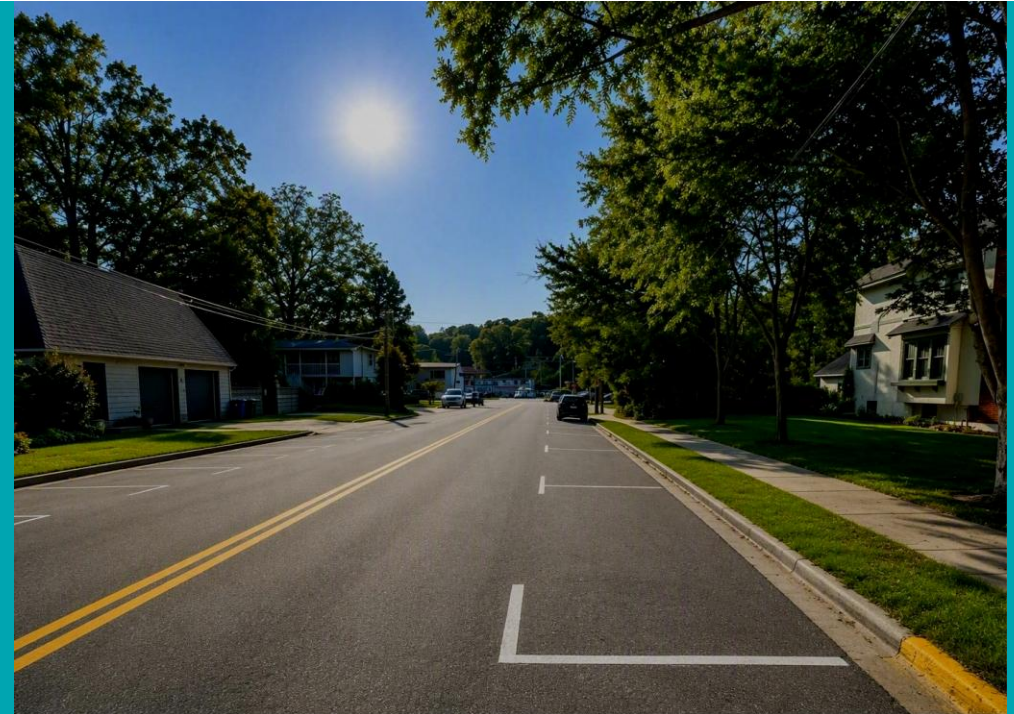


City of Saugatuck Parking Study

Executive Summary and Action Plan

Walker Consultants | September 2026



Prepared with the City of Saugatuck Parking Improvements Task Force

In association with:



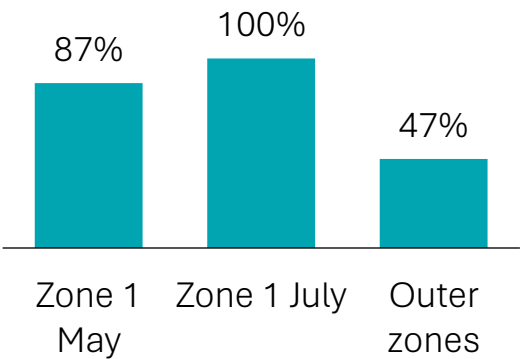
Agenda

- 1 Study Purpose, Scope, and Approach
- 2 What the Data and Input Show
- 3 Supply and Pricing Options
- 4 Management and Access Improvements
- 5 Recommended Strategic Direction
- 6 Implementation and Timeline

Executive Summary at a Glance

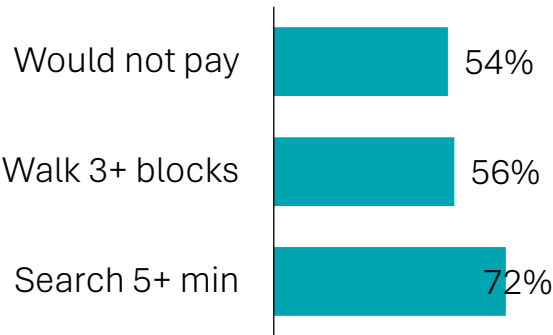
The Core Finding

A downtown management problem, not a citywide supply shortage. Of 1,868 public spaces, peak pressure sits almost entirely in Zone 1.



