City Council Agenda Item Report

FROM: City Clerk, Jamie Wolters

MEETING DATE: September 28, 2026

SUBJECT: Request for Proposal – Website Redesign & Development

DESCRIPTION:

The City Clerk's Office has prepared a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the redesign and development of the City of Saugatuck's municipal website, saugatuckcity.com. The RFP will publish on September 29, 2026, with proposals due by 5:00 p.m. on October 29, 2026.

The City's current website was redesigned in 2021 using a general-purpose website platform. While the existing platform has allowed City staff to independently maintain and publish a substantial amount of information, the City's digital needs have grown significantly. The website now contains a large volume of meeting records, documents, forms, public notices, seasonal information, and online services, resulting in increasingly complex navigation and a significant amount of manual staff maintenance.

ADA and Digital Accessibility Requirements:

Another important consideration in moving forward with this project is the U.S. Department of Justice's updated requirements concerning accessibility of web content and mobile applications provided by state and local governments under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The Department of Justice's Title II rule establishes specific technical accessibility requirements for websites and mobile applications of state and local governments. The rule adopts Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level A and Level AA as the technical standard for compliance. The requirements are intended to ensure that people with disabilities can access and use public entities' services, programs, and activities provided through digital platforms.

The rule applies not only to newly created content but also addresses existing electronic documents and other web content that remain available to the public, particularly materials currently used to apply for, gain access to, or participate in a public entity's services, programs, or activities.

The original DOJ compliance schedule established April 26, 2027, deadline for public entities with populations under 50,000. However, in April 2026, the Department of Justice issued an interim final rule extending that deadline to April 26, 2028, for public entities with populations under 50,000 and for special district governments. The City of Saugatuck falls within the under-50,000 population category.

The website RFP therefore specifically requires the new website to conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA—a standard that goes beyond the minimum WCAG 2.1 Level AA standard identified in the federal Title II rule. The RFP requires accessibility testing throughout development and prior to launch, correction of identified accessibility issues, documentation and guidance for City staff, and recommendations for improving the accessibility of existing documents being migrated to the new website.

Project Goals:

The proposed project is intended to be more than a visual redesign. The City is seeking an experienced municipal website partner to evaluate the current website, improve its information architecture and navigation, migrate and reorganize existing content, and develop a modern, accessible, secure, and user-friendly digital platform. The new website should make it easier for residents, property owners, businesses, visitors, applicants, voters, boards and committees, and other users to find information and access City services.

Scope and Vendor Responsibilities

The selected firm would be responsible for the project from discovery and planning through design, development, content migration, testing, accessibility review, staff training, launch, hosting, and ongoing support. The RFP requires vendors to identify implementation costs, annual hosting and support costs, optional services, third-party costs, and other recurring expenses so the City can evaluate the overall cost of ownership.

The project will also provide an opportunity to review the City's existing content and determine what should be retained, revised, consolidated, archived, or removed rather than simply transferring the existing website structure to a new platform. This is particularly important given the City's growing collection of agendas, packets, minutes, ordinances, forms, notices, applications, reports, and other public records.

Anticipated Timeline

The RFP establishes the following anticipated project schedule:

Milestone	Date
RFP Published	September 29, 2026
Proposals Due	October 29, 2026
Vendor Interviews, if needed	November 2-13, 2026
Council Authorization / Contract	November 23, 2026
Discovery, Content Audit, Design & Development	December 2026 – May
Migration, QA, Accessibility Testing & Staff Training	2027 May 2027 – June
Anticipated Website Launch	2027 July 2027

Proposals will be evaluated based on factors including compliance with the RFP, municipal website experience, qualifications of the proposed project team, understanding and approach to the project, accessibility and cybersecurity capabilities, implementation schedule, references and demonstrated quality of prior work, total cost of ownership, and interview/presentation performance if interviews are conducted.

Following the proposal deadline, staff will review the submissions and, if necessary, conduct vendor interviews before bringing a recommendation forward for Council consideration. The current RFP anticipates Council authorization of a contract on November 23, 2026.

