



## City Council Agenda Item Report

**FROM:** Ryan Cummins, City Manager

**MEETING DATE:** November 19, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Council Direction on Strategic Planning Meeting for Fiscal Year 2026/2027

**DESCRIPTION:**

For the last several years, City Council has held a strategic planning meeting to identify goals and priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. This has involved conducting a resident survey before the meeting, review of progress on prior year priorities, and a facilitator helping the Council establish and rank priorities.

Attached is the FY 25/26 report and priorities. Also attached is a copy of the survey questions from last year.

As City Council considers its approach for next fiscal year, I recommend that Council consider forgoing the resident survey and instead use the results of the master plan survey. The master plan survey and feedback were comprehensive and received a strong response rate. Our planning consultant advised the results are statistically significant and much of the feedback aligns with past strategic planning surveys in that residents want the City to focus on infrastructure. Another comprehensive survey related to parking will also be going out at the end of the year and we don't want to create survey fatigue.

Staff is seeking feedback from Council on how you would like to approach strategic planning for next fiscal year. Staff also seeks Council's availability in January for a strategic planning session.

**LEGAL REVIEW:**

Legal will be at your meeting if you have any questions.

**SAMPLE MOTION:**

N/A. Workshop item.

## Primary Questions

## Response

**Please check the following that apply:**

- Full-time resident of the City of Saugatuck.
- Part-time resident of the City of Saugatuck.
- Business owner in the City of Saugatuck.
- Other (please specify)

**Which of the following strategic goals do you consider the number one priority for the City of Saugatuck in Fiscal Year 2025-2026 (July 2025 to June 2026)?**

- City Organization and Culture: Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration and Council/Boards/Commissions/Committees, in order to provide better quality services to residents.
- Infrastructure: Investing in infrastructure updates throughout the City to support the needs of our citizens and visitors, such as road surfacing, water service line replacement, and improved cellular coverage.
- Parks and Recreation: Prioritizing Parks and Recreation projects for improved and well-maintained natural park spaces, which will add to the beauty and desirability of the City.
- Community Engagement and Communication: Increasing community engagement and trust with better communication strategies.
- Collaboration: Investigating opportunities to engage with other communities for cost-saving purposes and to accomplish larger-scale, cross-jurisdictional projects.
- Other (please specify)

**Which of the following strategic goals do you consider the number two priority?**

- City Organization and Culture: Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration and Council/Boards/Commissions/Committees, in order to provide better quality services to residents.
- Infrastructure: Investing in infrastructure updates throughout the City to support the needs of our citizens and visitors, such as road surfacing, water service line replacement, and improved cellular coverage.
- Parks and Recreation: Prioritizing Parks and Recreation projects for improved and well-maintained natural park spaces, which will add to the beauty and desirability of the City.
- Community Engagement and Communication: Increasing community engagement and trust with better communication strategies.
- Collaboration: Investigating opportunities to engage with other communities for cost-saving purposes and to accomplish larger-scale, cross-jurisdictional projects.
- Other (please specify)

**Are there any other specific goals, projects, or action items you would like to see addressed in the coming year?**

[Box provided for narrative responses]

## Goal Area Questions

## Rating

### City Operations, Engagement, and Communication

|                                                                                                                            |      |      |              |      |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| How would you rate the City's efforts in ensuring public safety (e.g., police, fire services, emergency response)?         | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How effective is the City in communicating with residents and businesses about decisions, projects, and community updates? | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How accessible and responsive are <b>City staff</b> when you have questions or concerns?                                   | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How satisfied are you with the City's handling of zoning, permits, and land use planning?                                  | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How effective is the City in seeking input from residents and businesses on decisions and projects?                        | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How would you rate the availability of public records or information on the City's website?                                | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| Are City meetings (e.g., Council meetings) accessible and easy to attend or follow online?                                 | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How accessible and responsive are <b>City Council Members</b> when you have questions or concerns?                         | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

### Infrastructure

|                                                                                                        |      |      |              |      |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| How would you rate the condition and maintenance of streets, sidewalks, and public spaces in the City? | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How would you evaluate the quality of water and sewer?                                                 | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

### Parks and Recreation

|                                                                                                                           |      |      |              |      |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| How would you rate the quality and accessibility of City parks and recreational facilities?                               | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
| How would you rate the City's efforts in managing and protecting local natural resources (e.g., dunes, waterways, parks)? | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |

### Economic Development

|                                                                                                                   |      |      |              |      |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|------|-----------|
| How well is the City supporting local businesses through policy, programs, and community development initiatives? | Poor | Fair | Satisfactory | Good | Excellent |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------------|------|-----------|

How would you rate the City's efforts in attracting new businesses and fostering economic growth?