What We Heard

From 618 survey responses and 10 stakeholder interviews. Enforcement is widely seen as inconsistent.



Top Four Recommendations

1. Launch a seasonal parking ambassador and enforcement program.
2. Expand remote and shared parking with stronger Interurban coordination.
3. Improve signage and wayfinding to better convey public parking locations; enhance website.
4. Address employee parking through partnership, not mandate.

What We Are Not Recommending

No parking structure at roughly \$42,000 per space, and no broad paid parking as a first step. Both remain long-term options only if measured performance shows demand stays severe.



Study Purpose, Scope, and Approach

Guiding Principles Behind the Plan



Optimize First

Use existing assets harder — enforcement, turnover, remote and shared parking, signage — before expanding supply.



Prioritize the Curb

Reserve the most convenient spaces for customers, visitors, accessible users, and quick-turnover activity through managed time limits.



Partner, Don't Mandate

Work with employers on employee parking, expand accessible space count, and reserve the closest curb spaces for customers and accessible users.



Manage by Data

Align solutions with fiscal capacity, preserve Saugatuck's character, and let measured performance drive future decisions.

The through-line: manage what already exists, protect the curb for customers and accessible users, and let measured performance drive any capital decision.

Why This Study

The Challenge

Downtown parking is real, visible, and concentrated in peak visitor periods — May through September, with July and August most constrained, particularly during weekends. Outside peak season, the system generally works.

The Question

Is Saugatuck short on parking, or is it managing the parking it already has ineffectively? The answer shapes whether the City builds new supply or manages demand.

The Answer

A management problem, not a systemwide supply shortage. Walker recommends a phased strategy that uses existing assets harder before any major capital commitment.



Peak-season conditions in the downtown core, May through September.

Study Scope and Methodology

Timeframe

Began late summer 2025, concluding summer 2026. Designed to capture both off-season and peak-season conditions.

Study Area

Four zones: CBD, The Hill, North Residential, and South Residential. Inventory and occupancy covered all four.

Field Work

Inventory and mapping of publicly available parking, including publicly- and privately-owned public parking, posted restrictions, transit stops, bike facilities, loading areas, curbside conditions, and ADA spaces. Parking occupancy studies in the core during off-season and peak-season conditions.

Stakeholder Input

- Eight Parking Improvements Task Force (PITF) meetings guided by nine City of Saugatuck PITF members, each with public comment
- Online questionnaire with 618 respondents
- Ten stakeholder interviews
- Parking study table at Music in the Park, staffed by Walker Consultants and PITF members, to elicit public comments
- Presentation to City Council



- Study Area Zones**
- Zone 1: CBD
 - Zone 2: The Hill
 - Zone 3: North Residential
 - Zone 4: South Residential

Perimeter Boundaries
Kalamazoo River, Lucy, Holland, North, Maple, and Blue Star Highway

Parking inventory exhibit, Fleis & VandenBrink, March 2026.

What the Data and Input Show

Public Parking Supply: The System Is Not Small

1,868 Spaces

Total publicly available spaces citywide — 1,502 on-street and 366 off-street.

561 Time-Limited

On-street spaces in the CBD already carry time limits — a substantial management tool if consistently enforced.

13 On-Street Accessible

On-street accessible spaces, all in the CBD, out of 28 accessible spaces citywide. PROWAG guidance suggests moving toward about 30 in the CBD.

116 Remote

Advertised summer-weekend spaces at the Saugatuck High School remote lot, expanded further in summer 2026.

Public Parking Supply by Zone

Zone	Off-Street	On-Street	Total
Zone 1: CBD	145	761	906
Zone 2: The Hill	197	514	711
Zone 3: North Residential	0	128	128
Zone 4: South Residential	24	99	123
Total	366	1,502	1,868

Source: Fleis & VandenBrink, Parking Supply Summary, March 13, 2026.