The goal of this project is to create a long-term digital platform that improves public access to City information and services, incorporates current accessibility requirements, strengthens transparency, reduces repetitive administrative work, and provides a secure and sustainable foundation for the City's future digital needs.

BUDGET ACTION REQUIRED:
2026/2027 approved budget item of $40,000

COMMITTEE/COMMISSION REVIEW:
City Council Discussion on September 23, 2026, and action on September 28, 2026.

LEGAL REVIEW:
N/A

SAMPLE MOTION:
Motion to approve/deny the request for proposal for redesign & development for the City of Saugatuck municipal website .

Request for Proposal:

Website Redesign & Development

City Clerk's Office:

102 Butler Street, PO Box 86, Saugatuck, MI 49453

Proposals Due:

October 29, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time

INTRODUCTION

The City of Saugatuck is a small but highly active waterfront community whose digital audience extends well beyond its year-round population of approximately 865 residents. Covering approximately 1.47 square miles with 11.5 miles of roads, the City serves a diverse audience of residents, property owners, businesses, seasonal residents, voters, applicants, and visitors. Saugatuck maintains approximately 500 acres of parks, natural areas, and recreational spaces, including nationally recognized Oval Beach, Mt. Baldhead Park, the 173-acre Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, the approximately 169-acre Saugatuck Wilds Nature Preserve, and numerous community parks and public spaces such as Coghlin Park, Wicks Park, Jones Park, Cook Park, Willow Park, Peterson Preserve, and Village Square Park. These facilities, along with the City's active calendar of events and seasonal activities, make the City website an essential resource for communicating municipal services, recreational opportunities, community information, and timely seasonal updates.

Saugatuck is a nationally recognized and award-winning community known for its natural beauty, arts, culture, waterfront, distinctive character, and celebration of human diversity. The City's website must effectively serve both its local community and its significant seasonal and visitor audiences through mobile-friendly design, intuitive and task-based navigation, accessible online services, effective search capabilities, and timely information. Through this project, the City seeks more than a functional municipal website—it seeks an innovative, engaging, accessible, and memorable digital experience that reflects the unique character of Saugatuck and provides an exceptional level of service to everyone who interacts with the City. Simply stated, the City wants a website as exceptional as Saugatuck itself.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The City of Saugatuck's current website was redesigned in 2021 using a general-purpose website-building platform that has allowed City staff to independently create, publish, and maintain a substantial amount of municipal information. As the City's digital presence has grown, so have the volume and complexity of documents, meeting records, forms, public notices, seasonal information, and online services that must be organized and maintained.

The City seeks an experienced municipal website partner to plan, design, develop, migrate, implement, host, secure, and provide ongoing support and maintenance for saugatuckcity.com. The selected firm will work collaboratively with City staff to evaluate existing content and develop an improved information architecture, modern design, and enhanced functionality. The new website must be responsive, accessible, secure, intuitive, visually engaging, and easy for City staff to manage.

The website should effectively serve the City's diverse audiences, including residents and seasonal residents; property owners; visitors; businesses; elected and appointed officials; boards and committees; community organizations; media; contractors; permit and license applicants; and others seeking City services and information. The website should emphasize user-centered and task-based navigation, allowing users to quickly find services, forms, public

records, meetings, alerts, and other information without needing to understand the City's organizational structure.

The selected firm will be expected to improve upon—not simply replicate—the existing website. The City welcomes professional recommendations that reduce repetitive staff maintenance, improve search and document management, enhance accessibility and mobile usability, support online services and future integrations, and incorporate best practices for modern municipal websites. The City seeks a long-term digital partner capable of delivering a flexible and scalable website that can evolve with the City's future needs.

CURRENT WEBSITE CHALLENGES

Over time, the City's website has grown to include a significant amount of information, resulting in a complex navigation structure with multiple levels of menus, submenus, departments, boards, committees, and year-specific pages. Much of the current navigation is organized around the City's organizational structure rather than the tasks users are trying to accomplish. This can require users to know which department, board, or commission is responsible for a service before locating the information they need. Long, information-heavy pages and a homepage containing numerous competing priorities can also make frequently requested information more difficult to identify quickly.

