

Changes Coming to the *Portager* Newsletter

As budget issues continue for the city (declining state revenue sharing, reduced interest/investment income, declining Act 51 revenue and declining property valuations), the City Administration and City Council continue to review a variety of cost-saving measures to assist with budgetary challenges facing the city. One measure recently approved by the Council involves the production of the *Portager* newsletter six times per year rather than monthly.

The 2009 Portage Community Survey results reveal

that the *Portager* represents an important source of information for happenings in Portage city government. It is believed a production schedule of six times per year will still allow for distribution of the most critical information, yet reduce costs by an estimated \$38,500 annually.

The revised schedule will include distribution of the *Portager* in January, March, May, June, September and December each year. This production schedule allows for the inclusion of annual inserts and important information

such as leaf collection dates, Summer Entertainment Series and other recreation events, election information, property tax assessment information, etc.

The City of Portage remains committed to providing residents with important information in a timely manner. The city website (www.portagemi.gov) is updated daily and provides the public with a variety of information, such as important news items, recreation/cultural events, property tax and assessment information, among many others. Be sure to visit the city website often for updated information.

What You Need to Know About the March Board of Review

Property tax assessments for 2010 will be mailed to Portage property owners during the last week of February. Information entitled "Understanding Proposal A in a Declining Market" will be included with the assessment notice, which may be helpful in understanding the valuation process and how taxable value is determined. You may also visit the city website at www.portagemi.gov/government/publications.asp to view this information.

The Board of Review will meet March 9 - 11, 2010. After receiving and reviewing their valuation notice, citizens who believe their property valuation (SEV) is inaccurate may schedule an appointment to appear before the March Board of Review to discuss concerns and appeal the valuation. Issues that can be brought before the

Board include property valuation (SEV), classification and exemption requests (see related article below). Taxable values are generally not appealable before the March Board of Review as this type of change is entirely a function of Proposal A. Taxable value change is limited by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), as determined by the State Tax Commission, unless there has been new construction or an uncapping event (transfer of ownership). For 2010, the CPI is .997%, meaning that unless new construction has taken place or physical improvements have been made to the property, the 2010 taxable value will be less than in 2009. With regard to assessed valuation, under Michigan law, the selling price of a property is not the presumptive true cash value. In

other words, the actual selling price is not what the City Assessor or Board of Review determines the assessed value to be. Keep in mind that selling price is only one measure of value for the Board of Review to consider.

Property owners are asked to come prepared to the Board of Review by bringing appropriate support for a particular position, such as sales of similar homes in the neighborhood (e.g., ranch style compared to ranch style), support for poverty exemption, receipts or invoices for recent construction activity, etc.

After reviewing your valuation notice, please contact the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433 if you wish to schedule an appointment with the Board of Review.

Do You Qualify for a Property Tax Poverty Exemption?

The City of Portage Board of Review together with the City Assessor can approve a one-year exemption from property taxes due to a resident's poverty income level. This annual property tax exemption requires the applicant to be currently receiving the Principal Residence Exemption (formerly the Homestead Exemption) and meet the federal household poverty exemption guidelines for the previous calendar year (shown at right). The guidelines determine the eligibility of the applicant and must be supported with proper income documentation (i.e., federal and state income tax returns for all persons residing in the principal residence, including any property tax credit returns). Household assets are also considered and must be recorded with the application.

Household Size*	Maximum Income
1 person	\$10,800
2 persons	\$14,600
3 persons	\$18,300
4 persons	\$22,100
5 persons	\$25,800
6 persons	\$29,500
7 persons	\$33,300
8 persons	\$37,000

* For households with more than 8 persons, add \$3,700 for each additional person.

The application form is available at the Office of the City Assessor. The approval process requires an in-person appointment before the Board of Review. Generally, the Board reviews the application in relation to the federal household income standards after the City Assessor determines that the application is properly completed. The Board of Review members, together with the City Assessor, determine by a simple majority vote whether or not an exemption will be granted. If you would like more information regarding the property tax poverty exemption, please contact the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433.