The Four Study Zones

Zone 2: The Hill — street boundaries

North: Spear Street

South: Allegan Street

West: Griffith Street



Approximate walk from the CBD core (estimates): Zone 2 about 4–6 min • Zone 3 about 6–8 min • Zone 4 about 8–10 min

May 2026 Occupancy: Constrained Before Summer

Zone 1 — CBD

788 of 906 spaces occupied at the 5:00 p.m. peak, about 87 percent — above the 85 percent practical-capacity threshold. On-street 86 percent; off-street 92 percent.

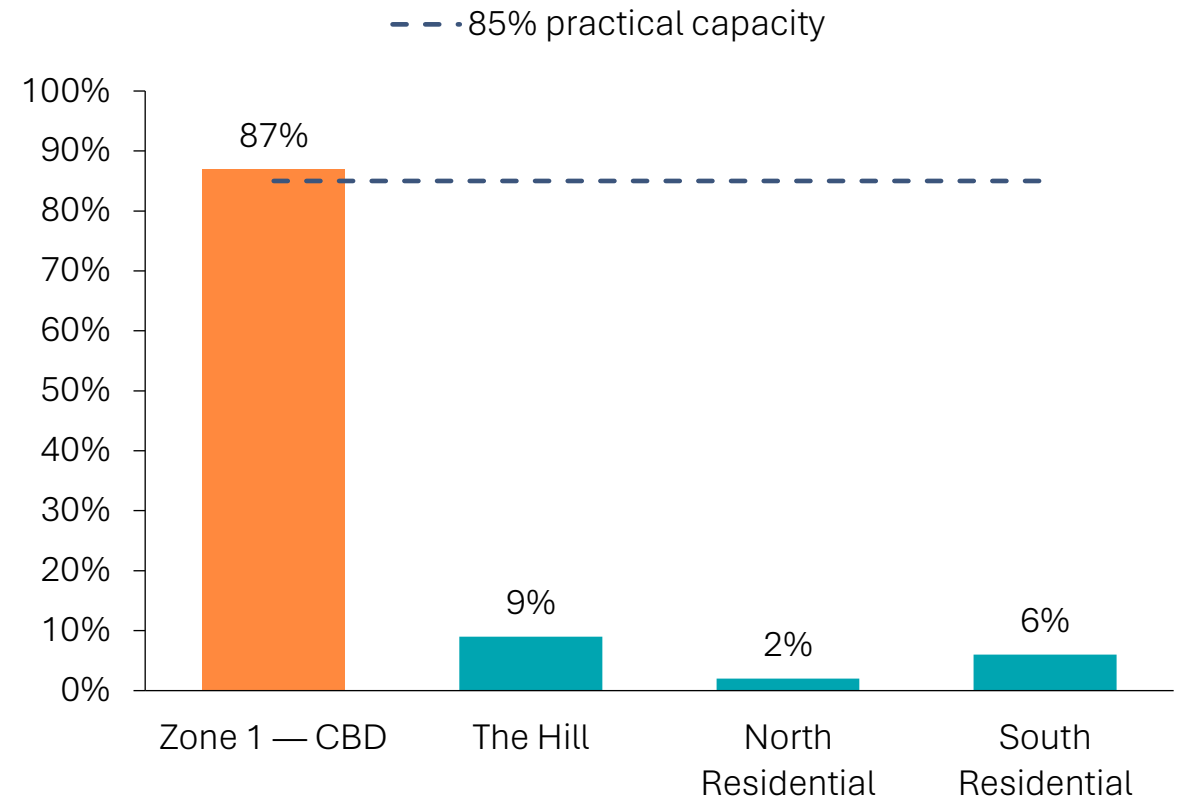
Surrounding Zones

The Hill peaked near 9 percent, North Residential 2 percent, South Residential 6 percent — substantial unused capacity within walking distance.

What It Means

A concentrated downtown management problem, not a citywide shortage. Direct demand rather than simply adding supply.

Peak occupancy by zone — Saturday, May 2026, 5:00 p.m.



Source: Walker Consultants field observations, May 2026.

July 2026 Occupancy: Peak-Season Reality

Wednesday, July 15

Zone 1 reached 97 percent occupancy, leaving about 27 spaces available at 6:00 p.m. across the entire Central Business District.

