

City to Host Property Assessment Forums

Board of Review to Meet March 15 – 17 to Consider Valuation Appeals

Assessment Change Notices

The annual Notice of Assessment, Taxable Valuation and Property Classification (Assessment Change Notices) were mailed to Portage property owners on February 11, 2011. Property owners are encouraged to read the Assessment Change Notice and the accompanying "Understanding Proposal A in a Declining Market," which may be helpful in understanding the valuation process and how taxable value is determined. Visit www.portagemi.gov/Boards-and-Commissions/BoardofReview.aspx to view this and other important information.

After receiving and reviewing the Assessment Change Notice, property owners are encouraged to contact the Office of the City Assessor with questions and/or concerns.

Many questions and/or concerns can be addressed by assessing staff, without the necessity of appearing before the March Board of Review. Certain questions regarding Assessment Change Notices and property assessments can be answered over the phone, while others may be best answered during an informal in-person review conducted by assessing staff. Property owners who wish to discuss their property valuation with assessing staff may contact the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433. It is important to note that the City Assessor cannot make any changes to 2011 property valuations – State Equalized Value (SEV) – after Friday, March 11, 2011.

Property Assessment Forums

Additionally, the City of Portage Office of the City Assessor will host two **Property Assessment Forums** on **Tuesday,**

March 1 and Wednesday, March 2 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Portage City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) in City Council Chambers. Each forum will be facilitated by Joyce Foondle of Southwest Michigan Governmental Consultants and will include an explanation of the assessment process, the assessment change notice, poverty exemption requirements and the Board of Review and Michigan Tax Tribunal appeal processes. The forum will also include the opportunity for property owners to meet individually with assessing staff to discuss specific questions concerning their property valuation. Property owners may also elect to set an appointment with assessing staff as noted previously.

Board of Review

Property owners who believe their property valuation is inaccurate may also appear before the March Board of Review to appeal the valuation. (Keep in mind that assessing staff may be able to address property owner concerns prior to March 11, 2011, without the necessity of appearing before the Board of Review.) **The Board of Review will meet from Tuesday, March 15 through Thursday, March 17, 2011.** Residents may contact the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433 beginning Monday, March 7, 2011 to schedule an appointment before the Board of Review.

Issues that can be brought before the Board of Review include property valuation (SEV), assessment roll classification changes and exemption requests (see related article below). Taxable value is generally not appealable at the March Board of Review as this type of change is entirely

a result 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 2011, the CPI is 1.7%, meaning that unless new construction has taken place or physical improvements have been made to the property or the assessed and taxable values are not the same amount, the taxable value may increase up to 1.7%.

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.

Supporting Documentation

Property owners who choose to meet with assessing staff and/or appear before the Board of Review are encouraged to provide appropriate support for a particular position, such as:

- ◆ Sales of similar homes in the neighborhood that took place between October 1, 2009 and September 30, 2010
- ◆ Copies of homeowners insurance policies showing replacement cost
- ◆ Current appraisals
- ◆ Receipts or invoices for recent construction activity
- ◆ Photographs of property damage or deterioration
- ◆ Support for poverty exemption
- ◆ Any other information relevant to the assessment of the property

Do You Qualify for a 2011 Property Tax Poverty Exemption?

The City of Portage Board of Review 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

(maximum of \$25,000) 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 (March, July or December). 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 determine by a simple majority vote whether 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.

Citizen Participation is Important in Portage

On May 10, 2011, the Portage City Council will interview citizens interested in serving on an Advisory Board or Commission and will make appointments and reappointments to the Construction Board of Appeals, Human Services Board and Planning Commission. The meeting times and responsibilities of each of the Boards and Commissions vary. Additional individual Board or Commission information and applications to serve can be obtained by visiting the city website at www.portagemi.gov or by contacting the Office of the City Clerk at 329-4412.

Citizens interested in serving on an Advisory Board or Commission must be registered voters of the City of Portage and may submit an application to the Office of

the City Clerk by Monday, April 11, 2011.

