



City Council Agenda Item Report

FROM: Ryan Cummins, City Manager

MEETING DATE: November 19, 2025

SUBJECT: Conservation Easement Concept – 582 Campbell Rd

DESCRIPTION:

Ryan Kennelly is pursuing the purchase of 582 Campbell and has submitted the attached conservation easement concept. A draft map of the area is forthcoming and should be available for the workshop meeting.

Mr. Kennelly has requested feedback on:

1. Whether the City is willing to hold the easement or prefers a land conservancy; and
2. What conservation priorities the City would want included.

Option 1: City as Easement Holder

Pros

- Local Control: Ensures the easement aligns with City goals for open space, viewshed protection, ecological preservation, and future trail planning.
- Direct Oversight: City maintains decision-making authority regarding enforcement and any future adjustments (within legal limits).
- Public Trust: Residents may prefer public stewardship over a private or nonprofit entity.
- Strategic Alignment: Useful if the City wishes to strengthen its long-term portfolio of locally managed conservation areas.

Cons

- Administrative & Staffing Burden: Annual monitoring, recordkeeping, and inspections are required in perpetuity. Staff would need to maintain expertise and continuity.
- Enforcement Responsibility: City must enforce terms, including potential legal action if violations occur.
- Precedent Setting: Accepting one private easement may lead to additional requests.

- Potential Conflicts of Interest: The City serves simultaneously as regulator, easement enforcer, and potentially future policy-maker affecting the parcel.

Option 2: Outside Land Conservancy as Primary Easement Holder

Common regional partners could include land conservancies, the Outdoor Discovery Center Network, or similar qualified organizations.

Pros

- Professional Expertise: Conservancies specialize in drafting, monitoring, biological evaluation, and enforcement of conservation easements.
- Long-Term Continuity: Nonprofits are structured to exist and steward easements in perpetuity regardless of City staffing changes.
- Minimal City Workload: The City can have input in easement terms without assuming ongoing legal or administrative responsibilities.
- Technical Support: Conservancies can assist the owner with habitat management plans, invasive species removal strategies, and long-term stewardship.

Cons

- Reduced Local Control: The City's role is largely advisory once the easement is finalized.
- Formal Processes: Conservancies may have fees, queues, or specific appraisal requirements.
- Potential Divergence of Priorities: Conservancy goals may not perfectly mirror City planning priorities unless well coordinated.

Recommendation

The City itself has used the Land Conservancy of West Michigan and Outdoor Discovery Center Network to hold conservation easements on properties we own.

To ensure professional stewardship and avoid long-term administrative or enforcement burdens, I recommend that Mr. Kennelly engage an established land conservancy as the primary easement holder.

BUDGET ACTION:

None at this time.

LEGAL REVIEW:

N/A at this time. Legal will be at the meeting for any questions.

SAMPLE MOTION:

N/A. Workshop item at this time.

Conservation Easement Concept – 582 Campbell Rd, Saugatuck, MI

Submitted by:

Ryan Kennelly

Email: kennellyr@gmail.com | Phone: 630.930.9364

Date: 11/15/2025

Purpose

To establish a **perpetual conservation easement** over the rear wooded portion of **582 Campbell Rd** in partnership with the City of Saugatuck (or a conservation partner the City recommends), in order to preserve open space, habitat, and the natural character of the property for future generations.

Family Legacy & Community Connection

My family has been coming to Saugatuck for **five generations**. My great-grandmother ran a bed and breakfast on Park Avenue, and my grandmother was born here. Growing up, we spent summers walking the preserved trails and wooded paths toward Oval Beach when **Camp Gray** was still active in the area.

Those experiences shaped my childhood and my connection to Saugatuck. I would like future families to have similar opportunities to experience woods, dunes, and shoreline in a way that feels authentic and natural—not overbuilt.

Easement Concept

- **Location:** Primarily the **rear wooded acreage** behind the house at 582 Campbell Rd
- **Use:** Home, driveway, and primary yard areas would remain **outside** the easement
- **Type:** **Conservation easement** focused on open space, habitat, and scenic character
- **Public Access:** No public access is required as part of this proposal; any future limited, foot-traffic-only access would be considered only under City guidance and if consistent

with conservation goals

- **Duration: Perpetual** easement, recorded to run with the land

A conceptual map of the property is included, showing the approximate rear easement area and its relationship to the surrounding natural corridors, including the historic Camp Gray area and the trail direction toward Oval Beach.

Community Benefits

- Helps maintain **natural open space and habitat** in a sensitive area
- Supports Saugatuck's long-standing emphasis on **environmental preservation and neighborhood character**
- Protects a wooded buffer behind existing homes
- Does **not** change existing neighbor access or privacy
- Does **not** create new rights-of-way across neighboring property

Importantly, **this proposal does not request any City funding or City maintenance.** Conservation and stewardship responsibilities would remain with the property owner.

Financial Sustainability & Stewardship

Property taxes and carrying costs for private open space are significant. Enabling a small amount of **stewardship-related revenue in the future** (for example, carefully managed, low-impact use aligned with City guidance) could help cover property taxes and land care, supporting long-term conservation **without shifting costs to the City or taxpayers** and without pressure to develop the land.

City Guidance Requested

I am respectfully requesting the City's guidance on:

1. Whether the **City of Saugatuck** would consider serving as easement holder, or whether there is a **preferred land conservancy** partner the City typically works with.
2. Any **policy, planning, or conservation priorities** the City would like reflected in an easement draft (habitat focus, viewshed protection, trail connectivity, etc.).
3. The best **review and approval process**—for example, staff review, City Council, Planning Commission, or a combination.

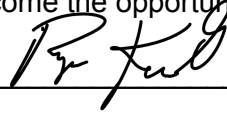
If the City is open to this concept, I would plan to:

- Obtain a **qualified appraisal** to support the easement value
- Commission a **survey and legal description** of the easement area
- Work with legal counsel to prepare a **draft easement** consistent with the City's feedback

Thank you for your time and consideration.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with staff or Council at an upcoming meeting.

Signature: _____



Name: Ryan Kennelly