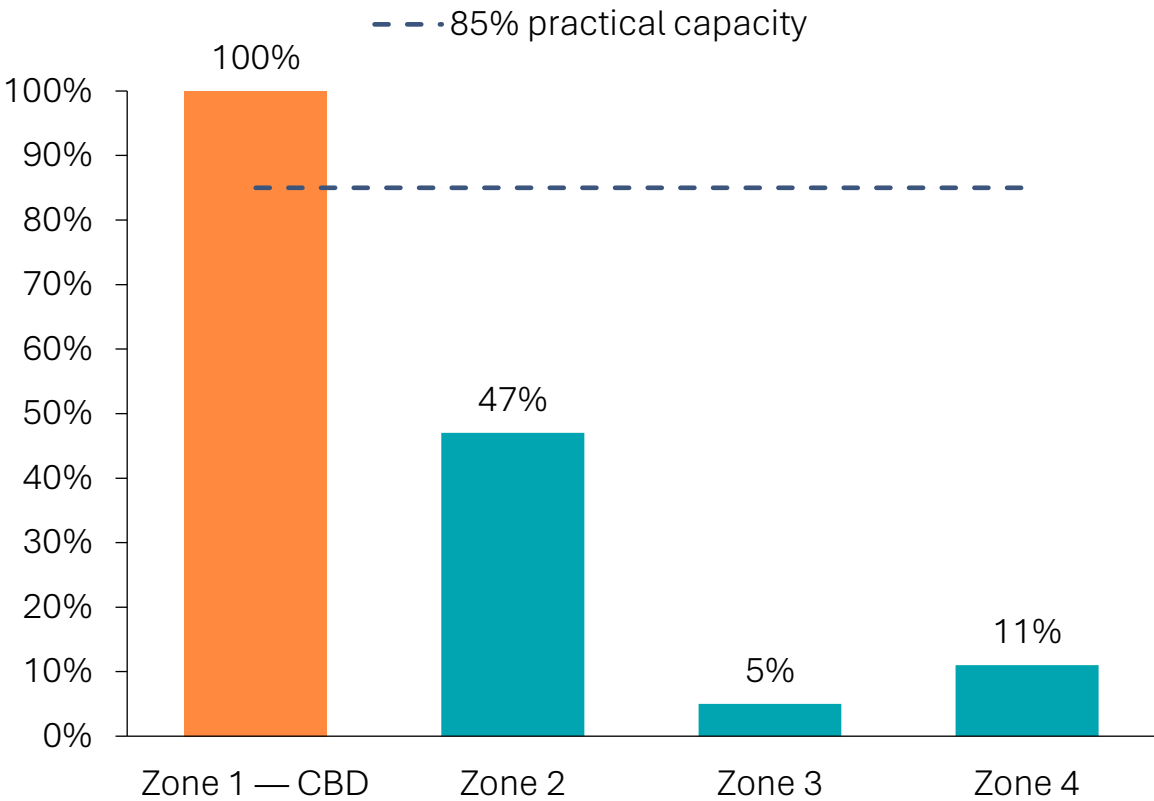
Saturday, July 18

Zone 1 reached 100 percent occupancy — no available CBD spaces at 6:00 p.m.

Still Not Systemwide

On July 18, Zone 2 peaked at 47 percent, Zone 3 at 5 percent, and Zone 4 at 11 percent. Capacity existed; it was simply not where visitors were looking.

Peak occupancy by zone — Saturday, July 18, 6:00 p.m.

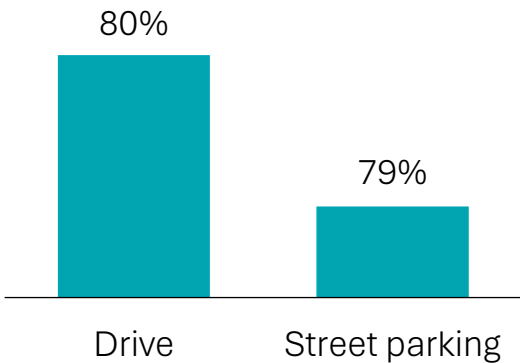


Source: Walker Consultants field observations, July 2026.