Poor Fair Satisfactory Good Excellent

**Overall Satisfaction**

Overall, how would you rate the City's performance in meeting its responsibilities to residents and businesses?

Poor Fair Satisfactory Good Excellent



## City Council/Leadership Team Planning Work Session

January 24, 2025

Report of Generated Ideas

### Overview of Planning Process

The Leadership Team of The City of Saugatuck: The Mayor, City Manager, City Council, and Senior Staff of the City of Saugatuck conducted their annual workshop to revisit current Goal Areas for relevancy, review progress made on initiatives set in 2024, and prioritize projects for fiscal years 2025/2026. *There is also a separate handout that includes additional information about team development models briefly reviewed in the work session.*

### Work Session Objectives:

- ◆ Identify key attributes of an effective member of a high-functioning leadership team
- ◆ Share individual highest priorities for 2025
- ◆ Review progress made on priority projects set in 2024
- ◆ Revisit Key Strategic Goal Areas for relevancy and inclusion of priorities
- ◆ Review and discuss results of Resident Survey
- ◆ Discuss potential near-future threats to address & opportunities to optimize
- ◆ Discuss high priority projects for upcoming year
- ◆ Discuss Next Steps

### Reflect & Revise

Before discussing goals & setting priorities for the next 12-18 months, the team listed “must have” attributes required of an effective member of a high-functioning leadership team.

### ATTRIBUTES

- Trust
- Active listening
- Be a part of the solution, not the problem
- Integrity
- Collaboration
- Ability to delegate effectively in ways that build the team
- Effective problem solving
- Humility geared toward improvement
- Be easy to approach; safe
- Transparency: Know & share the WHY we're doing something
- Empathetic; supportive; the ability & willingness to see both sides of an issue
- Frequent, effective communication
- Perspective; curiosity

### HIGHEST PRIORITIES: INDIVIDUAL #1 PRIORITY for the NEXT 12-18 MONTHS

Each participant shared their individual #1 priority for the team focus in 2025/26:

- City efficiency
- Oval Beach improvements
- Public safety and security: high traffic/high density areas
- To continue to improve in my new position
- Deliver on infrastructure projects currently set in our priorities
- Parking: Begin discussion regarding parking Master Plan
- Replace aging infrastructure
- Tri-community Master Plan
- Investigate potential resource sharing with Douglas
- Revisit short term rentals practices and appeals process; identify ways to optimize

**NOTE:** Work sessions identified to dig deeper into:

- ♦ Short term rentals ordinances, lottery, and appeals process
- ♦ Parks and Public Works: Current ordinance is very broad, discuss improvements

**Operating Guidelines created and agreed upon by City Council and Staff in 2022:**

### **Operating Guidelines The Way We Do Business**

#### **BEHAVIORS**

##### **PRODUCTIVE (+)**

Ask open ended questions  
Do your homework; be prepared  
Welcome people, including citizens  
Be respectful of time  
Active engagement: eye contact  
Active Listening  
Assume positive intentions  
Focus on the meeting - no technology

Identify:

1. Behaviors that work (+)
2. Behaviors that hinder (-)

##### **NON-PRODUCTIVE (-)**

Talking over others  
Personal attacks  
Being condescending  
A needy ego  
Having/working from a personal agenda  
Deflecting, derailing, hijacking conversation;  
take the conversation off topic  
Resistance to change  
Disrespectful language and action

**NOTE:** Review your previously created Operating Guidelines (Ground Rules, How We Do Business, Standards of Excellence, whatever you decide to call them). Ensure agreement with all the behaviors, having each member “sign off” on them, so accountability is possible.

Here's a Civility Statement of a municipality that is posted in all public gathering areas:

- We believe that only through open and honest dialogue can we gather diverse opinions, generate knowledge, and deepen our mutual understanding.
- We fully support the free exchange of ideas and beliefs, as well as the expression of controversial, challenging, or less popular ideas.
- We welcome respectful, civil, considerate conversations of differing opinions.
- We refrain from the use of behaviors that are disrespectful, uncivil, or insulting.

### **Citizen Survey: Mayor Anderson**

Mayor Anderson shared results of citizen survey. Conversation followed regarding citizen and business owners opinions of priorities for the near future. The survey did not identify strong changes from the last survey conducted. And, priorities identified in the survey, for the most part, aligned with the Council's priorities.