Note: Exemptions granted to residents due to poverty income levels are subject to audit by the Michigan Department of Treasury.



In March 2010, more than 130 million addresses across the nation will receive a census form. One of the shortest census forms in history, the 2010 Census form asks 10 questions and takes only 10 minutes to complete.

Required once every 10 years by the U.S. Constitution, the census counts everyone living in the United States, both citizens and noncitizens. Census data are used to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives, re-district each state and determine the distribution of the Electoral College.

Census data also directly affect how more than \$400 billion per year in federal funding is distributed to state, local and tribal governments. Census data are critical in determining locations for new hospitals, improving schools, building new roads, expanding public transportation options, creating new maps for emergency responders and much more.

To learn more, visit www.2010census.gov.

Are you a Snow Bird?

If you reside in Portage for more than six months of the year, this is your primary residence. According to the Census Bureau, you should be counted in your primary residence during the 2010 Census. This will ensure that federal funding is appropriately distributed to Michigan and the City of Portage.

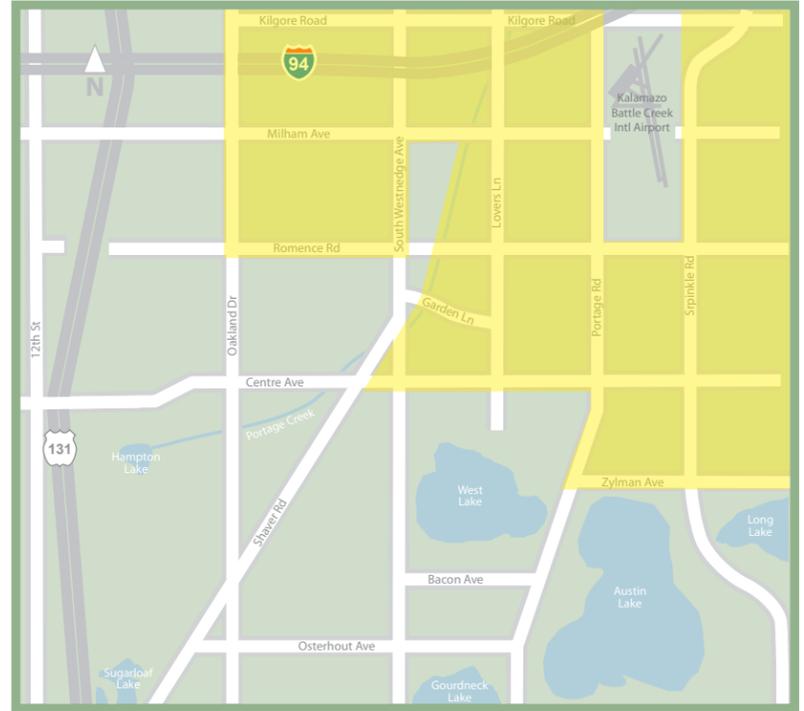
If you are away from your primary residence on Census Day (April 1) and have asked the post office to forward your mail, the 2010 Census questionnaire will be forwarded to your temporary residence. You should fill out the form in its entirety. Also, you should mark the response, "At a seasonal or second residence" for the question that states, "Does the person sometimes live or stay somewhere else?" If you receive a questionnaire at your temporary residence (not forwarded from your primary residence), you should answer question 1 with a "0" and not mark any other items.

Home Buyer Incentives Available through the Neighborhood Housing Stabilization Program



It's a great time to buy a home in Portage! Home prices have become increasingly affordable, mortgage interest rates have remained low, the federal government is offering tax credits for first-time home buyers and funding is available through the City of Portage Neighborhood Housing Stabilization Program to assist home buyers.