Survey Results: 618 Responses

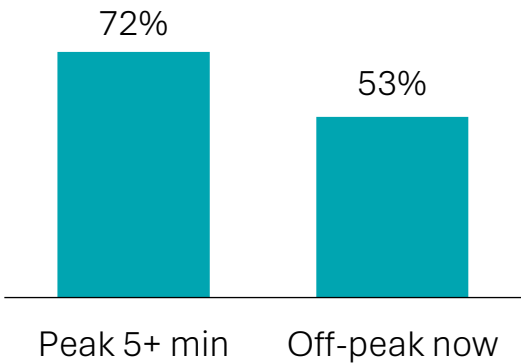
How People Arrive

More than 80 percent drive downtown in a personal vehicle and nearly 79 percent use street parking.



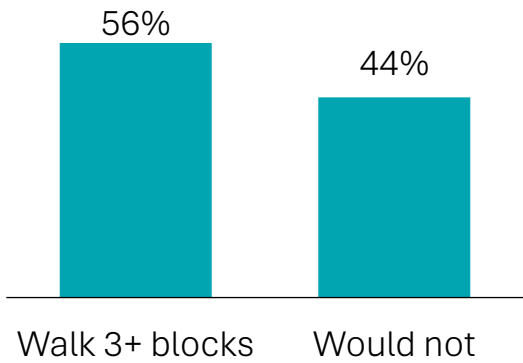
Search Time

About 72 percent spend more than five minutes finding parking in peak season; in the off-season, 53 percent find parking immediately.



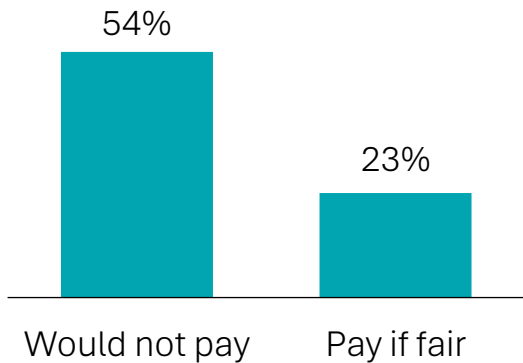
Willingness to Walk

56 percent would walk three or more blocks in peak season if remote options are clear, safe, and convenient.



Paid Parking

About 54 percent would not pay to park; roughly 23 percent would pay if the price were reasonable.



Stakeholder Feedback: 10 Interviews

Points of Agreement

Enforcement is minimal or inconsistent, posted time limits lose credibility, and signage, maps, and website information need real improvement.

Shared Assets

Remote parking and the Interurban are valued, but need clearer promotion, more predictable service, and stronger coordination with additional lots.

No Consensus on Building

Stakeholders did not coalesce around a garage, citing cost, seasonal use, aesthetics, site availability, and effects on Saugatuck's character.

Who We Heard From

The ten interviews represented lodging, marina, and visitor-serving operators, the school district, and civic and arts organizations. The Parking Improvements Task Force brought together city officials, city staff, Interurban Transit, downtown business representatives, and residents.



Supply and Pricing Options

Parking Structure: Not Recommended Now

Capital Cost and Ongoing Burden

Upfront Capital Cost: Roughly \$42,000 per space — about \$8.4 million for 200 spaces and \$12.6 million for 300.

Ongoing Burden: A 300-space facility could consume 15 to 20 percent of the City's annual operating budget.

Fit With Demand

A structure concentrates spaces in one location for a limited number of annual peak days. Keep it as a long-term option only if conditions change materially.

Other Concerns

Negative impact on downtown aesthetics and small-town feel.



Illustrative example: three-level parking deck, Rochester Hills, Michigan.

Paid Parking: A Possible Future Tool, Not Now

What It Could Do

Improve turnover, generate revenue, provide better data, and reduce reliance on punitive enforcement.

What It Raises

Political, customer-service, equity, technology, maintenance, and streetscape concerns — with 54 percent of respondents unwilling to pay.

