

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 25, 2011

The Regular Meeting was called to order by Mayor Strazdas at 7:30 p.m.

At the request of Mayor Strazdas, Pastor Richard Hertsel of the Centre Avenue Community Church of God of Portage gave the invocation and the City Council and the audience recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

The City Clerk called the roll with the following members present: Councilmembers Cory A. Bailes, Elizabeth A. Campbell, Patricia M. Randall, Claudette S. Reid and Terry R. Urban, and Mayor Peter J. Strazdas. Mayor Pro Tem Edward J. Sackley was absent with excuse. Also in attendance were City Manager Maurice S. Evans, Assistant City Attorney Charlie Bear and City Clerk James R. Hudson.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to approve the January 11, 2011 Special and Regular Meeting Minutes as presented. Upon a voice vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

* **CONSENT AGENDA:** Mayor Strazdas asked Councilmember Urban to read the Consent Agenda. Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to approve the Consent Agenda motions as presented. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

* **APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS PAYABLE REGISTER OF JANUARY 25, 2011:** Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to approve the Accounts Payable Register of January 25, 2011. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

STATEMENTS OF CITIZENS: State Representative Margaret O'Brien representing the 61st District reminded City Council of the invitation she sent them to a meeting of all elected officials on February 18, 2011; that she can be reached by phone or e-mail; that her new toll-free number is 877/347-8061; and, that her first office hours in Portage will be at the ChocolaTea Co., 7642 South Westnedge Avenue, Friday, February 4th from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. She indicated that her committee assignments are all on the policy side, and not on the appropriations side: Taxation, Insurance, Education, and Family, Children and Senior Services. Discussion followed.

REPORTS FROM THE ADMINISTRATION:

* **DECEMBER 2010 SUMMARY ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITY REPORT – INFORMATION ONLY:** Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to receive the communication from the City Manager regarding the December 2010 Summary Environmental Activity Report as information only. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

* **DEPARTMENT MONTHLY REPORTS:** Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to receive the Department Monthly Reports. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

COMMUNICATION:

PRESENTATION BY YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE (YAC): At the request of Mayor Strazdas, Youth Advisory Committee Chairperson Sujay Dewan, Vice-Chairperson Eric Alden, and Secretary Sarah Perry provided an update of the Youth Advisory Committee activities. Sujay reviewed past YAC activities, pointed out that he was a founding member in 2008 and recognized Deputy City Clerk Adam Herringa. They summarized the various activities and involvement as follows:

- Summer of 2010: welcomed new members, toured various facilities and held sessions on the role of local government and the budget.
- Autumn of 2010: formalized the Youth Advisory Committee leadership with the election of a chair, vice-chair and secretary. Assisted with the Pakistan Flood Relief by assisting with packaging care packages and packed care packages of food at Portage Community Center in December for families in need.
- Winter of 2010/2011: planned for upcoming Winter Snow Party at Oakland Drive Park on February 5 and will be receiving a report from the Kalamazoo County Substance Abuse Task Force and looking for ways to continue and promote the relationship.
- Spring of 2011: planning and hosting the Green-a-thon promoting environmental awareness again this year, working with the Park Board and the Environmental Board and hope to make the event even better.
- Summer of 2011: working with the Parks Department and partnering with the Portage District Library to host a “Teen Movie Night” at the Overlander Bandshell. Discussion followed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

* **AMENDMENT TO THE PORTAGE CODE OF ORDINANCES:** Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to adopt an Ordinance to amend the City of Portage Code of Ordinances by amending Section 34-61, Fire Prevention and Protection, Chapter 34, reflecting changes in the 2009 edition of the International Fire Code. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

* **MINUTES OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:** City Council received the minutes for the following boards and commissions:

Portage Zoning Board of Appeals of December 13, 2010.

Portage Planning Commission of December 16, 2010 and January 6, 2011.

BID TABULATIONS:

* **INDEPENDENT AUDIT SERVICE:** Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to award the independent audit service contract to Rehmann Robson for a three-year cost not to exceed \$73,950 and authorize the City Manager to execute all documents related to this contract on behalf of the city. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

* **SENIOR CENTER FIRE ALARM SYSTEM – BID RECOMMENDATION:** Motion by Urban, seconded by Reid, to accept the low responsive bid submitted by Engineered Protective Services, Incorporated, in the amount of \$10,900 for a replacement fire alarm system at the Portage Senior Center and authorize the City Manager to execute all documents related to this action on behalf of the city. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

OTHER CITY MATTERS:

STATEMENTS OF CITY COUNCIL AND CITY MANAGER: City Council and Mayor Strazdas expressed their appreciation to Youth Advisory Committee Chairperson Sujay Dewan, Vice-Chairperson Eric Alden and Secretary Sarah Perry for their fine presentation and for their yeoman efforts as volunteers in the community.