The growing volume of City records presents additional challenges. Years of agendas, packets, minutes, videos, forms, plans, reports, ordinances, budgets, and other documents are maintained across individual webpages, links, and annual archives. Forms and applications are also available through a combination of PDFs, City-hosted forms, external forms, and third-party resources. As this content continues to grow, improved site-wide search, centralized document management, and a more organized approach to forms and public records are increasingly important.

The current structure also requires considerable manual maintenance by City staff. Meeting records, seasonal information, schedules, election information, annual documents, and other time-sensitive content require frequent updates. Information appearing in multiple locations may need to be updated separately rather than entered once and automatically displayed wherever appropriate. The redesign provides an opportunity to inventory, consolidate, archive, and reorganize existing content while reducing repetitive administrative tasks.

Finally, the City's digital needs have evolved beyond those of a general-purpose website platform. The website must effectively serve year-round and seasonal residents, property owners, businesses, visitors, applicants, voters, meeting participants, and other users with varying needs and devices. The new website presents an opportunity to improve mobile usability, accessibility, search functionality, content management, automation, integrations, and online services while providing a more flexible municipal platform capable of supporting the City's future needs.

NEW WEBSITE OBJECTIVES AND REQUIRED CAPABILITIES

- **Intuitive, User-Centered Navigation**: Create a simplified information architecture based on what users are trying to accomplish rather than requiring users to understand the City's organizational structure. Provide task-based navigation and clear pathways to frequently requested information, services, forms, and documents.
- **Responsive Design, Performance, and Mobile Accessibility:** Provide a fully responsive website optimized for current major browsers and common desktop, tablet, and mobile devices. Optimize photographs, graphics, video, and other media to maintain visual quality while providing fast page loading and strong website performance.
- **Distinctive Saugatuck Design:** Create a modern, visually engaging digital presence that reflects Saugatuck's unique character, natural resources, waterfront, arts, culture, and community identity. The City seeks a website that is not only functional but as exceptional as the community it represents.
- **Accessibility:** Conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA and applicable ADA requirements. Conduct accessibility testing, address identified issues, provide remediation documentation, and provide guidance and training to help City staff maintain accessibility after launch.
- **Content Management System (CMS) and Efficient Administration**: Provide a secure, intuitive CMS that allows authorized City staff to create, edit, schedule, publish, archive, and manage content without HTML or specialized technical knowledge. The CMS should support role-based permissions, workflows, audit logs, version history, rollback capabilities, and multiple editors. Content should be structured so information can be entered once and displayed automatically in appropriate areas of the website, reducing repetitive staff maintenance.
- **Centralized Meeting and Calendar Management:** Provide a unified calendar filterable by department, board, commission, committee, event type, or other category. Meeting functionality should support agendas, packets, minutes, notices, video links, recurring meetings, and automated organization and archiving of meeting records.
- **Advanced Site and Document Search:** Provide fast, accurate, intuitive site-wide search capable of indexing webpages, PDFs, forms, meeting records, and other approved content. Search functionality should appropriately manage archived, expired, or removed content in accordance with City requirements.
- **Centralized Document and Media Management:** Provide centralized libraries for documents, photographs, graphics, video, and other media with logical organization, metadata, accessibility support, bulk-management capabilities, and tools for identifying broken links.
- **Forms and Online Services:** Provide a centralized Forms & Applications Center supporting downloadable and fillable forms, secure online forms and surveys, file uploads, confirmation notifications, exportable data, and department-specific workflows where approved by the City. The vendor should identify how sensitive information submitted through online forms will be protected.