Conversation also took place regarding a few negative comments about the City Council/City Council Members. Leadership is an intense responsibility. Being a member of a leadership team is not only about constant research to make decisions in the best interest of the City, collaboration to understand diverse points of view, struggling to choose best possible options, and envisioning the future and actions to get there. It also carries the responsibility of creating an intentional culture for the team, expanding into the City that will live long beyond member's years of service.

With negative comments made on the survey about the City Council, Council Members need to ask themselves: *What part of these comments do we own? How do we, individually and collectively, contribute to the comments expressed by our citizens and business owners? How are our behaviors perceived by those who have entrusted us with the future of their City?*

Each team member needs to look brutally in the mirror and ask her/himself: *What part do I play in the feedback we received?*

In the Five Stages of Team Development, Stage 2: *Storming* is a critical and essential stage. Avoid the trap that too many Councils fall into – getting and remaining stuck in *Storming*, resulting in constant conflict, repeating the past . . . serving no one and nothing.

*The true measure of a team is that it accomplishes the results that it sets out to achieve. To do that on a consistent, ongoing basis, a team must overcome the five dysfunctions by embodying the behaviors described for each one.*

~ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*

Civility and respectful communication are key attributes of an effective council-manager partnership. Discussions that are respectful and civil set a constructive tone for council meetings, instill confidence in citizens who attend or observe the meetings, and foster the same environment for community, helping to create a city culture of respect, civility and collaboration.

## Potential Threats and Opportunities

Before discussing priorities for the next 12-18 months, the team reviewed previously identified potential threats/challenges they may need to address and opportunities they can optimize in the near-future. Additional challenges/opportunities were identified. Consider changes in demographics, technology, legislation, etc.

### THREATS

- ◆ Our current trend of losing full time residents
- ◆ Loss of good employees
- ◆ Big development / Waterfront development
- ◆ Failing infrastructure
  - Lead service lines ownership
  - Water failure, Culver / Butler, closing down businesses
  - Drinking Water quality
- ◆ Erosion at Mt Baldhead / Structure at Mount Baldhead
- ◆ Threat to AT&T project/completion/policy
- ◆ Trip hazard sidewalks
- ◆ Long-term tree damage/replacement
- ◆ People not visiting because of lack of parking
- ◆ Tax exemptions
- ◆ Charm threat – gaps in zoning
- ◆ Resources
  - Climate change
  - Revenue (landlocked)
  - Cost increases
  - Water infrastructure
  - People: Employees, citizens, community engagement
  - Aging infrastructure
- ◆ Regulatory
  - Headley Amendment
  - Veteran exemptions
  - New requirements
  - Grant compliance
  - Gaps in zoning
- ◆ Population loss
  - Aging
  - Short-term rentals
  - Jobs
  - Lack of growth
- ◆ Organization
  - Opportunity cost
  - Disorganization
  - Inefficiencies
  - Lack of communications
  - Over complication

## OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Recapture City's cost of short-term rentals & events (permitting, etc)
- ◆ Revisit special events policy & procedures
- ◆ Revisit Oval Beach revenue opportunities
- ◆ Educate residents on city basics (tax allocation, etc)
- ◆ Staff development & evaluations (career development & compensation)
- ◆ Tri-community parking plan & other partnerships
- ◆ Update zoning ordinance (current don't make sense & are difficult to enforce)
- ◆ Protect natural resources
- ◆ Paid parking
- ◆ Oval Beach updates (public/private?) – revenue opportunities
- ◆ Mt Baldhead improvements
- ◆ Uniform street scaping
- ◆ Reclaim Park Street - city property, make walkable
- ◆ Gondola across the river
- ◆ Rentable bikes & racks
- ◆ Year-round restaurants open
- ◆ Community center
- ◆ DPW building
- ◆ Fish-cleaning station / Coghlin restroom
- ◆ Create a Foundation
- ◆ Partner/share with sister communities

## ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES ADDED AT WORK SESSION with Suggestions to Address:

- Parking: We need to work something out
- Capacity of City to handle tourists (warning signs of over-capacity are already here)
  - How to better manage?
  - Shuttle service?
  - Revisit Red Trolley
  - Invite community to input ideas
- Pay close attention to aging infrastructure that we cannot see
- Explore potentials of a food truck area (especially to serve after city restaurants close?)
- Wayfinding signage: "More shops/restaurants this way"
- Lean processes to improve efficiencies

**NOTE:** Works session suggested to discuss the need for a Construction Ordinance to increase safety

## BLUEPRINT FOR ANNUAL PLANNING

To facilitate smooth and productive annual planning, the leadership team returned to their Key Goal Areas -"buckets" or natural categories – where progress is required year-after-year. Upon review, there was the realization that there are three (3) similar, yet different lists of "buckets" currently in use.

