From City Manager
Jim Ritsema

The hot and hazy summer days are here, and many of us are doing things typical for this time of year – golfing, biking, and walking our community’s trails, checking out great live entertainment and festivals at Arcadia Festival Place, taking in a Growlers baseball game, enjoying a cool swim, and barbecuing in the yard with family and friends. It’s a festive time, as we celebrate our nation’s birthday and as we take part in the multiple citywide festivities such as the Black Arts Festival and the Washington Avenue Art Crawl.

Getting around the city this summer to enjoy everything taking place – or simply to leave your home and return – is a challenge and frustration that we fully understand. We are all impacted by the numerous construction projects taking place on our streets. Some of you may wonder why so many projects are being done at once. The simple explanation is these projects are funded by over $28 million in state and federal grants received in 2023 and this year to improve water quality and water reliability. These grants stipulate the projects be done within a certain time frame, otherwise we lose the funding and the ability to make the infrastructure improvements our city so desperately needs.

Since 2021, the City of Kalamazoo has received nearly $74 million in total grants for transportation, safety, and storm water infrastructure. That is more than four times the capital budget we’ve had the last three years!

With this additional funding, and much needed investments in our aging infrastructure, comes additional construction projects along with the opportunity to move forward for a better tomorrow. Our investments today will mean reliable, clean, and safe drinking water, and transportation that is safe and efficient into the future. We thank you for your patience and understanding as we diligently work to improve our great city.

Again, let me emphasize that our door is always open, and our job is to serve you. May you have a safe and enjoyable summer and throughout the rest of the year.

Thanks For Your Patience As We Modernize Our Infrastructure!

There a lot of cones in the streets this summer. Yes, road construction is definitely frustrating. But these projects are also extremely important. They’re not just resurfacing roads (no, not just installing bike lanes either)- they’re making our streets safer and replacing aging infrastructure that hasn’t been touched in decades, or in some cases, more than a century. There are projects underway that are improving every utility in the city: water, sewer, stormwater, communications, gas, and electric. This work is modernizing the infrastructure that we all depend on, but rarely think about. It will set our city and our community up for success long into the future.

Between grant awards, private utility work & investments, and the city’s capital projects, a lot of different factors converged this year and led to a really impactful construction season. This amount of investment hasn’t been seen in Kalamazoo since the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Yes, it’s a lot. But when it’s finished, it will serve all of us with more reliable utilities and safer streets. Our infrastructure will be the foundation for the community’s future growth and prosperity.

We know that businesses in these areas are impacted as well. We’re doing more to support businesses through this construction season, but their continued success depends on us taking a few extra minutes to continue supporting them. All businesses are open and accessible. Take a few extra minutes to show your support.

We’re working to coordinate projects and minimize the impacts as much as possible. We’re working with our contractors to complete work as quickly as they can. So please, bear with us for the rest of this season. Leave a few minutes early, keep supporting your favorite shops and restaurants, and know that in a few months you’ll be driving on a brand new road over brand new utilities. We’re looking forward to it, too.

Plan Ahead, Be Prepared, Stay Informed

You can find a list of ongoing projects at kalamazoocity.org/projects. Subscribe to the list to be notified when there are any updates or new projects added, or subscribe to a specific project that is near your home or on your commute. You can also follow the City of Kalamazoo on social media for updates on road construction and other projects.

New ductile iron water main is lowered into place on Westnedge Ave

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Find more information at kalamazoocity.org/projects
Earn Some Cash and Help Democracy: Work at the Polls! Did you know how many black people get to vote in Kalamazoo by people from right here in our community? It takes between 150 and 300 Kalamazoo residents to administer as many as 150 locations. So voters are counting on people like you to make sure they can vote.

Working at the polls is a great way to meet other civic-minded people, provide the most critical public service that our democracy depends on, and earn money too! Poll workers are paid a minimum of $16/hour for Election Day and during training.

As a poll worker, you'll also learn about the systems and processes in place that ensure every election is conducted fairly and with integrity, and why we have to do in the first place.

Youth & Teens Can Share Their Talents on August 16 Kazoos and the Kalamazoo Civic are excited to bring the Youth & Teen Talent Show back to Bronson Park this summer! Youth and teens 18 and under can participate in the talent show with music, dance, comedy performances, and more!

The Talent Show will be at Lunchtime Live! on Friday, August 16. Registration is open through July 25, with auditions taking place on July 23 and 25 (or you can submit a video of your act).

Did we mention there's prizes, too? Share your skills with your community! Register today at kzooparks.org/TalentShow.

Summer Tax Bills Show Continued Benefit from FFE Summer tax bills are mailed July 1 and include the City’s portion of your property taxes. Since 2017, the Foundation for Excellence (FFE) has funded a tax reduction for every property taxpayer of about 37%, saving tax payers an average of $728 every year. In total, Kalamazoo taxpayers have saved more than $80 million!

In addition to saving people money, this makes the City more competitive in attracting investment, talent, and jobs. The lower tax rate means the City is asking for less from Kalamazoo residents while still providing more services and investment from the FFE’s aspirational funding.

FFE is a unique innovation by the City of Kalamazoo and philanthropy to address systemic challenges to the prosperity of our city, investing nearly $170 million to date. It empowers us to achieve the lives we want for ourselves and our families. Find out more at www.kalamazooffe.org.

FBE Board Seeks Affinity Organization Director The Foundation for Excellence Board of Directors is accepting applications for its Affinity Organizations Stakeholder position through July 31. It’s a volunteer position that will help govern the FFE only at all organization and endowment so it can help Kalamazoo residents forever. Learn more about this opportunity at kalamazooffe.org.

