

**MINUTES**  
**Plainwell City Council**  
**May 11, 2026**

1. Mayor Keeler called the regular meeting to order at 7:00pm in City Hall Council Chambers.
2. Invocation: Given by Brian Warren from Lighthouse Baptist Church.
3. Pledge of Allegiance was given by all present.
4. Roll Call: Present: Mayor Brad Keeler, Mayor Pro Tem Lori Steele and Councilmembers Randy Wisnaski, Roger Keeney and Cathy Green.
5. Approval of Minutes:  
**A motion by Steele, seconded by Wisnaski, to accept and place on file the Council Meeting Minutes of the 04/27/2026 regular meeting. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**
6. Public Comment: None
7. County Commissioner Report: None
8. Agenda approval:  
**A motion by Wisnaski, seconded by Keeney, to approve the Agenda for the May 11, 2026 meeting as presented. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**
9. Mayor's Report:  
Mayor Keeler noted that City Manager Lakamper had been with the City almost 3 years already, and his contract is coming up in June. Mayor Keeler asked if Council wanted to discuss the contract at next month's Council meeting. Councilmember Green asked about the Manager review process, and Personnel Coordinator Kersten responded that she'll get Council their evaluation forms shortly, and the review process and contract discussion will take place before the final budget approval in June.
10. Recommendations and Reports:
  - A. Clerk Leonard discussed scheduling the 2026/2027 Budget Workshop for Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026 at 5:30pm.  
**A motion by Keeney, seconded by Wisnaski, approving a special meeting on Monday, June 08, 2026 at 5:30pm to discuss the preliminary 2026/2027 budget. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**
  - B. City Manager Lakamper discussed new playground equipment for Thurl Cook Park. The park was used as a staging area by USA Earthworks during the Old Orchard construction project, and when moving piping with machinery they struck several trees causing significant damage. The trees were evaluated by an arborist who provided an estimated replacement cost. The City then negotiated with USA Earthworks and obtained approximately \$15,000 from them, which was intended to go toward upgrading the playground equipment. Plainwell also applied for and received two \$10k grants from the Anna Pipp Foundation, giving Plainwell a total of \$35,000 to purchase and install new playground equipment. This major upgrade to a popular park will happen with little to no direct cost to the City due to generous grant funding coupled with the \$15,000 tree damage reimbursement from USA Earthworks. After researching pricing and equipment offerings from several playground equipment vendors, American Parks Company is recommended for this project.  
**A motion by Keeney, seconded by Steele, approving the purchase of playground equipment from American Parks Company for \$31,941.88. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**
  - C. Superintendent Keyzer discussed the removal and replacement of damaged fencing at Water Renewal. The original 8' wooden fencing surrounding the Bioxide Station was old, and heavily damaged during the recent storm. The 4x4 posts were rotted and snapped off at the ground, and three panels were knocked down. The wooden fence will be replaced with 6' tall chain link fence with privacy slats. This will be part of the City's storm damage insurance claim. Two quotes were received. Superior Fence and Rail is recommended for this job.

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**A motion by Green, seconded by Keeney, approving the removal and replacement of damaged fencing around the Bioxide Station by Superior Fence and Rail for \$5,439.57.**

**11. Communications:**

**A motion by Steele, seconded by Wisnaski, to accept and place on file the April 2026 Investment and Fund Balance Reports and the April Water Renewal Report. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**

**12. Accounts Payable:**

**A motion by Keeney, seconded by Wisnaski, that the bills be allowed and orders drawn in the amount of \$85,066.91 for payment of the same. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**

**13. Public Comments:**

- A. Bunny LaDuke – shared she understood that Council would be discussing the dissolution of the Parks & Tree Commission. She stated that she thought it would be helpful if Parks & Trees made periodic reports to Council, and discussed what the Parks & Tree Commission volunteer board does for Plainwell and its residents. She provided a handout to the Council members detailing projects and improvements throughout Plainwell that Parks & Tree have been a part over the past several years, mentioning their strong partnership with Chula Vista Garden Club, another area volunteer group working to beautify the City.
- B. Rachel Colingsworth of 115 Walnut Woods - asked that Council and staff use the microphones as it can be difficult to hear. She asked why Planning Commission meetings have been canceled since January, sharing that she's been on Planning for over 10 years, and is it unusual to go so long without a meeting.
- C. Matthew Bradley of 115 Walnut woods – introduced himself as Chairperson of the Parks & Tree Commission. He noted that like Bunny mentioned, they are all volunteers. Parks & Trees has no budget, and doesn't cost the City anything. Many of their projects and ideas are based on community feedback.