### THREE VARIATIONS of KEY GOAL AREAS:

1. 2024: City Operations  
Infrastructure  
Parks & Recreation  
Economic Development
2. Earlier: Fiscal Responsibility  
Maintain and improve public infrastructure and facilities  
Friendly, honest, transparent government  
Promote Saugatuck as a recreational and cultural center that attracts visitors
3. The organized "one page" to report-out progress of 2024 by City Manager  
Operations  
Infrastructure  
Parks and Recreation

Reviewing all three iterations and conversing about the value of each, the team agreed upon the natural categories used by the City Manager, and added Public Health and Safety:

### Key Results Areas:

1. Operations
2. Infrastructure
3. Parks and Recreation
4. Public Health and Safety

### Potential Priorities

Upon review of the current priorities that will carry over into FY 2025/26, the Council noted that the volume of priorities stretched staff time and resources, which are limited. So, the team attempted to put the priorities through these filters to defer a few and lighten the load:

### MUST

**SMART:** Clear ROI by taking on this project

**NICE,** yet deferrable

However, for each and every NICE that might be deferred, there were solid reasons why each was SMART rather than NICE, such as, a donation has already been accepted, progress has already been made and is in motion toward completion, or the project requires minimal resources.

There was a request for detailed information regarding time and cost of each project before selecting priorities; however, time is one of the essential resources required to execute each priority. Investing staff time in creating such information consumes their hours, which would otherwise be invested in their everyday responsibilities as well as work on current priorities. It also begs to question if Council members are crossing the line of WHAT and WHY, setting direction, and creeping into the staff's responsibilities of execution.

The Council agreed to receiving *directional* costs, required resources, and timing to give them a foundation upon which to set clearer priorities. There was discussion of the possibility of contracting out appropriate projects to manage staff hours; however, contracting would still requires oversight by staff.

The City Manager's categories of Operations, Infrastructure, Parks and Recreation, with the addition of Public Safety and Health:

## KEY RESULT AREAS

| Operations                                          | Infrastructure                                                  | Parks & Recreation                                       | Public Health & Safety                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Water-Sewer Agreement                               | Maple Street Design & Construction                              | Blue Star Trail                                          | Revisit Parade Safety                               |
| Updated Water & Sewer Infrastructure Fees           | AT&T Cellular                                                   | Mt. Baldhead Vegetation Restoration                      | Examine High Traffic Areas                          |
| Duneridge Litigation                                | Seawall Repairs                                                 | Mt. Baldhead Bathroom Construction                       | Investigate Ways to Slow Traffic in Necessary Areas |
| Wildlife Committee Recommendations                  | Sidewalk & Stair Repairs                                        | Finish Mt. Baldhead Platform Design & Start Construction |                                                     |
| Old Landfill Lease or Sale                          | Park Street Improvement Planning                                | Additional Bike Racks                                    |                                                     |
| Evaluation of Parking & Other Options               | City Hall Interior Renovations                                  | Village Square Courts                                    |                                                     |
| Land Use Master Plan Update/Saugatuck Specific Plan | More Comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)               | Evaluate Community Foundation Funding Options            |                                                     |
| Zoning Updates – District & Signage Regulations     | Evaluate Long-Term Funding Options for Capital Improvement Plan | Invasive Species Treatments                              |                                                     |
| Review & Update Older Policies                      | Road Maintenance/Resurfacing                                    | Low Water Level Impacts                                  |                                                     |
| Website Refresh                                     | Update signage & Wayfinding                                     | Holiday Lights Expansion                                 |                                                     |
| Improve Oval Beach Concession Profitability         | Chain Ferry Landing & Arbor Repairs                             |                                                          |                                                     |
|                                                     | Planning for Lead Service Line Replacement                      |                                                          |                                                     |
|                                                     | Begin Planning for Elizabeth Street Water Main & Road           |                                                          |                                                     |
|                                                     | Culvert Inspections                                             |                                                          |                                                     |

**NOTE:** Conversations surfaced about the importance of utilizing the local paper more to communicate topics of interest with the community, such as progress made on priorities/projects, posting public safety response times, and sharing accomplishments. Often, great things are achieved; however, we move onto the next item without a bit of sharing and celebration, so the community is unaware of accomplishments.