Go For a Paddle! New Kayak Rental Kiosk in Verburg Park Makes It Easier than Ever! We’re excited to share there’s a new kayak rental kiosk at Verburg Park! Just scan the QR code, pay for your rental (from 2 hours to a full day), and you’re ready to go. It’s super easy to use! Each rental comes with a paddle and life jacket. It’s $25 for 2 hours and $15 for each hour after. Or you can rent a kayak for the whole day for $80.

It’s a great way to enjoy the park from the water. Perfect for a relaxing solo trip or a fun outing with friends and family. Come check it out and enjoy some time on the water!

New Mural Finished Downtown on the Monroe Building Artist Bonus Saves (Bonusaves) recently finished a new mural downtown on the back of the Monroe Building. It’s dedicated to the kids who call Kalamazoo home, our vibrant art scene, and the movers and shakers who push towards a brighter tomorrow. It’s near Arcadia Creek Festival site and the new 180 E Water Building—head to Downtown Kalamazoo and check it out!

City Council's Final Regular Meeting of 2023 Today's City Council meeting includes discussions on the 2024-2025 budget and contracts for new city park programs.

Kalamazoo Launches Reusable Container Program for Takeout We're excited to launch a new pilot program to reduce waste from plastic and foam to takeout containers! With a small $5 deposit, you'll be able to get your order to go in a durable and reusable metal container at participating restaurants. Just ask for a ForEverWare reusable container with your order. When you're done with it, rinse it out and bring it back to any participating location. Your $5 will be returned to your account and you'll be ready for your next take out order! Sankazy Bakery is the first participating business and we expect to bring more partners into the program soon, so ask for ForEver Ware at your favorite downtown spot! Find all the details about how it works (or how to join if you own a business) at kalamazoocity.org/reusable.

New Urban Agriculture Program to Improve the Bike Network The City of Kalamazoo is launching a new urban agriculture program to improve the bike network. The program will focus on education and outreach to encourage people to bike and grow food in their communities. The announcement comes on the heels of the city’s successful 2023 Community Bike Month, which featured over 25 events and workshops to promote bike safety and accessibility. The new program is expected to build on that momentum and help the city achieve its VisionZero goal of eliminating bike fatalities by 2030. The announcement comes as the city moves forward with the development of a new bike plan that includes a comprehensive network of bike lanes and trails. The plan is expected to be completed next year, and the city will be seeking input from the public as it develops the plan. The new urban agriculture program is expected to be a key component of that plan and will help the city achieve its goal of creating a more bike-friendly city. The city will be working with local organizations and community groups to identify potential sites for urban agriculture projects, and the program will be open to people of all ages and backgrounds. The city is also expected to provide resources and support to help get these projects off the ground, including grants, equipment, and technical assistance. The new program is expected to create jobs and bring economic development to the city, as well as improve the quality of life for residents by making the city more bike-friendly and sustainable. The city is committed to ensuring that the program is accessible to all residents, and it will be working to identify ways to make it affordable for people of all income levels. The city will also be working to ensure that the program promotes equity and community engagement, and it will be seeking input from the public as it develops the program. The city is committed to creating a city that is more bike-friendly, and it is excited to launch this new urban agriculture program as part of that effort. The city will be working with local organizations and community groups to identify potential sites for urban agriculture projects, and the program will be open to people of all ages and backgrounds. The city is also expected to provide resources and support to help get these projects off the ground, including grants, equipment, and technical assistance. The new program is expected to create jobs and bring economic development to the city, as well as improve the quality of life for residents by making the city more bike-friendly and sustainable. The city is committed to ensuring that the program is accessible to all residents, and it will be working to identify ways to make it affordable for people of all income levels. The city will also be working to ensure that the program promotes equity and community engagement, and it will be seeking input from the public as it develops the program. The city is committed to creating a city that is more bike-friendly, and it is excited to launch this new urban agriculture program as part of that effort.
City Support Boosts Local Businesses

The City of Kalamazoo is thrilled to share the opening of the newest business in Downtown Kalamazoo, Dessert First! Owner Meka Phillips founded the business in 2011, creating custom cupcakes and cakes, and is now opening her first storefront. Dessert First offers all of the sweets that the business is known for, but also breakfast and lunch. It’s located at 220 Eleanor St, connected to the Hilton Garden Inn. The City of Kalamazoo is proud to have been able to support Meka with its Business Development Fund.

Just a short walk away on the Kalamazoo Mall is another downtown favorite: Colors & Cocktails. With city support, the store at 240 S Kalamazoo Mall has received funding for facade and interior improvements. These enhancements will create an even more inviting space for art parties and guests, while they shop a wide selection of local and women-owned products.

The City of Kalamazoo is proud to be able to support the local and neighborhood businesses that make play such an important role in our community.

Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 Planning To Start This Fall, Build On Success of IK2025

When we started the Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 Vision & Master Plan in 2017, our community was in a much different place. Together, we created a vision for Kalamazoo’s future and a clear plan to start making it a reality. In the years since, 99% of the actions contained within the plan have been completed or are in progress!

The bold vision for Kalamazoo has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in our community, and was foundational to the creation of the Foundation for Excellence, which will invest millions more every year forever.

All of this is to say, the Master Plan is really important. And your voice is important, too. When city staff start working on the Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 Master Plan this fall, please share your priorities, opinions and ideas. We need to hear from every one in our community, so don’t sit this one out.

We expect Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 to start this September. Follow the City of Kalamazoo on social media, join our email list, or follow the local media to make sure you know when IK2035 gets started! Stay in touch at kalamazoocity.org/connect.