In partnership with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), the City of Portage has funding available to facilitate the purchase and rehabilitation of foreclosed homes in north Portage neighborhoods, as shown on the map at right. The program provides up to \$25,000 in down payment and rehabilitation assistance to home buyers who purchase and occupy a vacant, foreclosed home in eligible Portage neighborhoods. Assistance is provided to home buyers in the form of a second MSHDA mortgage, which is a 10-year forgivable, no-interest, deferred loan.



Household Size	Maximum Income
1 Person	\$52,850
2 Person	\$60,400
3 Person	\$67,950
4 Person	\$75,500
5 Person	\$81,500
6 Person	\$87,550
7 Person	\$89,320
8 Person	\$89,320

Applicants must be residents of Kalamazoo County, complete an 8-hour home ownership class and have their mortgage and project approved by MSHDA prior to closing. The income limits (shown in the table at left) established through the grant program have been increased to encourage greater participation.

For more information or an application package, please call the Department of Community Development at 324-9201.

City of Portage Receives Grant Funding

Department of Energy Awards \$204,700 for Energy Efficient Projects

The City of Portage was recently notified of a \$204,700 grant award from the federal government as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). The grant funding, provided by the U.S. Department of Energy, will be used for energy efficient retrofits of major city facilities. Specific projects to be completed with the grant funding include:

City Hall

- ◆ HVAC Upgrades
- ◆ Window Replacement
- ◆ Insulation
- ◆ General Weatherization

Portage Senior Center

- ◆ Insulation
- ◆ Window Replacement
- ◆ General Weatherization

Fire Station #2 (Oakland Drive)

- ◆ Boiler Replacement
- ◆ Radiant Heat System Installation

Public Services Building

- ◆ Lighting Upgrades

The projects are expected to get underway in the spring with completion by fall 2010. It is anticipated that these projects will result in annual energy savings of approximately \$10,000.

GKUW Awards Over \$12,000 to Friends of the Portage Senior Center

In December of 2009, the Friends of the Portage Senior Center (PSC) applied for and were awarded \$12,942 in grant funding from the Greater Kalamazoo United Way (GKUW) to provide fitness and wellness programming for older adults.

"Funding from the Greater Kalamazoo United Way will be used to support the ongoing wellness efforts of the Portage Senior Center's *Project Enhance* program," reports Jason Horan, Manager of the PSC. "Project Enhance specializes in the delivery of Evidence Based Disease Prevention Programs (EBDPP) that promote physical independence and wellness for older adult participants. We are very excited to partner with the GKUW in offering these programs. With all the funding cuts that are going on at the state level, this news couldn't have come at a better time."

Matter of Balance: Falls Prevention, Personal Action Toward Health, and Enhance Wellness are all EBDPP offered through the PSC. The PSC partners with a variety of organizations to offer classes and workshops at different host sites, in addition to the programs offered on-site.

For more information on Project Enhance or other programs and services available through the Portage Senior Center, please call 329-4555.

New Business Profile Singer Eye Center, P.C.



Known throughout Southwest Michigan as a leader in eye care, Singer Eye Center is proud to announce the opening of their new office at 1906 West Milham Avenue. As a full-service ophthalmology practice,

Dr. Thomas Singer, along with a talented staff, work to exceed patient expectations in their new state-of-the-art facility. "We were very excited to build our new office in Portage," indicated Dr. Singer. "The excellent visibility provided by West Milham Avenue, the business friendly climate and the close proximity to much of our client base were all big pluses."

Location: 1906 West Milham Avenue
Size: Approximately 5,400 square feet
Jobs: Approximately 11 employees
Market Value: Approximately \$680,000

Household Hazardous Waste Collection

The Kalamazoo County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Center, located at 1301 Lamont Street in Kalamazoo, collects unwanted household chemicals. In November 1990, Portage voters approved the establishment of a Curbside Recycling fund with a maximum millage of .5 mills. The fund provides for the curbside recycling program and the HHW program. The amount assessed for Fiscal Year 2009-2010 was .271 mills, just over half of the voter approved amount. As residents pay for this service through their property taxes, there is not a drop-off fee for Portage residents. In 2009, Portage residents made 1,639 visits to the HHW Center, an increase of nearly 29 percent over the 2008 total.

