



Parks and Public Works Committee

Meeting Minutes - APPROVED

March 24, 2026, at 10:00 A.M.

Saugatuck City Hall, 102 Butler St, Saugatuck, MI 49453

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 by Chair Kimble.

2. Roll Call

Members Present: Charak, Hoffman, Kimble, Roche, Stanton, Thiel.

Members Absent: None.

Staff Present: DPW Superintendent Herbert and Clerk Wolters.

Others Present: None

3. Approval of Agenda

Motion by Hoffman, supported by Thiel, to approve the agenda. Via voice vote, motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes

Motion by Thiel, supported by Chara to approve the February 26, 2026, regular minutes as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment on Agenda Items

None.

6. Discussion

A. DPW Administrative Update:

Seasonal Transition & Equipment

- DPW is at the transition point from winter to summer operations
 - Removing winter equipment from trucks.
 - Neutralizing salt and enzymes, re-lubricating equipment.

- Storing winter gear and preparing equipment for summer use.

Staffing & Training

- AJ Brown: successfully obtained Class B CDL with air brake endorsement, now able to operate dump trucks.
- Angela Stasewich: currently in a CDL course (West Michigan CDL in Grand Rapids); and be fully licensed before managing Oval Beach this summer.
- Seasonal staff recruitment:
 - Return letters sent to Oval Beach staff to see who is coming back.
 - DPW goal: three of four seasonal public works staff have been hired.
 - Expectation to fill one more position to be fully staffed for:
 - Restrooms
 - Trash collection
 - Special event assistance
 - Tree trimming
 - Other summer maintenance needs

Oval Beach Concession – Saga Taco

- RFP for Oval Beach concession went to Council; two proposals were received.
- City chose to move forward with one: ~~Saga Taco~~ Saugataco as the concession operator.
- Next steps:
 - DPW Superintendent Herbert, Alec and Lindsay to meet that afternoon to refine additional details not in the RFP.
 - Those details will go to the City Manager, who will:
 - Review with legal counsel.
 - Work up a license agreement to take back to Council.
- Herbert and Public Works are very enthusiastic about this partnership; see ~~Saga Taco~~ Saugataco as creative, professional and experienced based on their other local restaurants.

Current Projects & Maintenance

- Chain Ferry Arbors
- DPW staff working on chain ferry arbors:
 - Diversified Welding reconstructed the metal frame (“skeleton”).
 - DPW is reinstalling:
 - Cedar shake shingles
 - Redwood columns and details.

Tree Work & Tree City USA Compliance

- This committee has absorbed some responsibilities from the former Tree Board.

- To maintain Tree City USA status (Arbor Day Foundation benchmarks):
 - Ed Dowd’s Crane Service removed six large trees around the city over the past month.
 - Stump grinding scheduled for this week.
 - City will purchase and replant new trees at those locations.
 - One location will serve as the Arbor Day celebration tree.
- Arbor Day event:
 - Tentatively Friday, April 24 at 10:00 a.m.
 - Exact location TBD.

Equipment Disposition & Auctions

- DPW Project Coordinator Michelle Gibson has made good progress selling old/decommissioned DPW equipment.
- Ranger Bid (Miedema) will:
 - Come to the DPW garage.
 - Photograph and post listings online.
 - Equipment will remain on site, making the process easier for staff.

B. Invasive Species Management:

The committee reviewed four proposals for city-wide invasive species work, presented by DPW Project Coordinator Michelle Gibson, from Kalamazoo Nature Center (KNC), Outdoor Discovery Center (ODC), Plant Wise, and Allegan Conservation District. KNC proposed a detailed right-of-way survey focused on the top six invasive species, heavy integration with MISIN data, and a week of fieldwork with a large crew, but at a cost approaching \$48,000 once labor, lodging, and travel were included, which members felt was prohibitively expensive for an assessment. ODC proposed a two-season survey (late spring/early summer and late summer/early fall) for approximately \$22,000, with mapping and comprehensive city-wide coverage; staff and committee members emphasized their long, positive working relationship with ODC on Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, Mount Baldhead revegetation, and other projects, and viewed them as a strong long-term partner. Plant Wise, based in Ann Arbor, submitted the lowest survey-type price (about \$14,450) for 150 acres, including a management recommendation report and native planting list, and had strong references from ODC for prescribed burn work; however, their proposal lacked clear mapping, raised questions about reliance on driving/biking for rights-of-way surveys, and left travel/logistics costs ambiguous. Allegan Conservation District was seen as a valuable resource with agricultural relationships, but their proposal focused on treatment based on MISIN data rather than a baseline assessment, and the City’s attempts to work with them over the past year had been hampered by limited capacity and incomplete follow-through. After discussion, the committee concluded that ODC offered the best balance of cost, scope, and reliability.

Motion by Charak, supported by Hoffman that ODC be awarded the comprehensive survey of invasive species and ecological threats within the city of Saugatuck and outlying properties to which include the Saugatuck Wilds. Via voice vote, motion carried 4-0. Abstain – Roche.

