

MEMORANDUM



TO: VICTOR CARDENAS, CITY MANAGER
FROM: DANIELLE MAHONEY, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER
SUBJECT: SHAWOOD LAKE STAKEHOLDER MEETING
DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

Mayor and Council –

Please see the following summary from a recent meeting held with staff and ELGL, along with members of Council, regarding Shawood Lake and possible/allowable options for changes to it.

- Victor

Key Highlights

- Stakeholders, led by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), met with City staff and council members of the Environmental Sustainability Committee to discuss Shawood Lake's ecological health and recreation potential.
- An on-site meeting was held at Shawood Lake in October 2024 to address these same issues, and staff have been awaiting a clear, written recommendation from EGLE since that time.
- The City's 2022 purchase of the Shawood Lake island increased City ownership of the lake area from ~75% to ~95% and spurred conversation about programming and non-motorized recreation opportunities.
- Council's August 2025 motion directed the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Commission to develop plan options for Shawood Lake and the island for discussion during the FY 2026 budget planning process.
- EGLE emphasized that historical vegetation patterns in Shawood Lake have been consistent since the 1930s and cautioned against the use of aeration and bio-augmentation.

Background

In January 2022, City Council approved the purchase of two properties on Shawood Lake, including an island parcel, for \$175,000. The purchase increased City ownership of the lake from approximately 75% to 95%, including ownership of the island itself. The existing home on the island was deemed unusable, with the City's intent to remove it and restore the site for passive and recreational purposes.

This acquisition sparked renewed conversations about Shawood Lake's recreational potential, particularly opportunities for non-motorized uses such as kayaking. City staff envisioned limited vegetation removal to support lake access, while intentionally avoiding wholesale dredging or the elimination of lily pads.

Building on this momentum, in August 2025 Council unanimously approved Motion CM 25-08-114, directing the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Commission to develop programming options for Shawood Lake and the island. These options will be presented to the Council for discussion during the initial budget planning session in January 2026.

Against this backdrop, a stakeholder meeting was convened by EGLE (facilitated by Sue Tepatti) to provide technical input on the lake's condition and appropriate management practices. The meeting included EGLE staff, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, City staff, and members of the Environmental Sustainability Committee.

Discussion Summary

The discussion began with EGLE staff sharing historical imagery of Shawood Lake, which showed that the lake's vegetation patterns have remained largely unchanged since the 1930s. They noted that natural oxygen levels in the lake are already sufficient, making aeration unnecessary, and they raised concerns about the long-term effectiveness of bio-augmentation. From their perspective, the most important factor in maintaining lake health is addressing nutrient inputs, which if left unmanaged could accelerate cultural eutrophication (the human-accelerated process of nutrient enrichment in a body of water, such as a lake or river).

Council members and staff emphasized that the City's recent purchase of the island has created new opportunities to enhance Shawood Lake for residents, particularly for passive and non-motorized recreational activities, such as kayaking. The conversation explored how limited vegetation clearing might support access, while also recognizing the ecological value of maintaining native vegetation such as lily pads. Balancing environmental health with recreation potential emerged as a central theme of the discussion.

In addition to ecological and recreation considerations, EGLE representatives reminded participants of the legal requirements that must be met before any physical interventions can occur. Riparian rights and bottomland ownership must be clearly documented, as permits for vegetation management or structural improvements cannot be issued without proper authorization.

Conclusion and Action Items

Ultimately, EGLE advised the City against altering the lake through bio-augmentation and instead encouraged the City to provide education outreach to residents while encouraging passive recreation opportunities (such as kayaking and bird watching). Additionally, the following action items were noted:

- Ownership/Riparian Rights: City of Novi to further investigate riparian rights around Shawood Lake to clarify permitting requirements.

- Recreation Access Planning: City of Novi to explore access points and other amenities tied to the island purchase to support kayaking and non-motorized recreation.
- Resident Education: City of Novi to consider outreach on fertilizer use and nutrient management practices.
- EGLE Guidance: EGLE to provide a clear, updated summary of recommended practices for Shawood Lake.
- Parks & Recreation Commission Planning: As directed by Council's August 2025 motion, and now with clear guidance from EGLE, the Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services Commission will develop plan options for Shawood Lake and the island for discussion at the January 2026 budget planning session.