- **Online Payment Services:** Provide a secure, mobile-friendly payment portal or integration allowing users to conveniently make online payments for applicable City services, permits, fees, taxes, recreation, and other charges. The solution should integrate with existing or future City payment providers, provide payment confirmations, and clearly identify transaction fees, third-party fees, and recurring costs.
- **News, Public Notices, Alerts, and Subscriptions:** Provide a structured system for publishing City news, public notices, emergency or priority alerts, and other time-sensitive information. Support scheduling and expiration of content and provide or integrate opt-in email and SMS notifications, newsletter distribution, list management, reusable templates, consent controls, and unsubscribe/opt-out management. All associated third-party and recurring costs should be clearly identified.
- **Department and Staff Information:** Provide standardized department profiles containing services, staff contacts, telephone numbers, frequently asked questions, forms, and related resources. Staff and contact information should be centrally managed whenever possible so updates automatically appear throughout the website.
- **Third-Party Integrations:** Support current and future integration or embedding of City systems and services, including GIS and mapping, social media, ordinances, parcel and tax records, recreation software, shared calendars, video, and other approved third-party applications. The solution should be flexible enough to accommodate additional integrations as City needs evolve.
- **Secure Managed Hosting:** Provide secure managed hosting and appropriate protection against spam, bots, harvesting, and common website abuse. Services should include SSL/TLS, monitoring, backups, disaster recovery, incident response, software patching, vulnerability management, uptime commitments, and clearly defined service levels and responsibilities.
- **Website Analytics and Reporting:** Provide privacy-conscious website analytics, traffic reporting, configurable dashboards, and appropriate staff access to reporting so the City can understand how users find and interact with information and use that data to guide future improvements.
- **Content Review, Migration, and Quality Assurance:** Conduct a comprehensive inventory, review, and migration of approved existing website content, documents, images, and other materials. The process should identify outdated, duplicate, unnecessary, or poorly organized content rather than simply replicating the structure of the existing website. Comprehensive quality assurance should be completed prior to launch.
- **Training, Documentation, and Ongoing Support:** Provide administrator and editor training, written documentation, accessibility guidance, launch assistance, and ongoing technical support. Post-launch services should include clearly defined response expectations, escalation procedures, troubleshooting, software updates, and identification of services included in the contract versus those subject to additional fees.
- **City Ownership, Portability, and Vendor Independence:** The City shall retain ownership and control of its website content, files, data, analytics, configuration, and domain-related assets. The solution should use an industry-standard, nonproprietary CMS or comparable

technology that minimizes vendor lock-in and allows City information to be exported in usable formats. The vendor shall provide a documented exit and transition process should the City transition to another provider.

- **Future .gov Domain Readiness:** Assess and provide recommendations for a potential future transition to a .gov domain, including eligibility and registration, DNS requirements, redirects, email implications, preservation of search engine rankings and existing links, security considerations, and public transition communications.
- **Scalability and Future Growth:** Provide a flexible platform capable of accommodating future technologies, integrations, accessibility requirements, online services, increased content, and changing public expectations without requiring a complete website replacement. Ultimately, the City seeks more than a visual redesign. The project should transform saugatuckcity.com into a modern digital service platform that makes City government easier to navigate, improves public access to information and services, reduces repetitive administrative work, strengthens accessibility and transparency, and provides a secure and sustainable foundation for the City's future digital needs.

SCOPE OF WORK

The selected firm shall provide all professional services necessary to successfully plan, design, develop, migrate, test, launch, host, and support the City of Saugatuck's new municipal website. The scope of work shall include, at minimum, the following:

1. Discovery and Project Planning

- Conduct a project kickoff meeting with City staff.
- Review the City's goals, audiences, current website, existing technology, and desired functionality.
- Identify project responsibilities, deliverables, milestones, and required City participation.
- Develop and maintain a detailed project schedule.
- Conduct regular project meetings and progress check-ins.

2. Current Website and Content Assessment

- Review the existing saugatuckcity.com website, including webpages, documents, forms, images, links, meeting records, calendars, and other content.
- Conduct a comprehensive content inventory.
- Identify outdated, duplicate, unnecessary, or poorly organized content.
- Recommend content to retain, revise, consolidate, archive, or remove.
- Review available website analytics and user behavior data, if available.

3. Information Architecture and Navigation

- Develop a new sitemap and information architecture based on user needs and common tasks.
- Simplify navigation and reduce unnecessary menu levels.
- Provide multiple intuitive pathways to frequently requested City information and services.

- Present the proposed sitemap and navigation structure to the City for review and approval before development.

4. Website Design and User Experience

- Develop a modern, professional, and visually engaging website reflecting Saugatuck's distinctive community character.
- Provide design concepts and page templates for City review and approval.
- Incorporate City branding, photography, graphics, and other approved visual elements.
- Design for desktop, tablet, and mobile devices.
- Prioritize frequently requested services and information on the homepage.
- Incorporate accessibility and usability throughout the design.