C. **Review of Council Priorities and Project Considerations:**

a. **Park Bench and Picnic Table Locations:**

The committee discussed park bench and picnic table locations as a potential new project in response to survey feedback indicating a desire for more places to sit and eat, particularly for families seeking affordable options in a park. Members agreed that the issue is not simply “adding more” but understanding the current inventory and impacts on maintenance. Committee member Hoffman expressed concern about adding large, full-size picnic tables, especially in Wicks Park, fearing increased trash and workload for DPW; he favored smaller tables, such as four-seat checker/chess tables, that can accommodate a light meal or game without inviting large groups. Others noted that smaller game tables shown in earlier Village Square concepts might be appropriate in multiple parks. The committee agreed the first step should be to inventory existing benches and tables and evaluate whether they are in the right locations, as well as to consider redistribution before purchasing additional units. DPW Superintendent Herbert added that existing wooden tables, though durable, have a finite lifespan and are prone to damage, and suggested future investments should prioritize composite materials; he also encouraged thinking beyond core parks to locations like new sidewalks where a simple bench or “rest station” might serve pedestrians. Funding possibilities discussed included donor-funded dedication benches and potential support from the Convention & Visitors Bureau. Recognizing the complexity of the issue, the committee formed a small study group, with Committee member Charak and Committee member Hoffman volunteering to lead the bench and picnic table project and to develop a project charter covering current inventory, objectives, maintenance considerations, and possible funding.

b. **Wayfinding Signage:**

Under Council’s “update signage and wayfinding” priority, the committee discussed how Parks and Public Works could assist. Chair Kimble proposed that PPW’s role should be to identify and map locations where wayfinding and park signage are needed, rather than designing the signs themselves. Committee member Stanton, serving on the logo and branding committee, explained that the City’s consultants are developing an overall visual identity and that it is common for cities to have different types of signs (e.g., for parks, downtown, and trails) that share a cohesive look. She felt it was appropriate for PPW to begin the location-mapping work now, while the branding process defines the

visual standards. Committee member Roche described prior wayfinding work she helped lead with a non-motorized trails organization from Grand Rapids, which maintains a library of MDOT-approved sign templates, and with Outdoor Discovery Center's interpretation staff, who have experience designing park and trail signage. She emphasized the opportunity for tri-community consistency among Saugatuck, Douglas, and the Township, all of which have recently updated their branding. The committee agreed to form a small working group, with Committee members Roche and Thiel volunteering to identify sign locations and draft a project charter for wayfinding signage, coordinating as needed with the broader branding effort.

c. Restroom Interior improvements at Village Square and Wicks Park:

The committee discussed Council's priority of upgrading restroom interiors at Village Square and Wicks Park and how PPW could move that work forward. Chair Kimble noted that the facilities are functional but dated, and that public feedback reflects a desire for restrooms that feel cleaner and more pleasant; she framed the discussion around what standard the City wants to achieve. Committee member Stanton said there are straightforward improvements that could significantly enhance the user experience and emphasized the importance of staff input on practical, durable solutions. DPW Superintendent Herbert explained that, because the buildings are cinder block and subject to heavy use and abuse, any upgrades must prioritize ease of cleaning and durability (materials that can withstand hose-downs, chemicals, and frequent sanitation) and will likely require architectural assistance from firms such as Fleis & VandenBrink. The committee agreed that the immediate task is planning and scoping, not committing funds. A small study group was formed, with Lauren and Nancy volunteering to work with DPW Superintendent Herbert and staff to draft a project charter, analyze current conditions, explore feasible improvement options, and consider budget implications, and to bring recommendations back to the full committee.

7. Public Comments

Holly Anderson provided public comment.

8. Correspondence

Kam Morris provided correspondence.

9. Member Closing Comments

Judy Thiel

Judy reported on the upcoming Dark Sky Week events planned for the week of April 13, emphasizing that these activities are being organized outside the formal city structure but will be hosted at the Visitor Center. She described an opening-night expo featuring support from the Outdoor Discovery Center (potentially including a live owl), night photography assistance, demonstrations and telescopes

from the Shoreline Astronomical Society, and related programming such as book discussions at the library. She also noted there will be a night hike at ODC during that week (not at Oval Beach this time, due to an already-planned ODC event), with the intention of pursuing a separate night hike at Oval Beach in the fall. Judy said event information will be pushed out on social media and encouraged community participation, highlighting the educational focus on what residents can do individually to reduce light pollution.

Committee member Hoffman

Hoffman commented that it had been a great meeting and indicating he had nothing further to add.

Committee Member Stanton

Stanton echoed earlier praise for the committee’s work on the Village Square courts project. She acknowledged that some members were disappointed that the final Council decision did not precisely match the committee’s preferred plan but stressed that the end result will still be a significant, positive improvement to the park, supported by both the donor and the grant that staff worked hard to secure. She emphasized staying positive and focusing on the benefits of the redesign. Stanton also expressed enthusiasm for the newly formed small work groups on benches/tables, signage, and restrooms, noting that these focused teams know how to get tangible work done and that she looks forward to working in these smaller, task-oriented settings.

Committee Member Roche

Roche thanked everyone and expressed appreciation for the committee’s work and collaboration. She reinforced the supportive, collegial atmosphere as the meeting wrapped up.

Chair Kimble

Chair Kimble closed by thanking the committee members for their efforts and specifically recognizing DPW Project Coordinator Michelle Gibson for her substantial work on the invasives project. She also thanked DPW Superintendent Herbert for his ongoing support and broad contributions across many topics. Kimble reflected that the committee is finally wrapping up what she viewed as the “big three” environmental projects—Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, Mount Baldhead revegetation, and the city-wide invasives work—and expressed excitement about that milestone. She concluded by noting that, with those major efforts transitioning into implementation, the committee now has new projects to work on, such as benches/tables, wayfinding, and restroom improvements.

10. Adjournment

Motion by Roche supported by Hoffman, to adjourn. Via voice vote, motion carried unanimously. Chair Kimble adjourned meeting at 11:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by:
Jamie Wolters, City Clerk
City of Saugatuck