The following items are accepted at the Kalamazoo County HHW Center:

- ◆ Aerosols
- ◆ Gasoline
- ◆ Batteries
- ◆ Motor oil
- ◆ Cleaners
- ◆ Pesticides
- ◆ Computers and monitors
- ◆ Oil-based paint (not latex)



Other hazardous wastes are also collected and as the HHW Center is not open every day, residents are encouraged to call before visiting. Call 373-5211 or visit www.kalcounty.com/hhw/index.htm for more information.



The Ice Rink at Millennium Park

280 Romence Road – Just west of South Westnedge Avenue
324-9200 – Call ahead for current ice rink information

Schedule through March 7:	Sunday	Noon to 9 p.m.
	Monday and Tuesday.....	Closed
	Wednesday and Thursday.....	3 to 9 p.m.
	Friday	3 to 10 p.m.
	Saturday	11 a.m. to 10 p.m.
School Holidays:	Friday, February 26.....	2 to 10 p.m.
Fees:	\$4 per day for open skating	Discount Card: \$25 for 10 visits
(cash/check only)	\$.50 per user for locker rental	\$3 per day for skate rental
	\$3 for skate sharpening	
Group Discounts:	Groups of 10 or more save money by purchasing the 10-skate discount cards for \$25 at the rink during regular hours.	
Notes:	Hockey is prohibited at all times. Ice resurfacing occurs from 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. on weekends.	

Valentine's Skate Date

What could be more fun than gliding on the ice at Millennium Park to celebrate Valentine's Day? The Valentine's Skate Date evening of fun for couples and/or families will take place on Sunday, February 14, 2010 from 6 – 8 p.m. The \$10 per person fee includes skating, skate rental, a floral gift, a Soup'r Heros box lunch and sparkling grape juice to toast the occasion! There will also be a skating exhibition provided by the Southwest Michigan Skating Club. Pre-register and pay the \$10 fee by Friday, February 12 at Millennium Park Ice Rink. Enjoy a memorable evening under the stars!

K-Wings Mascot Madness Night

Come to Millennium Park for an evening of zany on-ice fun and games with K-Wings Mascot Slappy and other area mascots on Thursday, February 25, 2010, from 7 – 9 p.m. There will be giveaway prizes and two hours of great fun. No registration is needed at this free event. Discount skating and rental package at \$5 per person available for skaters during this special event. Come, enjoy and bring a friend or two for a fun time.

Valentine's Teas at Stuart Manor

Have you been looking for true love in a teacup? Then you're sure to fall 'head over heels' for our special Valentine's Day Teas. All teas are held at the historical Stuart Manor in the Celery Flats Historical Area located at 7335 Garden Lane.

On Wednesday, **February 10** at 12 noon, guests will enjoy a delicious five-course tea along with a serenade of songs from top vocalists from the Portage Northern High School choir.

Dust off your 'Sunday best' for a special family tea on **Saturday, February 13** at 1 p.m. What a wonderful way to celebrate the day with your loved ones, family or friends! After tea, guests will create handmade Valentine's to give to someone special.

Cost for each teas is \$18 for adults and \$14 for youth 4-12 years old. (Because teas are usually 90 minutes in length, children younger than 4 years old are discouraged from attending.) All tickets must be purchased in advance and can be obtained at the Parks and Recreation Department in Portage City Hall. For additional information, please call the Parks Department at 329-4522.

2010 Summer Entertainment Series – Experience It!

The City of Portage believes that performing arts and cultural events are important and vital to enhancing the quality of life of residents in our region. **Do you share this vision?**

The Portage Summer Entertainment Series (SES) has been going strong for 22 years with events and activities for everyone to enjoy! Planned highlights for the 2010 summer season include the popular children's Lunch & Learn series, Shakespeare in the Park, movies in the park, children's theatre and the Taste of Portage.