**NOTE: SUGGESTIONS MADE FOR WORK SESSIONS:**

- Short term rentals ordinances, lottery, and appeals process
- Parks and Public Works: Current ordinance is very broad, discuss improvements
- Address parking issues/shuttle services
- Possible food truck promotion
- Ways to use technology to optimize efficiencies
- Ways to streamline purchasing and bidding process
- Resource sharing with Douglas
- We have an opportunity to help guide committees
  - To have a better understanding our Council expectations
  - Conduct an annual review of the relevancy, benefits, and expectations met for of each committee
- Need of a Construction Ordinance to increase safety
- Revisit previous Operating Guidelines created by the City Council and Staff: discuss and update, agreeing upon a set of “norms” or Standards of Excellence” to work as accountability standards for productive and non-productive behaviors to drive collaborative results
- Schedule time in work sessions to reflect upon how the team is working together:
  - What are we doing well? What do we need to improve?  
The first few reflections will take some time; however, once all hold themselves accountable for their behaviors, “check ins” become relatively brief.

**Next Steps**

City Manager, Cummins, will review the report of generated ideas from the work session and send to Council members and Staff. Once reviewed and approved, the City Staff will align Council priorities to annual budget and report back to the Council.



Once again, I commend your service to your exceptional City and your investment of time and energy in planning and prioritizing. And, I applaud your commitment to creating and sustaining a high-functioning leadership team and intentionally creating a culture of respect, civility, and collaboration – a legacy that will live beyond your years.

It is a complete pleasure to assist you in your commitment to efficiently, effectively, and productively serve your community.

Respectfully, Marilyn Semonick

# CITY OF SAUGATUCK

## Vision

*Saugatuck is an inclusive waterfront community that welcomes all. City residents enjoy a great quality of life living in one of the country's highest-rated tourist destinations. Saugatuck is a vibrant, inviting community with a talented and dedicated staff, great schools, an active tourist-based economy, stable property values, and sense of history as the community moves into the future. Residents and visitors enjoy a unique, small-town atmosphere, exceptional parks, and access to beautiful natural resources.*

## Goals and Priorities

*Saugatuck City Council sets the goals and priorities that reflect our vision and guide decision-making. The priorities-setting process forms the basis of Council's consensus on the projects that impact City residents, businesses, visitors, and the community as a whole. City Administration uses Council's vision and priorities to direct work activities and allocate staff and financial resources. City Council's priorities are dynamic and will be reviewed and modified as needed to reflect citizen input and changes in the external environment.*

### Operations, Public Health and Safety

*Goal: We will maintain a culture of fiscal responsibility and friendly, honest, and transparent government. We will partner with the Fire District and Sheriff's office to ensure we take the right measures to keep our community safe.*

#### Priorities

- Finish new water-sewer agreement
- Update water-sewer infrastructure fees
- Manage Dune Ridge litigation (potentially multi-year)
- Evaluate and implement solutions to parking issues (multi-year)
- Evaluate and implement Wildlife Committee recommendations
- Negotiate sale or lease of old landfill
- Update Land Use/Tri-Community Master Plan (multi-year)
- Improve profits from Oval Beach concessions
- Update zoning districts and signage regulations
- Refresh website
- Review and update older policies
- Develop and implement safety protocols, including for parades

### Infrastructure

*Goal: We will focus on maintaining and improving current infrastructure while planning and saving for future needs.*

#### Priorities

- Complete Maple Street design and construction
- Finalize AT&T cellular agreement and installation
- Make repairs to seawall, sidewalks, and stairs
- Inspect culverts
- Plan for Park Street improvements
- Renovate City Hall interior (potentially multi-year)
- Develop more comprehensive Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)
- Evaluate long-term funding options for CIP
- Maintain and resurface roads
- Repair Chain Ferry landing and arbor
- Plan for lead service line replacement
- Begin planning for Elizabeth Street design and construction
- Update signage and wayfinding

### Parks and Recreation

*Goal: We understand that our natural resources are the foundation of residents' quality of life and our tourism economy and will invest to sustain and enhance them.*

#### Priorities

- Construct Mt. Baldhead bathroom
- Complete Mt. Baldhead platform design; begin construction
- Restore Mt. Baldhead vegetation
- Treat invasive species
- Refresh Village Square Courts (donor funded)
- Continue to advance Blue Star Trail (multi-year)
- Monitor and mitigate low water level impacts
- Evaluate community foundation options to accept citizen donations
- Expand holiday lighting to Water and Griffith streets