



**CITY OF WALLED LAKE
DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Tuesday, January 13, 2026**

The Meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance led by DDA Chairman Blair

ROLL CALL: Allen, Amin, Blair, Gunther, Johnston, Lublin, McDonald, Raleigh

ABSENT: Marshall, Mechigian

OTHERS PRESENT: Council Member Woods, Council Member Ambrose, Public Safety Deputy Director Shakinas, Deputy Police Chief Kolke, Fire Chief Gonzalez, DPW Menzies, City Attorney Vanerian, Finance Director Pesta, and City Clerk Stuart

There being a quorum present the meeting was declared in session.

DDA 01-01-26 MOTION TO EXCUSE DDA BOARD MEMBERS MARSHALL AND MECHIGIAN FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Motion by Lublin, seconded by Johnston: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY: To excuse DDA Board Members Marshall and Mechigian from today's meeting.

REQUESTS FOR AGENDA CHANGES:

DDA Chairman Blair requested to discuss the banner program.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES:

1. Regular DDA Meeting of October 14, 2025

DDA 01-02-26 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 14, 2025 MEETING

Motion by Johnston, seconded by Lublin: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY: To approve the minutes of the October 14, 2025 meeting.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) 42-inch replacement project update

City Manager Whitt explained Public Works representative Eric Menzies is present today to provide an update. City Manager Whitt explained this is a GLWA project not a city project, they are directing the construction.

Mr. Eric Menzies with the Department of Public Works explained he met with Brian from Ric-Man Construction to review the status and progress of the current infrastructure projects. He explained the Maple Road project, which began a few weeks ago and involves internal lining of the existing pipe, remains on schedule. Work is expected to be completed by February 1, at which time traffic will be fully reopened. He explained there will be work on Angle Road beginning as early as next week, crews will access several manholes along Angle Road. A small portion of the roadway will be closed, but residents will continue to have access in and out of the area. This work includes installation of a fiber-optic monitoring system that detects the sound of wire breaks in the water main. This technology allows future failures to be predicted before they occur. The fiber-optic cable will run along 14 Mile Road from Beach Walk Drive to Beck Road. He further explained construction began yesterday on the 14 Mile project between East Lake Drive and Decker Road. Crews are accessing the water main for internal lining and replacement of some pipe. He explained this project will be done in three phases. He said Phase One is 14 Mile Road between East Lake Drive and Decker Road and is expected to be completed by mid-February. Phases Two and Three will be east of Decker Road to M-5 to include one section that is approximately one mile long which will be fully replaced. A second section, approximately 240 feet, is located just west of M-5. He said both of these phases are expected to begin within the next week. He said he was told Phase Two is scheduled for completion by March 2026 and Phase Three, the one-mile replacement section, is expected to be completed by April 2026.

DDA Chairman Blair said he sees that Maple Road is closed off but does not see people working. Why is nobody there.

Mr. Menzies said the crews are using the center lanes and there are construction tents in between the large trailer machines, crews are accessing the watermains through manholes, the work is underground under the road.

DDA Board Member Lublin asked about the work that was done in the last couple of years in the same area.

Mr. Menzies explained his understanding of that work was for the installation of the 24-inch bypass that the city is currently using right now to provide its water and it also provides water service to all the surrounding areas.

City Manager Whitt explained Ric-Man Construction is a professional company they do work all over the country from west coast to east coast. He said they will be working through the holidays. He said he has been communicating with them.

2. Update on downtown development

City Manager Whitt explained that the DDA purchased the properties across from the beach downtown. He explained that the DDA board must consider and begin discussion on how to utilize the property. City Manager Whitt explained what came up at last night's Parks and Recreation meeting was discussed to turn it into a city park. City Manager Whitt explained the DDA will vote on how to utilize it, we do not want it as a parking lot. City Manager Whitt explained, "you do not want a parking lot for the non-resident beach users in his opinion. He explained historically the city has been able to use these parcels for city events. Including the fireworks display.