The SES is a self-supporting program, which means that none of your tax dollars are used for funding. The SES is made possible entirely through financial support from area businesses, corporations, foundations, revenues from attendees and individuals like you. This year the fundraising goal is \$110,000. The success of the SES depends on the community and funding must be secured to ensure that the larger more costly events are a part of the 2010 programming.

As the New Year begins, help make the City of Portage a **great place** in which to live, work and visit by making a



donation to the SES. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. All donations received before March 9, 2010 will be recognized in the annual SES brochure, distributed to over 45,000 households in Portage and surrounding communities.

Individuals or companies interested in program sponsorship may contact the Department of Parks, Recreation & Property Management at 329-4522. To submit your donation, please complete the form below and mail it to us along with your check. Your contribution is **critical** in providing another sensational cultural arts season in 2010.

Are you Ready for Some Softball?

2010 Recreational Softball Meeting Planned

Although it is mid-winter (and very cold), it is not too early to start planning for the 2010 recreational softball season. Interested teams or individuals are urged to attend the organizational meeting on Thursday, February 18, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the Portage Senior Center (320 Library Lane) to obtain information about the 2010 softball season.

The following leagues will be offered this year:

- Mondays Women's and Co-Ed Leagues
- Tuesdays Co-Ed and Over 50 Leagues
- Wednesdays Men's Leagues
- Thursdays Men's Leagues
- Fridays Men's, Co-Ed and Church Leagues

Registration is due in late March and league play begins in late April.

Information regarding the 2010 Fall Softball Program will also be discussed at the organizational meeting.

Umpires Needed

We always welcome new umpires in Portage! If you have an interest in umpiring, we will train you in a series of pre-season clinics conducted by our fine staff of veteran umpires. Please call 329-4522 prior to April 1 to receive umpire information.

Please accept this donation to the 2010 Summer Entertainment Series.

Please print your name(s) as you would like it to appear on the SES promotional material.

Address _____ City _____ Zip Code _____

Amount of Donation Enclosed _____

Mail to: Summer Entertainment Series
7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, MI 49002

Is Your Child Safe When You Travel?

Restraint Laws Recently Changed



Did you know that the Michigan law pertaining to child restraint seats and requirements recently changed? The law now states that a "driver transporting a child less than 4 years of age in a motor vehicle shall properly secure that child in a child restraint system in a rear seat, if the vehicle is equipped with a rear seat." The law goes on to state, "if all available rear seats are occupied by children less than 4 years of age, then a child less than 4 years of age may be positioned in the child restraint system in the front seat. A

child in a rear-facing child restraint system may be placed in the front seat only if the front passenger air bag is deactivated."

The legislation for this law also now prohibits removing a child from a car seat to nurse while the vehicle is in motion. Nursing mothers must drive the vehicle to a safe place and stop to feed the baby. A person who violates this section is responsible for a civil infraction, which is similar to a citation you may receive for not wearing your seat belt. Other child restraint laws remain unchanged, including placing children under 8 years of age or under 4'9" in booster seats.

Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of accidental injury-related death among children ages 14 and under. Children are 40 percent more likely to be injured when in the front seat compared to children seated in the rear. Properly restrained children in the rear seat have the lowest risk of injury according to the Partners for Child Passenger Safety. Placing the more at-risk group of children (under 4 years of age) in the rear seat is an attempt to keep them safer in the event of a traffic crash.

If you have any questions about child restraint laws or would like to have your child restraint seat inspected, please contact the Crime Prevention Officer at the Portage Police Department at 324-9255.