5. Content Management System

- Implement a secure, user-friendly content management system (CMS) that does not require HTML or programming knowledge.
- Configure appropriate staff roles, permissions, workflows, versioning, and administrative controls.
- Structure content to minimize repetitive staff maintenance and allow information to be reused throughout the website where appropriate.

6. Website Functionality and Online Services

Develop, configure, or integrate the functionality identified in this RFP, including, as applicable:

- Site-wide webpage and document search.
- Meetings, agendas, packets, minutes, and video management.
- Unified City calendar.
- Document and media libraries.
- Forms and applications.
- Online payment portal or payment integrations.
- News and public notices.
- Emergency and priority alerts.
- Email, newsletter, and SMS subscriptions.
- Department and staff directories.
- Maps and GIS.
- Social media.
- Parcel, tax, ordinance, recreation, and other third-party systems.
- Website analytics and reporting.
- The selected firm shall identify any functionality requiring third-party products, licenses, subscriptions, or additional recurring costs.

7. Accessibility

- Develop the website to conform to WCAG 2.1 Level AA and applicable accessibility requirements.
- Perform accessibility testing throughout development and prior to launch.

- Correct identified accessibility issues.
- Provide documentation and guidance to assist City staff with maintaining accessible website content.
- Identify recommendations for improving the accessibility of existing documents being migrated to the new website.

8. Content Migration

- Migrate all City-approved webpages, documents, forms, photographs, meeting records, and other content to the new website.
- Reorganize migrated content according to the approved information architecture rather than simply reproducing the existing website structure.
- Preserve important historical public records and archives.
- Establish appropriate redirects from existing URLs where necessary.
- Verify migrated content, documents, links, and formatting before launch.

9. Third-Party Integrations

- Evaluate and integrate existing City systems and services as approved by the City.
- Coordinate with third-party providers when necessary.
- Clearly identify integration limitations, dependencies, licensing requirements, and recurring costs.
- Provide a platform capable of supporting additional integrations as City needs evolve.

10. Hosting, Security, and Technical Services

- Provide secure managed website hosting.
- Provide SSL/TLS, backups, monitoring, software updates, patching, vulnerability management, and disaster recovery.
- Protect public-facing forms and staff information against spam, bots, and common website abuse.
- Establish appropriate uptime, support, backup, recovery, and incident-response procedures.
- Maintain appropriate City ownership and access to website content, data, and digital assets.

11. Testing and Quality Assurance

- Prior to launch, conduct comprehensive testing of:
- Website functionality.
- Desktop and mobile responsiveness.
- Major browsers and devices.
- Accessibility.
- Search functionality.
- Forms and online services.
- Third-party integrations.
- Links and redirects.

- Website performance.
- Content accuracy and formatting.
- The City shall be provided an opportunity to review and approve the website prior to public launch.

12. Staff Training and Documentation

- Provide training for website administrators and content editors.
- Provide written and/or electronic CMS documentation.
- Include training on content publishing, document management, accessibility, meetings, calendars, forms, alerts, and other applicable functionality.
- Provide additional or refresher training options and associated costs.

13. Website Launch

- Develop and coordinate a detailed launch plan.
- Complete final content migration and quality assurance.
- Coordinate domain, DNS, redirects, analytics, and other technical requirements.
- Minimize disruption to the existing website during transition.
- Provide enhanced technical support immediately before, during, and following launch.

14. Post-Launch Support and Maintenance

- Provide ongoing hosting, maintenance, security, software updates, and technical support.
- Establish clearly defined support procedures and response times.
- Identify services included in annual costs and services subject to additional charges.
- Provide options and pricing for future enhancements and additional services.

15. Ownership and Future Transition

- Ensure the City retains ownership and control of its website content, files, data, analytics, and domain-related assets.
- Provide the ability to export City content and data in usable formats.
- Document procedures for transitioning the website to another provider if necessary.
- Minimize proprietary restrictions or vendor lock-in.