DDA Board Member Lublin said the concept starts with the DDA and then it moves to City Council.

City Manager Whitt said City Council approves the budget, but the DDA has the say how to utilize it. He said the DDA is a component unit of the city, they can do things independent of the City Council. He said he believes all parties will be on the same page. City Manager Whitt said the DDA is controlling what will happen to these parcels.

DDA Chairman Blair explained he would like this discussion to continue at the next meeting, giving all members time to do their due diligence.

City Manager Whitt said there is a new majority council and at the next City Council meeting there will be another presentation from the consultant city engineer on Phase I of the downtown rehabilitation which will include these parcels.

DDA Board Member McDonald asked about the property downtown and said parking is most needed. Why not make it a parking lot, charge or not charge but a parking lot not a park.

DDA Chairman Blair said he personally is not totally in favor of parking lot. He said in his opinion there are so many people using Mercer Beach that are not Walled Lake residents we should not create more parking for those users. He said he is not sure if parking is best use, this suggestion creates a lot of discussion, there cannot be any snap judgments on this.

DDA Board Member McDonald asked then what is the plan.

DDA Chairman Blair said he plans on discussing with each DDA member in preparations for next month's meeting.

DDA Board Member Lublin said parking is a concern, but not an underlying use for these parcels.

City Manager Whitt explained no one disputes the need to improve the appearance of the downtown area. There is broad agreement that it currently looks disjointed and lacks a cohesive design. Buildings and facades do not match or complement one another, and existing sign and façade standards allow inconsistent and, at times, inappropriate designs. This points to the need to strengthen and modernize the City's development and design codes. There is likely to be support for improving those standards so that future projects contribute to a more unified, attractive downtown rather than allowing anything to be built without regard to context or visual quality. He explained City Council has started discussions for city code improvements if the city wants a downtown area that looks intentional, coordinated, and worthy of investment.

Mayor Gunther said he agrees.

3. Discussion – Event Planning e.g. fireworks

City Manager Whitt explained the DDA will participate as long as there is board agreement to do so.

DDA Board Member Johnston explained as a member of the Civic Fund, the group expressed strong support for the DDA's acquisition of the downtown property. There is broad interest in using that space for more than just the annual fireworks display. Several ideas were discussed, including hosting community events and fundraising activities such as chili cook-offs, barbeque competitions, and similar gatherings that would bring people downtown, increase foot traffic, and support local businesses. He explained that the Civic Fund is also interested in being able to use the property for additional events beyond fireworks. He said there was discussion about if the city could generate revenue through a permitting process for these types of activities, similar to how other communities manage their park and event spaces. He said cities, such as Novi, require permits for organized gatherings, which allows for both recreation and revenue generation. He said another major topic was the long-term sustainability of the fireworks program. He explained after nearly 16 years of operation the fundraising effort has become increasingly difficult to sustain on a year-to-year basis. He said comparisons were made with neighboring communities, including Commerce Lake, Wolverine Lake, Long Lake, and Union Lake. While those communities admire how Walled Lake has successfully run its program, several of them receive financial support from their cities or villages. He explained that Wolverine Lake was cited as an example of a community that contributes municipal funding toward its fireworks display. He said based on that model, the Civic Fund discussed whether the DDA could provide support in the future, which would create greater shared ownership of the event and allow it to be promoted more clearly as a City of Walled Lake fireworks celebration.

DDA Chairman Blair asked what the Civic Fund would like to see the DDA donate.

DDA Board Member Johnston explained it costs approximately \$40,000/year for the firework display and prices are now going up this year. He explained that the Civic Fund met with business entity Firefly to inquire about drone coverage. He explained the logistics of drone coverage is extensive. He said Wolverine Lake contributes \$15,000.

DDA Chairman Blair said if Wolverine Lake can contribute \$15,000, the DDA can do the same.

