who communicate with visitors. Interurban information should include the free parking shuttle operating period, shuttle days and hours, remote parking stops, fares, the call-to-ride number, and app-download instructions.
5. **Implement the signage improvement program.** Develop a coordinated signage package that includes updated gateway and directional signs at City entrances, downtown vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding signs, standardized public parking facility names, parking identification signs at publicly accessible lots, simplified on-street regulatory signs, additional map kiosks at pedestrian exits from parking facilities, updated Social District signs, and permanent shared parking signage at the high school. Confirm sign locations, messaging, design standards, branding, installation responsibilities, and maintenance responsibilities before fabrication.
6. **Begin remote and shared parking outreach.** Prioritize the most feasible candidate lots, beginning with existing or previously discussed school, church, municipal, institutional, and private properties. Candidate locations should include Dykstra Funeral Home, Riverside Church of Saugatuck, the Saugatuck DPW property, Douglas Elementary School, St. Peter's Catholic Church, and other willing owners. Use a standard shared parking agreement framework that addresses days and hours of public use, whether the lot is intended for visitors, employees, events, or mixed use, owner priority, blackout periods, insurance, maintenance, signage, compensation, liability, and termination.
7. **Develop and pilot an employee parking strategy.** Work with downtown employers to identify peak-season staffing levels, current employee parking locations, shift times, late-night safety concerns, loading needs, and willingness to participate in remote or peripheral parking. Identify one or more designated employee parking locations, including shared lots or remote facilities that can be reserved or prioritized for employee use during defined days and hours. Establish a voluntary or permit-based participation framework, coordinate safe walking routes and lighting needs, and determine whether employee-oriented shuttle trips can be coordinated with the Interurban Transit Authority or other partners. Begin with a pilot program involving willing employers, clear expectations, employee communication materials, and monitoring the number of employee vehicles shifting out of prime customer spaces.
8. **Coordinate with the Interurban Transit Authority.** Coordinate with the Interurban Transit Authority to confirm feasible peak-season service options, remote-lot connections, pickup and drop-off information, app and phone instructions, operating hours, staffing, fleet availability, and funding needs. Any service

expansion should align with shared parking agreements, realistic operating capacity, and visitor-facing communications.

9. **Identify ADA and short-term curb improvements.** Map existing accessible spaces and identify candidate locations for additional ADA spaces near key destinations. Identify locations where 15-minute parking may be warranted based on business type, observed activity, loading needs, turnover patterns, and safety considerations.
10. **Evaluate restaurant curb-space use through the existing process.** The City already administers restaurant outdoor dining in on-street spaces through special land use approval, Historic District Commission approval, and revocable license agreements. The next step should be to decide whether to restore the affected spaces to public parking, continue the current approach, or revise the fee schedule and operating conditions so the use better reflects the public value of high-demand curb space. Any continued use should remain conditional, revocable, consistently administered, and subject to applicable design, traffic protection, insurance, ADA, inspection, fee, and compliance requirements.
11. **Scope technical review of street conversion concepts.** Prepare field-measurement and concept-striping reviews for opportunities on Butler Street, Water Street, Lucy Street, and Elizabeth Street. Include traffic circulation, emergency access, pedestrian visibility, loading, driveway access, snow operations, streetscape impacts, and public input before implementation.
12. **Establish performance metrics and reporting.** Track occupancy, turnover, warnings, citations, unpaid citations, citation collections, remote lot use, shuttle ridership, ADA-space utilization, employee participation, customer-service interactions, business feedback, and public comments. Use these metrics to determine whether additional strategies, including targeted seasonal paid parking, are warranted after lower-cost actions have been tested.

Suggested Implementation Timeline

The following timeline intentionally provides a more relaxed implementation schedule. It assumes policy direction is confirmed in late 2026, with 2027 used for planning, agreements, communications, and limited early actions; 2028 used for the first broader operational pilot; and later seasons used for refinement. Dates may be adjusted based on City Council action, staff capacity, partner availability, budget approvals, public engagement, and Interurban Transit Authority operating constraints.

Phase	Target Timing	Primary Actions	Expected Outcome
Phase 1: Policy Direction and Program Setup	Late 2026– Spring 2027	Confirm policy direction, assign responsibilities, prepare the implementation work plan, begin legal and administrative review, define priorities, and initiate outreach on shared parking, employee parking, signage, Interurban coordination, ADA needs, and restaurant curb-space policy.	The City establishes direction and administrative capacity before committing to full implementation.

Phase	Target Timing	Primary Actions	Expected Outcome
Phase 2: Pre-Season Planning and Agreements	Summer–Fall 2027	Advance program design and partner negotiations; prepare draft shared parking and employee parking concepts; coordinate with the Interurban on feasible service options; develop parking communications, website content, maps, and signage concepts; identify candidate ADA, loading, and curb-management improvements; and scope technical review for street conversion concepts.	Major program elements are designed, vetted, and budgeted without requiring a compressed launch schedule.
Phase 3: Final Pre-Season Implementation	Winter–Spring 2028	Finalize initial agreements, staffing approach, training plan, communications materials, signage priorities, employee parking pilot details, Interurban coordination, ADA improvements, curb-management actions, and restaurant curb-space policy decisions needed for the first broader operational pilot.	The City has the operating tools, agreements, communications, and staffing needed to launch the peak-season pilot.
Phase 4: Peak-Season Pilot and Monitoring	Memorial Day–Labor Day 2028	Launch the parking ambassador program; begin with a warning and education period before full citation activity; promote remote parking and Interurban options; monitor occupancy, turnover, citations, warnings, remote lot use, shuttle ridership, ADA-space use, employee parking behavior, and public feedback; make minor operating adjustments as needed.	The City tests the recommended lower-cost strategies under real peak-season conditions and collects performance data.
Phase 5: Post-Season Evaluation	September–November 2028	Prepare a post-season performance report; compare results to baseline conditions and implementation goals; evaluate remote lots, shuttle coordination, enforcement practices, communications, ADA changes, and curb-management actions; identify adjustments for the following season.	The City uses data and stakeholder feedback to refine the program and determine whether additional measures are needed.
Phase 6: Longer-Term Refinement	2028 and Beyond	Continue refining the enforcement, ambassador, communications, remote parking, shared parking, and Interurban programs; advance technical design only for street conversion concepts with strong feasibility and public support; expand ADA parking over time; revisit paid parking or structured parking only if measured demand	The parking program evolves into a data-informed management system rather than a one-time capital response.