Friendly Reminders

Please Keep Sidewalks Free of Snow And Ice

The city reminds residents and businesses of the importance of keeping sidewalks clear of snow and ice. Your cooperation in keeping sidewalks on major roadways and neighborhood streets clear for use by pedestrians is requested. City ordinance (Chapter 66, Article 1, Section 66-4) requires property owners and occupants with sidewalks adjacent to their properties to clear the sidewalks within 24 hours of a snowfall and within 12 hours when ice has formed on the sidewalks. Please contact the Department of Community Development at 329-4477 for more information.



Help Keep Fire Hydrants Clear



As winter snow builds up, it often obscures fire hydrants. Snow moved to clear streets, driveways and parking lots often buries them. The Portage Fire Department asks residents to clear snow away from fire hydrants that are on or adjacent to your property. The time a firefighter may have to spend clearing around a hydrant before connecting a fire hose may make a difference in saving a life or building.

Mailbox Replacement Policy

The City of Portage snow removal program is designed to keep city streets clear and safe in the most efficient manner possible. While plow trucks normally travel through heavy snow at speeds of only 15 to 25 mph, the weight of the snow coming off the plow can easily damage mailboxes and/or knock posts and mailboxes completely over.

So what is a resident to do when this happens? Call the City of Portage Streets and Equipment Department at 329-4444 or use the "Report It" tool on the city website (www.portagemi.gov/government/report_it.asp) to report the damage. City staff will schedule either repair of the damage or replacement of the box and post, as necessary.

Replacements will be in the form of a standard U.S. Postal mailbox and/or post. The standard mailbox is either white or black and measures 6.5 inches in width, 19 inches in length and 8.5 inches in height. The mailbox has a hinged door and flag. Damaged posts will be replaced with a standard 4" x 4" wooden cross-arm U.S. Postal post.



Residents will have the option of receiving the standard replacement mailbox installed by the city or receiving a payment of \$44 (the cost of a standard box and post and labor). If payment is desired, the resident will be asked to sign and return a release form from the city and will be responsible for purchase and installation of the mailbox of their choosing.

If you have any questions concerning the Mailbox Replacement Program, please contact the Streets & Equipment Department at 329-4444.

CITY OF
PORTAGE
A Place for Opportunities to Grow
7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002-5160

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
KALAMAZOO, MI
PERMIT NO. 33

ECRWSS

POSTAL CUSTOMER

Portage City Council

Upcoming City Council Meetings:

- ◆ Tuesday, February 9, 2010 @ 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Tuesday, February 23, 2010 @ 7:30 p.m.



Mayor Pro Tem Ed Sackley
Term Expires 2013
323-8119

edsackley@msn.com



Councilmember Elizabeth Campbell
Term Expires 2011
321-9383

campbell4portage@yahoo.com



Councilmember Margaret E. O'Brien
Term Expires 2011
324-9626

margaret.obrien@portagemi.gov



Councilmember Patricia M. Randall
Term Expires 2011
324-7779

patricia.randall@portagemi.gov



Councilmember Claudette Reid
Term Expires 2013
491-9725

claudette.reid@portagemi.gov



Councilmember Terry R. Urban
Term Expires 2013
323-8160

terry.urban@portagemi.gov



Mayor Peter J. Strazdas
Term Expires 2011
327-4478

peter.strazdas@portagemi.gov

Televised City Meeting Schedule

The following City of Portage meetings can be seen on Portage Cable Access Channel 19. All meetings are held in the City Council Chambers at City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue and are open to the public.

February 2010

4	7 p.m.	Planning Commission (rebroadcast February 11)
8	7 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals (rebroadcast February 15)
9	7:30 p.m.	City Council (rebroadcast February 16)
18	7 p.m.	Planning Commission (rebroadcast February 25)
23	7:30 p.m.	City Council (rebroadcast March 2)

Cable Access channel 19 is available as live video streams on the Portage Cable Access home page (www.portagecableaccess.org) and the City of Portage Community Learning Resources page (www.portagemi.gov/learning).

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