Peer Communities: On-Street Parking in Michigan Resort Towns

Free On-Street Parking (11)

- Saugatuck
- New Buffalo
- South Haven
- Muskegon
- Holland
- Grand Haven
- Ludington
- Manistee
- Frankfort
- Elk Rapids
- Mackinaw City

Paid On-Street Parking (4)

- St. Joseph
- Charlevoix
- Petoskey
- Traverse City

Takeaway: paid on-street parking is the exception among comparable Michigan resort towns, and where it exists, it is often seasonal.

Street Changes and Future Growth

Butler Street

One-way conversion with angled parking could add roughly 63 spaces between Lucy and Culver Streets.



Water and Lucy

Water Street one-way and parallel-to-angled conversions could add about 22 spaces; Lucy Street about 6.



Elizabeth Street

About 20 remote-support spaces near the school campus, pending engineering review.



Future Demand

Long-term growth of roughly 100 to 150 spaces, with the lower end most realistic — manageable without major new supply.



Note: These figures are conceptual. They are based on concept-level studies rather than detailed field surveys or design engineering, and final results are likely to vary.

Management and Access Improvements

Wayfinding and Signage: A Coordinated System

Gateways and Direction

Updated gateway and directional signs at the Blue Star Highway and Lake Street entry, and at Holland, North, and Riverside, plus a downtown vehicular and pedestrian sign system.



Parking Identity

Standardized names for every public off-street facility, identification signs at each entrance, on-street signs consolidated to no more than two per pole, and permanent shared-parking signs at the high school.



Maps and Online

Map kiosks at every pedestrian exit point, more and better social district signs, and a dedicated City parking webpage with an interactive map of every facility.

A Coordinated Sign Family

A consistent hierarchy of vehicular, pedestrian, and kiosk signs, paired with a simple color-coded public parking map, directs visitors to the open supply outside the core.

Shared Parking and the Interurban

Private Lot Partners

Pursue agreements with owners of underused lots: Dykstra Funeral Home, Riverside Church, the DPW property, Douglas Elementary, and St. Peter’s Catholic Church.

Shared Parking Agreements

Use one standard framework covering days and hours of public use, intended users, owner priority, blackout periods, insurance, maintenance, signage, compensation, liability, and termination.

Interurban Expansion

Extend on-demand shuttle service to each new remote lot with predictable hours, published schedules, and coordinated signage.

Progress in Summer 2026

During this study the Interurban expanded remote parking to the Saugatuck Drug Store, Beery Field, and Douglas Elementary School lots, with more buses and service hours — building on the high school lot and its 116 summer-weekend spaces.

Recommendation: keep expanding the program and anchor a voluntary employee parking program with downtown employers.



Source: Walker Consultants, Saugatuck Remote Parking, The Interurban, and Shared Parking Agreements, 2026.

Parking Ambassadors: Enforcement as Hospitality

Ambassador Program

A visible, uniformed team that gives directions, explains where open parking is, and enforces posted limits. Service first, citation last.

Enforcing Three Hours

Posted limits only work if they are checked. Consistent enforcement turns 561 time-limited CBD spaces into real turnover instead of all-day storage.

Employees Need an Option First

Tighter enforcement without an alternative simply penalizes downtown workers. Remote and shared lots must be in place before ticketing tightens.

Cost and Benefit: Ambassadors Versus a Structure

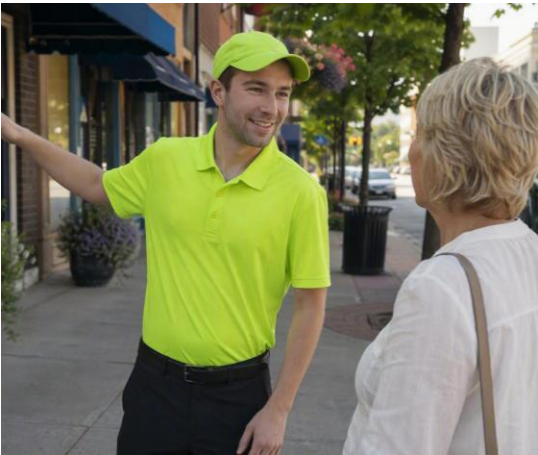
Ambassador program

Two seasonal positions run roughly \$85,000 a year fully loaded. Typical Michigan parking ambassador pay is \$35,000 to \$40,000 per position.