DDA Board Member Johnston said the Civic Fund wants to participate with the city to help facilitate the days event, work together, and bring in drones to capture the firework show. He again stressed the extensive planning involved with the use of drones. He said in the manpower and funding that Mr. Millen and staff from the Green House provide in the past was tremendous including all the work of DPW, police, fire and numerous volunteers.

City Manager Whitt explained there are real and unavoidable costs to the city whenever an event takes place, whether it is formally approved or not. When activity occurs on the lake or downtown, the Police Department must assign additional officers, and the Fire Department must have equipment and personnel on standby. These public safety and staffing requirements create significant expenses. In addition, city staff spends substantial time planning, coordinating, and supporting these events well in advance.

DDA Board Member Amin explained she agrees that having multiple fireworks displays in the area tends to dilute attendance and overall impact. She asked if there has been any discussion with the organizers of the other local shows about consolidating into a single, coordinated event? Doing so could reduce overall costs, concentrate sponsorships and attendance, and create a larger, more meaningful community celebration rather than several smaller, competing events.

DDA Board Member Johnston explained the Civic Fund has reached out and discussed this option with that person that puts on those other shows. He said that person has declined to be a part of our group. Mr. Johnston said he wants to bring to everybody's attention that he did discuss with the Police Chief of Novi, Mr. Zinser because this person is pulling permits in Novi for firework displays. He said a serious concern with multiple, independently run fireworks shows is the public safety risk. He explained in one instance, a contractor used Styrofoam flotation platforms to stage large fireworks. Those platforms caught fire, and the crew did not have proper fire extinguishers on hand. They attempted to put out the fire using paddles, which is not an acceptable or safe method when dealing with explosive materials. He said an incident like that puts everyone at risk. If a serious accident were to occur, it could jeopardize not just that one event, but fireworks displays across the region, including the city's program. He said a single injury or major incident could lead to shutdowns, stricter regulations, or cancellations imposed on all communities. This is another reason why coordination, proper oversight, and consistent safety standards are critical when fireworks are conducted on or near the lake. Mr. Johnston said the vendor used by the Civic Fund is professional and follows the rules, safety is critical to them.

Mayor Gunther said he agrees with DDA Board Member Johnston, it is worthy of discussions.

4. Banner Program

DDA Chairman Blair explained he understands funding has already been appropriated for the upcoming year to update the downtown flags and banners, including replacing the plaques and installing new materials. He said it was suggested to dedicate a portion of the new banners to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States which he thinks is worthy to consider.

Finance Director Pesta explained three quotes were obtained, the most cost effective was from a company out of Kalamazoo, KBW. She explained a commemorate flag product base with the same size starts around \$91.00. She explained once the board finalizes it is onto the creation of the application and sponsorship offerings. She explained if businesses wished to have their name on banner there would be an additional fee of \$25-30.

Banner design options were discussed

EXECUTIVE & MANAGING DIRECTOR REPORT:

1. Public Safety Activity Report

Deputy Public Safety Director Shakinis explained that the traffic issues with construction along Maple Road are being addressed daily with monitoring and citation issuance. He explained officers have been out there along with the sheriff and dozens of citations have been issued but drivers are still disobeying. He said along Leon Road they are working to slow people down; more traffic stops are being pursued, he asked for patience.

City Manager Whitt said traffic enforcement is stronger than ever right now.

WARRANT REPORT:

1. October - December 2025

DDA 01-03-26 APPROVAL TO RECEIVE AND FILE THE WARRANT FOR OCTOBER 2025 THROUGH DECEMBER 2025

Motion by Lublin, seconded by Raleigh: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY: To receive and file the warrant for October 2025 through December 2025.

ADJOURNMENT:

DDA 01-04-26 ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Lublin, seconded by Johnston: CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY: To adjourn the meeting at 4:43 P.M.



Jennifer A. Stuart
City Clerk



Steve Blair
DDA Chairman