Councilmember Campbell expressed her condolences to the family of Dr. Tom Berglund, who passed away January 11, 2011, in Snowmass, Colorado. She reflected on his involvement in Rotary, his love for his family, his sense of humor and his love for University of Michigan Football. Mayor Strazdas echoed her sentiments and City Manager Evans indicated he had the pleasure of sharing a meal with him before he left for Snowmass and indicated that Dr. Berglund had a love for skiing and was the epitome of a Rotarian.

Councilmember Reid pointed out that the fire alarm system approved for the Senior Center was a significant upgrade as it makes the Senior Center compliant with the Americans with Disability Act. She also indicated that, for those who are interested, the recent school board meeting had a ten-minute glitch, but the entire meeting was recorded and can be viewed on line at www.publicmedia.org.

Councilmember Urban indicated that he does not usually comment on letters to the editor, but felt compelled to address some errors found in a recent letter to the editor in the Monday, January 24, 2011 *Kalamazoo Gazette*. He acknowledged that the article was correct that the Regular Meeting started late owing to a continuation of the discussion in a Special Meeting regarding the implementation of the new Charter Amendment passed by the voters allowing for City Council to determine the size and composition of the Board of Review as there is now an option of a three, six or nine member Board. He disagreed with the reference in the letter that City Council was “behind closed doors trying to put a lid on the property tax information that Councilmember Patricia Randall exposed” when in fact they were in an open meeting, properly advertised; everyone present in City Council Chambers was personally invited to that meeting at least twice while the Board of Review discussion took place; none of the discussion was about “trying to put a lid on the property tax information that Councilmember Patricia Randall exposed;” and, some of the citizens came from Council Chambers and attended the meeting. Councilmember Urban agreed that perhaps some of the residential properties in Portage are very likely incorrectly assessed, but pointed out that not all of the properties in Portage are incorrectly assessed. He acknowledged that there are probably a few properties that are over assessed and a few properties that are under assessed, and concluded that it is likely that there are as many citizens paying too little in taxes as there are paying too much in taxes owing to an error in the system designed and run by people. With regards to the contention that “Randall spent more that \$10,000 in legal fees to prove that point and won,” he indicated that he did not know if the \$10,000 figure was correct or not, but did know that the matter was settled, and there was no winner or loser; however, the *Kalamazoo Gazette* had this fact correct in only one of the various articles on the subject, so it was understandable why the letter reflected this misperception. As the letter gave Councilmember Randall’s contact information, he pointed out that contact information for all of City Council is on the City of Portage website at www.portagemi.gov. He referred to the end of the letter where it read, “Did your property values go down and your tax bill go up? Fight back. Don’t let them gag the truth.” He explained the effect of Proposal A (1994) and how many property values likely did go down and taxes likely did go up because of Proposal A where the capped amount property taxes could go up each year is based on the Consumers Price Index (CPI) and the property values continued to go up at a higher rate. (Capped value is calculated by multiplying the Taxable Value of the prior year, with adjustments for additions and losses, by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as calculated by the State Tax Commission and cannot increase by more than 5%). He went on to say that with the value of properties going down, those property values that have not reached the capped increase in taxable value likely did go up. He emphasized that he wished to address the factual errors in the letter; that he was not disputing anyone’s opinion; and

objected specifically to the allegation that City Council was busy meeting behind closed doors, since City Council was meeting in an open meeting discussing a completely different subject than that averred to in the letter.

Councilmember Randall said she was looking forward to the Portage Snow Party sponsored by the Youth Advisory Committee, Saturday, February 5, 2011, from 12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Oakland Drive Park and indicated she hoped to be there.

Mayor Strazdas thanked City Council for their involvement in committee assignments at the present time, asked them to report back and asked City Clerk James Hudson to check with City Manager Maurice Evans to make sure there is a place on the Agenda for their reports. He indicated that at the February 12, 2011 Eagle Scout Court of Honor, he has the privilege of being the keynote speaker for the Eagle Scouts in the Region at the Kalamazoo Country Club, and will be attending three more Court of Honors in the coming weeks. He also announced that, in the evening on February 12, 2011, the Portage Police and Fire Departments will be playing the Kalamazoo Public Safety Department in Ice Hockey as a fundraiser at Wings Stadium, and that the "Stepping Out" fundraiser at the State Theater for the Portage Athletic Foundation would be that evening at 7:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Strazdas adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.

James R. Hudson, City Clerk

***Indicates items included on the Consent Agenda.**