

## Downtown Saugatuck Planned Development and Future Parking Impacts

This narrative provides context and analysis of future parking demand in downtown Saugatuck. Included is a review of Saugatuck’s population, its master plan, and planned development projects. As reported herein, Saugatuck’s future growth and development strategy is centered on balancing preservation, tourism, housing needs, and environmental stewardship. Rather than pursuing rapid expansion, the city is intentionally guiding incremental growth that protects its historic character, natural assets, and small-town coastal identity while responding to evolving economic and residential needs.

### Context: Historical Population

**Table 1: Historical Saugatuck Population**

Census	Pop.	%±
1870	1,026	—
1880	794	-22.6%
1890	799	0.6%
1900	707	-11.5%
1910	621	-12.2%
1920	526	-15.3%
1930	696	32.3%
1940	628	-9.8%
1950	770	22.6%
1960	927	20.4%
1970	1,022	10.2%
1980	1,079	5.6%
1990	954	-11.6%
2000	1,065	11.6%
2010	925	-13.1%
2020	865	-6.5%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census

Population can serve as a proxy for parking demand, particularly for trend analysis. It is reasoned that a community with a steady population, neither increasing nor decreasing in a measurable way, is unlikely to see significant changes in its parking demand.

As shown in the table to the left, Saugatuck’s permanent resident population peaked in 1980 at 1,079, decreased in 1990 to 954, and then increased to 1,065. In 2010, the resident count decreased to 925, and by 2020, it had decreased to 865.

Although no official projections are available, it is reasonable to expect that the 2030 population will fall in the 850-950 range.

The takeaway here is that the steady population suggests stable parking demand and modest or no growth.

### The Master Plan as the Primary Policy Framework

The City of Saugatuck is updating its Master Plan, which serves as the primary long-range policy document guiding land-use, transportation, housing, infrastructure, and economic development decisions. Building upon the 2016 Tri-Community Master Plan shared with Douglas and Saugatuck Township, the updated plan provides more city-specific direction. Key objectives include preserving historic neighborhoods, focusing development in already-served areas, strengthening year-round residency, and ensuring new development aligns with community character.

## Growth Approach: Infill and Redevelopment

Future growth in Saugatuck is expected to occur primarily through infill development and redevelopment rather than outward expansion. The city discourages sprawl into surrounding rural and agricultural lands, instead prioritizing underutilized parcels, adaptive reuse of existing structures, and modest increases in density in targeted areas. This approach allows the community to accommodate growth while maintaining its physical footprint and scenic setting.

## Housing and Workforce Challenges

Housing availability and affordability are among the most pressing issues shaping future development policy. The area's strong tourism economy and second-home market have contributed to limited year-round and workforce housing options. In response, planning policies support a broader mix of housing types, including smaller units, duplexes, and low-scale multifamily housing. Regional partnerships and private initiatives are also being pursued to expand workforce housing opportunities without altering neighborhood character.

## Downtown and Economic Development

Saugatuck's downtown is envisioned as a vibrant, walkable mixed-use center that supports local businesses, arts, and cultural activities. Economic development efforts emphasize reinvestment, building preservation, and small-scale improvements rather than large new commercial projects. Tourism will remain a cornerstone of the local economy, but future strategies seek to balance visitor activity with resident quality of life and encourage more consistent, year-round economic vitality.

## Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements

Planned infrastructure investments focus on enhancing pedestrian safety, improving streetscapes, expanding bicycle and trail connectivity, and maintaining efficient local circulation. Emphasis is placed on traffic calming and multimodal access rather than road widening. These improvements support infill development, reduce congestion, and reinforce Saugatuck's pedestrian-oriented character.

## Environmental Protection and Open Space

Environmental conservation is a foundational element of Saugatuck's growth strategy. Policies strongly protect dunes, wetlands, river corridors, and wooded areas while integrating stormwater management and resilience planning into development standards. Coordination with regional parks and recreation planning ensures public access to natural areas while safeguarding sensitive landscapes.

