



**CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING  
May 4, 2026**

The City Council met to have a Regular Council Meeting at City Hall at 6:30 p.m.  
102 Butler St., Saugatuck, MI 49453.

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Anderson at 6:30 p.m.

**Attendance:**

Present: Mayor Anderson, Mayor Pro-Tem Clark and Councilmembers Dean, Gardner, Muncey, Peterson and Stanton.

Others Present: City Manager Cummins, Attorney Witte, Engineer Tierney and Clerk Wolters.

**Agenda Changes:** None.

**Guest Speakers:** None.

**Public Comment on Agenda Item Only:**

Chad Thurkettle  
Mike Johnson  
Christine Murphy  
Jennifer Davenport read by Christine Newman  
Hannah VanBuskirk

**Discussion/ Action Items:**

To change the dates of the scheduled water valve work, currently planned for Tuesday, May 5 and Wednesday, May 6, 2026:

The council's discussion on the scheduled Water Street water valve work centered on balancing urgent infrastructure needs with serious business and communication concerns. The valve replacement is part of a larger, council-approved Maple Street/Water Street utility project, with a contract requiring Water Street-related work to be completed by May 22, 2026, to reduce the risk of a major break during peak summer. Staff had scheduled the shutoff and resulting boil water advisory for May 5–6, 2026, based on those constraints and prior direction to complete downtown work before Memorial Day. Business owners, especially on Water Street, objected strongly to the timing because it overlaps with Tulip Time and Cinco de Mayo, which are critical revenue days for restaurants and lodging, and several testified they would have to cancel substantial bookings and lose tens of thousands of dollars in revenue. Nearly all public commenters also criticized the city's communication, saying notice came only a few days

before via flyers or was otherwise unclear, and they called for a tighter communication process and some form of business liaison. Council members debated whether to keep the current dates, move the work to the following week after Tulip Time, or postpone it until later. Staff cautioned that they were not prepared to answer in the meeting whether a shift to next week or later would be feasible under the contract and scheduling, and some council members warned about the risk of a catastrophic main break in midsummer if work is delayed.

*Motion by Gardner, second by Peterson to change the date of the scheduled water valve work scheduled on May 5th and 6th to a date in the future less impactful to businesses and residents in the community with appropriate communication with the impacts of that work. Via roll call vote, motion carried 4-3. Yes – Anderson, Clark, Dean. No – Gardner, Muncey, Peterson, Stanton.*

**Public Comment:**

Christine Murphy  
Renee Greys  
Phil Suave  
Laura Gustaitis Zangara  
Ryan Brown  
Nick Agnew  
Chad Thurkettle  
Tim Straker

**Council Comments:**

Council Member Chris Peterson thanked everyone who came and those who engaged on social media, emphasizing that this was more than a simple scheduling issue and that the size of the turnout showed how important it was. She stressed that the city “has to do better” on communication, recalled how easy it had been to work with the old business association (SADABA), and framed this decision as a starting point for improving communication going forward. He also thanked the council members who supported changing the dates.

Council Member Russ Gardner echoed Peterson’s thanks and appreciation for those who contacted him over the weekend and pushed for Monday’s special meeting. He said he was pleased with the council’s vote and reiterated that he would rely on the city manager and staff to figure out the new dates with the contractor. He also said the city needed to own the mistake, acknowledged the communication failure, and stated he does not support hiring a full-time communications employee, but would support hiring a professional communications/PR consultant to help the city improve.

Council Member Joe Clark thanked everyone for attending and said he looked forward to putting a discussion on a future agenda about reasonable service-level expectations for communicating disruptive work, especially given all the upcoming infrastructure projects. He cautioned against starting with staffing decisions before defining what level of notice and outreach is appropriate, preferring to define standards first and then determine resources. Clark also voiced concern that the council had voted to move an important project without fully understanding the logistical implications for the broader project schedule, warned about the risk of overriding staff decisions made in the community’s best interest, and urged the council to be very careful about second-guessing operational judgments by the city manager.

Council Member Scott Dean framed the moment as a demonstration of the “beauty of

democracy,” where residents come, speak, and influence decisions, and council members vote accordingly. He said he respected the outcome and the community input, even though he remains concerned about possible unintended consequences from delaying the work. He took the opportunity to mention his involvement with American Legion Post 137 and the planning for the Memorial Day parade, noting that they urgently need volunteers to help block intersections so the parade can be safe, and asked attendees to help spread the word.

Council Member Gregory Muncey thanked everyone for coming, including those who communicated via Facebook. He said he appreciates how well the council works together, even when they disagree, and emphasized that he respects prior decisions that have not gone his way while still collaborating constructively. He has been elected several terms to be a voice for the residents and noted there is a lot to learn from this meeting. He appreciated the turnout as no one “wants” to be at the meeting and viewed the day as a clear lesson in the need for better communication and everyone must do better.

Council Member Lauren Stanton echoed what others had expressed, thanking everyone for attending and communicating their concerns, because council members are there to represent the community. She noted that Butler Street work and other infrastructure projects will be even more challenging in the future and urged everyone to keep that in mind. Stanton emphasized that communication will be crucial as the city tackles those larger projects, and she expressed confidence that the city can adapt and adjust when needed. She closed by thanking the businesses for being part of the process and specifically thanked contractor Superintendent Chad Thurkettle from Schippers Excavating Inc. for attending and listening, since the city depends on the contractor to get the work done.

Mayor Holly Anderson closed by picking up on comments from the public comment about governance structure, reminding everyone that council and school boards are policy-making bodies, while implementation and day-to-day decisions belong to administrators such as the city manager and staff. She stated that by directing staff to reschedule the project, the council had overruled the staff’s operational judgment, which she believes is not council’s role and sets a bad precedent for the city. Holly said this effectively tells staff to do their best work and then accept being overruled, which she described as “not good government.” She did affirm that she respects how well the council generally works together despite disagreements.

**Adjournment:**

*Motion by Muncey, second by Peterson to adjourn the meeting. Upon voice vote, motion carried unanimously. Mayor Anderson adjourned at 10:10 a.m.*

Respectfully Submitted

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Jamie Wolters, City Clerk