



**CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES  
December 3, 2025**

The City Council met for a Workshop Meeting at 4:00 p.m.  
City Hall  
102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Anderson at 4:00 p.m.

**Attendance:**

Present: Mayor Anderson, Mayor Pro-Tem Clark and Councilmembers Peterson and Stanton. Gardner arrived at 4:03 p.m.

Absent: Dean and Muncey.

*Motion by Peterson, Second by Stanton to excuse Dean and Muncey. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0.*

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, Attorney Witte, Treasurer Bredeweg. DPW Superintendent Herbert and Clerk Wolters.

**Agenda Changes:** None.

**Public Comment on Agenda Items Only:** None.

**Action Items:**

Regular City Council Meeting Minutes – November 24, 2025:

*Motion by Stanton, second by Peterson to approve the regular city council meeting minutes from November 24. Via roll call vote, motion carried 4-0.*

Gardner entered meeting.

**Discussion Items:**

Upcoming Assessing Process Presentation:

The council discussed common questions and concerns raised by the community regarding the property assessment process and its impact on property taxes. Key topics included what triggers property reassessment (such as sales, capping and uncapping, changes in property use like becoming a short-term rental, or structural modifications), how fair market value is determined, and why neighboring properties sometimes have different tax bills. There were also questions about how changes to a property affect assessments, and the process for appealing an assessment if a property owner disagrees with it. To address these questions the assessing team at Assessing Solutions will prepare a presentation for an upcoming meeting.

### Proposal for Planning of Elizabeth Street Improvements:

The discussion on the Proposal for Planning of Elizabeth Street Improvements centered on the need for significant infrastructure work. DPW Superintendent Herbert presented the proposal, highlighting road resurfacing, sidewalk and storm sewer repairs, and planning for water main and sanitary sewer replacements, with an estimated project cost of \$1.5 million for design and planning in the current fiscal year and phased work through 2028. He emphasized the complexities involved with sidewalk routing, mature trees, and elevation changes, leading to the recommendation of a more involved, community-driven planning process similar to a previous successful project on Maple Street. Discussion also addressed long-term financial planning, with council members urging the inclusion of financial projections to understand fiscal impacts amid other large city projects. Suggestions included involving school representatives with their input and considering short-term road repairs if needed as the planning and bidding processes unfold.

### Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area - Invasive Species Management Trail Assessment, and Ecological Evaluation:

DPW Superintendent Herbert presented the proposal for invasive species management, trail assessment, and ecological evaluation. The Public Works Committee reviewed a management plan previously developed with the Land Conservancy of West Michigan and sought proposals from various contractors. The ODC Network was recommended due to their comprehensive, practical proposal and existing familiarity with the property. Funding for the project is to come from an endowment specific to the property, with \$225,000 in available earnings (the \$866,000 principal is protected). The proposed scope includes invasive species treatment (\$20,000), trail assessment (\$5,000), ecological evaluation (\$10,000), and ongoing surveying through 2027, totaling \$38,500. Committee members discussed the importance of community involvement for real-world feedback on trails and hazards, maintenance needs, and balancing ecological protection with human experience. Suggestions included working with regular trail users and exploring volunteer maintenance to address issues like erosion, signage, and safety hazards. The conversation also covered process transparency, the value of detailed proposals, and ensuring decisions passed the “optic test” regarding fairness and inclusiveness among vendors.

### Dock Repairs & Maintenance:

The council discussed recent and ongoing dock repairs and maintenance, primarily focused on addressing damage to the shopper dock at Coghlin Park caused by a boat strike, and normal wear issues affecting docks at Willow Park and municipal transient slips. DPW Superintendent Herbert explained that repairs include straightening and extending dock posts, fixing railings and leveling surfaces, and removing unnecessary floating dock structures. The total budget for related repairs is \$65,000, with approximately \$33,000 proposed for immediate dock work. Discussion considered the efficiency of combining repairs at several locations in one contract to maximize use of equipment and minimize disruptions. There was an idea suggested about converting some boat slips to expand shopper dock capacity.

Mayor Pro Tem Clark left meeting at 4:46 p.m.

### Logo and Branding Refresh Project - Formation of a Branding Advisory Committee and Request for Proposals:

City Manager Ryan Cummins presented the need for the city’s logo and overall branding, highlighting the need for a modern, cohesive identity across signage, website, and official materials. To initiate this process, Cummins recommended forming a specialized Branding Advisory Committee made up of city staff, two council members, and local design and arts experts. The committee will work closely with a design firm, which will be selected through a formal Request for Proposals (RFP). Council discussion emphasized a streamlined, expert-driven committee rather than a large group, but acknowledged the value of broad public and school input through community surveys, student engagement, and potentially consulting local residents with branding experience. The RFP will seek a firm to guide the city through research, public feedback, and an iterative design phase involving multiple logo options and revisions. The

committee will ultimately recommend a design to the full council for approval. The branding refresh is budgeted within a \$125,000 allocation for contractual services, with additional funds available for a subsequent phase focused on website redesign after the new branding is completed.

#### Inflation Adjustments to Staff Wage Scale:

City Manager Cummins presented an annual inflation adjustment to the staff wage scale. He proposed a 3% increase for grades two through eight (covering most city positions) and a 6% increase for grade one (primarily public works staff), based on current inflation rates, regional pay comparisons, and external data from the State of Michigan and federal sources. The goal is to ensure the city remains competitive for both recruitment and retention. The discussion highlighted that, in addition to these adjustments, employees also receive merit-based increases according to performance. The council noted the importance of considering total compensation, including health, retirement, and time-off benefits, when evaluating how competitive the city is as an employer.

#### **Public Comments:**

Peter Hanson  
Nancy Kimble

#### **Council Comments:**

Councilmember Peterson expressed concern about the process surrounding the proposed warming fire pit project. She emphasized that the city council had not formally supported the project, raised questions about its location, design, and code compliance, and stressed the need for thorough council review before moving forward. Peterson was strongly opposed to the city spending funds on the warming pit, describing it as a “want” rather than a priority, and advocated for a transparent process where council reviews all aspects—including budgeting and public safety—before any action is taken. She highlighted the importance of not giving the impression that decisions had already been made and urged that the city focus on true community priorities over optional projects.

Councilmember Russ Gardner echoed Councilmember Peterson’s warming pit comments and emphasized that it should only proceed through proper council process, with clear priorities and budget considerations, and not until all required reviews and information are gathered. He clarified the city’s responsibility regarding mailbox damage in winter—explaining that the city is only responsible for damage caused directly by snowplows, not for boxes damaged by snow piles or due to poor construction.

Councilmember Lauren Stanton shared a lighthearted story about her mailbox being knocked down by snow, clarifying that it was due to the mailbox’s construction rather than city staff. She also expressed excitement for the upcoming Christmas Parade and looked forward to participating in the event, emphasizing its unique and fun atmosphere in the community.

Mayor Holly Anderson echoed the fun around the mailbox anecdote and highlighted her anticipation for the upcoming parade and the city’s branding refresh project, expressing gratitude for the council members’ diverse skills. Anderson commended city staff for their hard work and dedication, thanked everyone for their contributions, and wished all a safe journey home as she called for adjournment.

#### **Adjournment:**

*Motion by Stanton, second by Peterson to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried 4-0. Mayor Anderson adjourned the meeting at 5:28 p.m.*

Respectfully Submitted

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Jamie Wolters, City Clerk