## Overall Outlook

Over the next several decades, Saugatuck's development pattern is expected to remain cautious, deliberate, and community-focused. Growth will likely manifest as small-scale projects, housing diversification, infrastructure upgrades, and continued reinvestment in existing areas. Large-scale commercial development and dramatic changes to the city's form are unlikely. The guiding vision is to accommodate thoughtful changes while preserving the qualities that make Saugatuck distinctive and desirable.

## Will Future Plans Increase Parking Demand?

Future plans are expected to modestly increase parking demand; however, the increase is expected to be incremental, seasonal, and manageable. The City's growth strategy emphasizes infill development, redevelopment of existing sites, and small-scale housing diversification rather than large-scale expansion. As a result, parking impacts are expected to be limited compared to communities experiencing rapid growth.

## Key Drivers of Parking Demand

### 1. Residential Infill and Housing Diversification

Future residential growth is expected to occur primarily through infill and redevelopment, including smaller housing units, duplexes, and low-scale multifamily development. Based on comparable planning benchmarks, this level of growth could result in approximately 20–40 new housing units over the next 10–20 years.

Using an average parking demand of 1.0–1.5 spaces per unit, this translates to an estimated increase of approximately 25–60 parking spaces. Most of this demand would be accommodated through on-site parking, shared driveways, or on-street parking within residential neighborhoods, with limited impact on municipal parking lots.

### 2. Downtown Reinvestment and Mixed-Use Activity

Downtown development is expected to focus on reinvesting in existing buildings, fostering small-scale business growth, and promoting mixed-use activity within a walkable setting. This type of development typically increases parking turnover rather than overall demand, with modest increases during peak employee hours and during peak dining or event hours.

Overall, under the most optimistic scenario, downtown reinvestment is estimated to generate additional demand for up to a few dozen additional spaces, concentrated during evenings, weekends, and special events.

### 3. Tourism and Seasonal Peak Demand

Tourism will remain the primary driver of parking demand in Saugatuck. Annual visitation has evolved over decades and is reported to exceed one million. The planning framework does not anticipate a significant increase in total visitor volume, but rather continued seasonal peaks during summer weekends, festivals, and special events.

Any increase in parking demand related to tourism is expected to be modest—generally single digits and likely less than a 10 percent increase on peak days. This equates to an estimated need for 50–100 additional parking spaces during the busiest periods, with little to no change in off-season demand.

### 4. Planned Development

As part of the parking study effort, Walker asked the city to identify known planned development projects. The city identified the following two projects:

Table 2: Planned Saugatuck Development Projects

Address	Parcel	Zoning	Description
<b>250 MASON ST</b>	57-300-152-00	CER R-4 TRANS, ICE & SNOW	Change of use to Bed & Breakfast. Proposing 12 private parking spaces.
<b>640 WATER ST</b>	57-300-030-00	DWP DTN WATR PRV	PUD - new build - 2 story building - 2 STR units on 2nd floor - retail/kitchen space on ground floor - 3 parking spaces proposed.

Source: City of Saugatuck

Both planned developments are expected to provide their own parking. As shown, the 250 Mason Street project is a proposed change of use to a bed-and-breakfast with 12 private parking spaces. The 640 Water Street project is a planned unit development with two storage units, retail and kitchen space on the ground floor, and three parking spaces.

### Overall Parking Impact Estimate

When combining residential, downtown, and tourism-related factors, the total long-term increase in parking demand is estimated to be approximately 100–150 spaces. Based on the conservative growth assumptions in the Master Plan, the lower end of this range is considered the most realistic planning scenario.

### Why the Impact Is Manageable

Several planned policy initiatives help moderate parking demand, including improvements to walkability and pedestrian safety, expanded bicycle and trail connectivity, traffic calming measures, and an emphasis on compact, mixed-use development. Together, these strategies reduce short vehicle trips, increase parking turnover, and lessen the need for new large-scale parking facilities.

### Conclusion

In summary, Saugatuck’s future growth plans will result in a gradual and modest increase in parking demand, primarily during peak tourism periods. The scale of anticipated growth does not suggest the need for significant additional parking capacity. Instead, targeted management of peak-day demand, shared parking strategies, and incremental adjustments to existing parking supply are likely to be sufficient.