16. Future .gov Domain Assessment

- Evaluate the feasibility of a future transition to a .gov domain.
- Provide recommendations regarding registration, DNS, redirects, email impacts, search preservation, security, and public communications.
- Ensure the proposed website can accommodate a future domain transition without requiring redevelopment.

ANTICIPATED PROJECT TIMELINE

RFP published	September 29, 2026
Proposals due	October 29, 2026
Interviews if needed	November 2-13, 2026
Council authorization / contract	November 23, 2026
Discovery, content audit, design and development	December 2026 – May 2027
Migration, QA, accessibility testing & Staff training	May 2027 – June 2027
Launch	July 2027

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Proposals must be submitted in person or via email and must be clearly labeled: RFP - WEBSITE REDESIGN & DEVELOPMENT by October 29, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time.

- Proposals received after the stated deadline will be rejected.

Introduction and general information:

- Firm identity, primary contact, organization, subcontractors, and understanding of the project.

Project Team:

- Roles, locations, resumes, relevant qualifications, and anticipated level of effort.

Relevant Experience:

- Comparable municipal or public-sector websites, including live URLs and project scope.

Project Approach/Scope:

- Discovery, research, information architecture, design, development, migration, integrations, accessibility, security, QA, training, launch, support, and City responsibilities.

References:

- Three recent comparable projects with owner contact information and service dates.

Project/Hourly Billing Rate Schedule:

- One-time implementation, optional services, first-year total, annual years 2-5, hosting, support, maintenance, integrations, travel, taxes, and all assumptions.

Testing and Quality:

- Describe usability, browser/device, functional, content, accessibility, performance, security, and acceptance testing methods.

Insurance:

- Commercial General Liability Insurance
- Cyber Liability and Data Breach Insurance

SELECTION CRITERIA

The City may evaluate proposals based on factors including:

- Compliance with RFP requirements
- Municipal website experience
- Qualifications and experience of the proposed project team
- Understanding of the project and proposed approach
- Accessibility and cybersecurity capabilities
- Implementation plan and project schedule
- References and demonstrated quality of prior work
- Total cost of ownership
- Interview and presentation performance, if applicable

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Questions regarding this RFP should be directed via email to:

Jamie Wolters
City Clerk and FOIA Coordinator
jwolters@saugatuckcity.com

BID FORM

WEBSITE REDESIGN & DEVELOPMENT | DUE October 29, 2026, 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time

NAME OF COMPANY: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE / CELL PHONE: _____

AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:

_____

TOTAL BID AMOUNT: _____

ANTICIPATED START DATE: _____

WEEKS TO BETA LAUNCH: _____

WEEKS TO FINAL LAUNCH: _____

The undersigned, having reviewed the RFP and related documents, proposes to furnish all labor, services, tools, deliverables, hosting, training, and support required to complete the City website project for the prices stated below. The City reserves the right to accept or reject any and all proposals, to waive any informalities or irregularities in the proposals received, or to award the contract in any manner deemed to be in the best interest of the City. The City may also negotiate with the most qualified firm(s) prior to award.

COST SCHEDULE

ITEM	ONE-TIME / ANNUAL	AMOUNT
Discovery / content audit / information architecture	[IDENTIFY]	$
Concept and visual design	[IDENTIFY]	$
Development and CMS configuration	[IDENTIFY]	$
Content conversion and implementation	[IDENTIFY]	$
Integrations and forms	[IDENTIFY]	$
Accessibility and security testing	[IDENTIFY]	$
Training and user manual	[IDENTIFY]	$
Hosting and security - year 1	[IDENTIFY]	$
Support and maintenance - year 1	[IDENTIFY]	$
TOTAL FIRST-YEAR COST	[IDENTIFY]	$
Annual hosting - years 2-5	[IDENTIFY]	$
Annual support / maintenance - years 2-5	[IDENTIFY]	$
Optional services / alternates	[IDENTIFY]	$

REFERENCES AND AUTHORIZATION

REFERENCE 1: Name _____

Organization _____

Phone/Email _____

REFERENCE 2: Name _____

Organization _____

Phone/Email _____

REFERENCE 3: Name _____

Organization _____

Phone/Email _____

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____