Parking structure

About \$42,000 per space, or \$8.4 million for 200 spaces before land, plus annual operations. The same capital would fund ambassadors for decades.

Michigan peers: Traverse City calls its enforcement staff parking ambassadors; East Lansing hires parking ambassadors; Grand Rapids runs a downtown ambassador team seven days a week; Holland pairs free customer parking with employee parking guidance.



Employee Parking: Partnership, Not Mandate

The Pattern

Many downtown businesses have no dedicated employee parking, so employees park wherever space exists — Butler, Water, the side streets, the hill, church lots, and the high school lot.

The Scale

Peak-season shifts at individual businesses range from 10 to 15 employees up to 50 during the day and 75 at night, consuming prime customer spaces for the whole shift.

Why Not a Mandate

Stakeholders repeatedly said the high school lot is unworkable or goes unused, citing shuttle hours, lighting, and late-night safety. A rule without a workable alternative just moves the problem to nearby streets.

A Voluntary Program, Piloted First

Work with downtown employers to document peak-season staffing, where employees park today, shift times, loading needs, and safety concerns. Match those needs to remote and shared lots with Interurban service that actually covers shift ends.

Launch a small pilot with willing employers, backed by real incentives — free or discounted permits, guaranteed remote spaces, extended shuttle hours, and better lighting — and measure how many prime spaces it frees before scaling.

Source: Employee parking survey of the downtown business community, stakeholder engagement, and remote parking analysis. Walker Consultants with Fleis & VandenBrink and the Parking Improvements Task Force, 2026.

Accessible Parking: Expanding On-Street Supply

Where We Stand

The City has 28 accessible spaces for public use, and only 13 of them are on-street — all within the CBD. Accessible spaces make up just 1.5 percent of the total supply, and Zones 3 and 4 have none.

What the Standard Expects

Federal accessibility guidance for public rights-of-way suggests accessible spaces on each block perimeter, scaled to the number of spaces provided, sited on an accessible route with a compliant access aisle and curb ramp.

What We Recommend

Add on-street accessible spaces on the block faces closest to downtown destinations, extend coverage beyond the CBD to The Hill and the residential zones, and reserve the most convenient locations rather than the leftover ones.

The Near-Term Opportunity

Every planned restriping, resurfacing, or street-conversion project is the lowest-cost chance to add accessible on-street spaces. Pair each new space with a compliant access aisle, a connected curb ramp, and clear signage so the space is usable, not just striped.

Track the count by zone so accessible supply grows with the system rather than staying concentrated downtown.

Source: Fleis & VandenBrink, Parking Supply Summary, March 13, 2026.



What a Public Parking Space Is Worth

The Approach

Divide the estimated annual value of downtown goods and services by the public parking supply across the four zones. This is not what users pay for parking, which is commonly subsidized; cost is a floor, not full public value.

The Illustrative Math

An illustrative \$200 million in annual downtown sales across 1,883 public spaces yields about \$106,000 in gross annual value per space. A 10 to 15 percent business margin puts the adjusted value at roughly \$10,600 to \$15,900 per space a year.

What It Implies

The current \$200 monthly fee is about \$2,400 per space a year — roughly a fifth to a quarter of that adjusted value. Across 13 spaces the gap is on the order of \$105,000 to \$175,000 a year.

Reading the Numbers

These figures are illustrative, built on an assumed downtown sales value — a way to frame the magnitude of the public interest in a curb space, not an appraisal. The \$200 million assumption and the margin range should be tested against local sales data before any fee is set.

Used as a policy input, the analysis supports pricing outdoor dining use closer to the value of the space it displaces, rather than at a flat rate set to recover the cost of providing parking.

Source: Walker Consultants, Restaurant Use of On-Street Parking — parking-space value analysis, using illustrative assumptions of \$200 million in annual downtown goods and services and 1,883 public spaces.