**14. Staff Comments:**

- A. Personnel Coordinator/Deputy Treasurer Kersten stated that the DPW contract negotiations are going well and are currently being reviewed. She discussed spending a week at Treasurer's Institute, a training course offered by the Michigan Municipal Treasurers Association, sharing that she learned a lot of useful information. This was her second year.
- B. Superintendent Nieuwenhuis stated that hydrant flushing went well. He is working with Amanda to fill a permanent part time position at DPW, as well as a seasonal worker. Most of the tornado damage has been cleared, though there are stumps remaining that will need to be ground down. The City flowers should arrive next week.
- C. Superintendent Keyzer reported that the storms caused a higher-than-normal flow rate at Water Renewal, leading to an increase in chemical use, otherwise everything is going well.
- D. Director Callahan gave an update on the accreditation assessment, sharing that it went great, and that he and Detective Varley will be going to pick up the certification on June 24<sup>th</sup>. He shared that DPS received positive feedback from local businesses and residents. He stated that FEMA would be coming to Plainwell to assess storm damage.
- E. Clerk Leonard stated she continues to look for election workers.
- F. City Manager Lakamper met with the DNR to discuss the dam project, noting that all the dams in Plainwell are failing. This project has several stakeholders- the City of Plainwell, the property owners, as well as the DNR. Since the DNR maintains partial ownership of the dams, they have a say in the overall project. They are also a potential source of funding, so their input is important. When the dam project started years ago, there was a general understanding that the Mill Race would remain. Lakamper feels that Dam Presentation to the public several months ago reinforced the cultural significance of the Mill Race to the DNR, which is a good thing. However, we need to find a way to design and build something that will both maintain the Mill Race and solve the issue of the failing dams. Fish passage is one source of potential funding, as well as general wildlife

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restoration. The Morrow Dam settlement provides \$25 million for a 40-mile stretch of the Kalamazoo River, including Plainwell. The DNR has concerns about how the project has been designed so far, and we will need more buy in from the DNR before we can move forward. The current plan is to obtain letters from the property owners, so we can submit permits and get official feedback from the permitting agencies and use that information as a starting point to regroup. The current engineering grant runs out in December, and can't be extended, so we need to get as far as we can with the current engineering company by December. Both DNR representative Noah and Lakamper feel that getting the permit application submitted is the best way to do that. That will allow for feedback from the State on the current design, and then we can address any issues moving forward potentially with a new design firm. Lakamper noted that the Mill Race is artificially raised and the dam structures contain earthen embankments, so it isn't just diverted by the cement dams. One idea being discussed is to try and lower the entirety of the Mill Race and that it might naturally flow and not need structures to maintain some amount of water. This is probably the design that has the most promise of moving forward.

The Mill property is being surveyed to create parcels for both Classic Auto Mill and Plainwell Auto, and completing these surveys will allow the purchase agreements to move forward.

He gave an update on the purchase agreement with Bex Farms for property in the Industrial expansion. The agreement has been pushed back to September. Once the site plan for the proposed Ready-Mix plant is submitted, both it and the Special Use Permit Application will come to the Planning Commission for review. We are still waiting on the engineering report for Building #2 to determine what happens with that building.

15. Council Comments:

- A. Councilmember Green asked about fallen trees and who is responsible for cleaning them up. Director Callahan responded that if a tree doesn't strike a house, homeowner's insurance doesn't apply and it is the property owners' responsibility. Mayor Keeler added that City residents are lucky, because in the township, you own to the center of the street and are responsible for all of it. There is no public right of way, and the Allegan County Road Commission has stated it's the property owner's responsibility to remove any downed trees. Councilmember Green asked about the cemetery, sharing that there is storm damage there as well. Mayor Keeler noted that the cemeteries are all located in Gun Plain Township. City Manager Lakamper added that many township residents have asked why the City of Plainwell can't clear trees and brush for them as well. Legally, we can't do that. There is a notion that if the City does it, it is free, but that simply isn't true. There is a cost associated with cleaning up, with Plainwell spending around \$40k so far. It's up to the other municipalities to decide what assistance to offer to their residents and how to pay for it. Councilmember Green asked if Allegan County had further information or a plan. No one has heard of anything like that. Director Calahan and City Manager Lakamper shared that Plainwell has submitted claims to Emergency Management, but aren't sure what, if anything, to expect as far as reimbursement.

16. Adjournment:

**A motion by Green, seconded by Keeney, to adjourn the meeting at 7:53pm. On a voice vote, all voted in favor. Motion passed.**

Minutes respectfully  
submitted by,  
JoAnn Leonard  
City Clerk

MINUTES APPROVED BY CITY COUNCIL  
May 26, 2026

  
JoAnn Leonard, City Clerk