Phase	Target Timing	Primary Actions	Expected Outcome
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remains severe after lower-cost strategies are tested.

Implementation emphasis. The first year should be treated as a pilot period focused on learning, communications, voluntary compliance, and operational refinement. The City should avoid treating early citation volume as the main measure of success. More important indicators include improved turnover in prime spaces, increased use of remote lots, greater awareness of Interurban options, more reliable ADA access, clearer curb rules, and reduced visitor confusion.

Decision point after the 2027 season. After the first peak-season pilot, the City should decide whether to continue, expand, or adjust the lower-cost strategies before considering more intensive measures. Targeted seasonal paid parking, additional one-way street conversions, permanent remote parking investments, or structured parking should be evaluated only after the City has measured how well the lower-cost management actions perform under peak conditions.

Timeline conclusion. This phased schedule gives Saugatuck time to confirm policy direction, build administrative capacity, negotiate partnerships, prepare communications, and launch a broader peak-season pilot when the City and its partners are ready. By treating implementation as a multi-season program rather than a compressed rollout, the City can make visible early progress while preserving flexibility for later decisions about paid parking, permanent remote parking investments, major street changes, or structured parking.

Key Performance Indicators for Monitoring

The City should track a concise set of performance measures during peak seasons to determine whether lower-cost strategies are improving access, turnover, remote parking use, accessibility, customer service, and overall system performance.

Category	Core Measures	Use
Occupancy and turnover	Peak occupancy by zone and core blocks; duration of stay; overstay; visitor search time.	Confirm whether prime spaces are turning over and whether demand remains concentrated above practical capacity.
Enforcement and ambassadors	Warnings, citations, repeat violations, collections, customer-service contacts, and complaints.	Evaluate compliance, education, and customer-service performance.
Remote, shared, and employee parking	Remote lot use, shared parking spaces under agreement, employee participation, Interurban ridership, shuttle wait time, and user feedback.	Measure whether peripheral capacity and shuttle service are reducing pressure on downtown spaces.

Category	Core Measures	Use
Accessibility and curb management	Accessible-space supply and use, misuse, short-term space use, loading conflicts, and restaurant curb-space status.	Track progress on ADA access, quick-turnover needs, and curbside conflicts.
Communications and finances	Website and map use, parking-related complaints, partner distribution of materials, program cost, revenue, and staff time.	Determine whether information is reaching users and whether the program is cost-effective.
Future policy triggers	Persistent occupancy above 85 percent, continued long-duration use of prime spaces, poor remote/shuttle use, or unresolved ADA and curbside issues.	Identify whether targeted paid parking, street changes, permanent remote parking, or structured parking merit further study.

KPI Monitoring Plan

Monitoring should be simple, repeatable, and focused on peak conditions. The City should collect enough information to compare seasons and guide decisions without creating an overly complex research program.

Monitoring Element	Approach	Frequency
Baseline and seasonal counts	Track occupancy, turnover, remote lot use, ADA-space use, and enforcement activity during representative peak periods.	Pre-season baseline and twice monthly during peak season.
Ambassador and enforcement logs	Record warnings, citations, repeat violations, customer-service contacts, common questions, and conflict locations.	Daily during active periods; summarize weekly.
Partner and shuttle data	Coordinate with shared-lot owners, employers, and the Interurban to track use, participation, ridership, wait times, and operating issues.	Weekly during peak season and after major events.
Communications, finance, and feedback	Review website/map use, complaints, partner feedback, program costs, revenue, and staff time.	Monthly during peak season and at seasonal closeout.
Post-season report	Prepare a short annual report summarizing results, lessons learned, budget implications, and recommended adjustments.	Annually, ideally each fall.

Reporting and decision use. Each fall, the City should prepare a short post-season report comparing results to baseline conditions, identifying adjustments for the next season, and stating whether additional tools—such as targeted seasonal paid parking, street conversions, permanent remote parking, or structured parking—merit further study.

Data management. One staff lead should maintain the KPI dashboard, coordinate data requests, and keep field forms simple and consistent.

Conclusion

Saugatuck does not need to choose between doing nothing and making a major capital commitment. The strongest path forward is to manage the existing system more intentionally: improve turnover and compliance, expand remote and shared parking, coordinate with the Interurban Transit Authority, improve signage and online parking information, add accessible parking over time, evaluate restaurant-occupied curb spaces through the City's existing approval and license process, and use performance data to decide whether more intensive strategies are warranted.

By proceeding in phases, the City can address the most visible parking frustrations quickly, avoid overbuilding for occasional peaks, preserve flexibility, and build public confidence through visible improvements. This strategy aligns with the guiding principles developed for the parking study: optimize existing assets first, manage convenient spaces for priority users, maintain clear and enforceable rules, support a balanced access system, protect accessibility, communicate clearly, preserve Saugatuck's character, and align solutions with fiscal capacity.