Recommended Strategic Direction

Recommendations 1–6

- 1 No parking structure at this time
- 2 No broad paid parking as a first step
- 3 Seasonal ambassador and enforcement
- 4 Employee parking by partnership
- 5 Expanded remote and shared parking
- 6 Stronger Interurban and shuttle coordination

Recommendations 7–11

- 7 Improved signage and wayfinding
- 8 Add accessible on-street CBD parking spaces
- 9 Deliberate management of curb space
- 10 Street conversions only after technical review
- 11 Broader mobility options in the strategy

Implementation and Timeline

Implementation Roadmap and Immediate Next Steps

Phase 1 — Late 2026 to Spring 2027

Confirm policy direction, assign responsibilities, and begin outreach.

Phase 2 — Summer to Fall 2027

Design programs, negotiate partners, and scope street conversions.

Phase 3 — Winter to Spring 2028

Finalize agreements, staffing, signage, and ADA improvements.

Phase 4 — May to September 2028

Launch the ambassador program and promote remote parking through peak season.

Phase 5 — September to November 2028

Report post-season performance against baseline and adjust.

Phase 6 — 2028 and Beyond

Refine programs, expand ADA parking, and revisit paid parking only if needed.

Immediate Next Steps

1. Confirm policy direction with Council
 2. Create a peak-season implementation work plan
 3. Develop the parking ambassador program
4. Prepare communications and wayfinding package
 5. Begin remote and employee parking outreach
 6. Establish metrics and post-season reporting

Measuring Performance

Occupancy and Turnover

Peak occupancy by zone and core block, duration of stay, overstay, and visitor search time.

Enforcement

Warnings, citations, repeat violations, collections, customer-service contacts, and complaints.

Remote and Employee

Remote lot use, spaces under shared agreement, employee participation, Interurban ridership, and shuttle wait times.

Policy Triggers

Occupancy persistently above 85 percent, continued long-duration use of prime spaces, or weak remote and shuttle use.

Reporting cadence: report to Council after each peak season. If occupancy stays above 85 percent following two full seasons of active management, revisit supply and pricing options.

Acknowledgments

This plan is the product of a year of community effort. Walker Consultants thanks:

Parking Improvements Task Force — volunteer members, eight working meetings

City of Saugatuck Staff — field support, data, and coordination

Fleis & VandenBrink — parking inventory and local field data

Downtown Business Community — employee parking survey participants

618 Survey Respondents — residents, employees, and visitors

Ten Stakeholder Interviewees — owners, institutions, and community leaders

Citizen Participants — public comments at PITF meetings and the parking study table at Music in the Park



Questions and Discussion



Restaurant Use of On-Street Spaces

What Is in Place Today

Thirteen on-street public spaces are used for restaurant outdoor dining, under special land use approval, Historic District Commission approval, and a revocable license. The City may reclaim them for parking or other public purposes.

What the City Charges

Restaurants pay \$200 per space per month — about \$2,400 per space a year, or roughly \$31,200 across all 13. That fee reflects the cost of providing parking, not the public value of high-turnover curb access in the busiest block faces of the CBD.

Where Opinion Divides

The task force and the public do not agree: end the practice, charge significantly more, or cap the number of spaces used. The pandemic rationale has passed, and the mode-shift case made in larger cities is weaker here.

Where This Lands

Outdoor dining adds seating capacity, street activity, and peak-season revenue. It also removes high-demand curb from public use, benefits some businesses more than others, and raises loading, accessibility, safety, and enforcement concerns. The question is not authority — the City already has it — but price and structure.

Recommendation: discontinue the practice unless participating restaurants reimburse the City at a level that reasonably reflects the economic value of the occupied spaces — with a district-wide cap, consistent standards, and continued revocability. At an illustrative margin-adjusted value of \$10,600 to \$15,900 per space per year, each space is worth roughly four to seven times the \$2,400 a year restaurants now pay for it.

Source: Walker Consultants, Restaurant Use of On-Street Parking; City of Saugatuck zoning § 154.092(O)(2) and Chapter 152 Historic District regulations; City fee schedule and license agreements.