Youth Advisory Committee Seeks Applicants

The Portage City Council seeks the involvement and input of Portage youth in our local government. Options for youth involvement include serving on the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) or as a youth appointee to the Environmental Board, Historic District Commission, Human Services Board, Park Board or Senior Citizen Advisory Board. Descriptions of the responsibilities of these Boards and Commissions and meeting times are available at www.portagemi.gov.

The City Council will interview student applicants for the YAC and the five other boards and commissions the

evening of May 10 and youth involvement responsibilities will begin July 1 for those selected. There are 21 positions on the YAC and one appointee to various other boards and commissions. The duration of the appointment is one year. Appointees must be full-time students, residents of the City of Portage and be between the ages of 13 and 18. A diverse group of students representing public and private schools, as well as home-schooled students, is desired.

Interested youth may complete an application form available online at www.portagemi.gov. If you desire further information about City of Portage Youth In Government Programs please contact Adam Herringa, Deputy City Clerk and staff liaison to the YAC at herringa@portagemi.gov or 329-4511.

Portage Supports & Recognizes Fair Housing Month



Each April is National Fair Housing Month, and the city supports fair housing educational activities that will help to eliminate discrimination in housing and will foster equal housing opportunities.

The Federal Fair Housing Act (1968 and 1988), the Michigan Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act of 1977 and the Michigan Persons With Disabilities Civil Rights Act of 1976 make it illegal to discriminate in the sale or rental of housing when the discrimination is based on any of the following factors:

- ◆ Race
- ◆ Color
- ◆ National Origin
- ◆ Religion
- ◆ Gender
- ◆ Age
- ◆ Disability
- ◆ Marital Status
- ◆ Familial Status

These national and state laws protect people against discriminatory actions such as:

- ◆ refusing to sell or rent housing
- ◆ quoting a difference in housing availability
- ◆ quoting a difference in required security deposit
- ◆ quoting a different monthly rent
- ◆ refusing to rent to a family or individual with children
- ◆ sexual harassment of a tenant

If you are interested in educational opportunities regarding fair housing, or if you suspect discrimination in a housing purchase, sale or rental transaction, including a difference in terms, conditions or opportunity, please contact the Fair Housing Center of Southwest Michigan at 276-9100. The Fair Housing Center is available to assist persons in the Portage area with fair housing community education and complaint investigations.

For information and referral assistance, persons may also contact the City of Portage Department of Community Development at 329-4466.

Housing Funds Available for Spring 2011 Projects

With the end of the cold weather season in sight, many Portage homeowners begin to think about completing necessary home improvement projects. As a service to city residents, the following programs are available to income-eligible families and individuals who own and occupy a home located within the city:

Housing Rehabilitation Program

Up to \$10,000 no-interest and low-interest loans for a variety of home repairs, including furnace repair and replacement, roofing repair and replacement, weatherization activities, sewer and water connections, plumbing upgrades, electrical upgrades and other necessary interior and exterior repairs.

Emergency Repair Grant Program

Up to \$1,000 to complete household repairs that pose an immediate threat to the health, safety and welfare of the residents. The City of Portage is prepared to quickly assist homeowners who have an emergency situation.

Eligibility for all programs is based on the maximum income limits provided at right established annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Household Size	Category 1 Deferred 0% Loan	Category 2 Deferred 3% Loan*
1 Person	\$12,850	\$34,200
2 Person	\$14,650	\$39,050
3 Person	\$16,500	\$43,950
4 Person	\$18,300	\$48,800
5 Person	\$19,800	\$52,750
6 Person	\$21,250	\$56,650
7 Person	\$22,700	\$60,550
8 Person	\$24,200	\$64,450

No-interest Deferred Matching Loans also are available to homeowners in Income Category 2 for every dollar the homeowner contributes toward rehabilitation costs.

In addition to these home repair programs, the City of Portage offers two Home Buyer Assistance Programs to income eligible home buyers purchasing homes in designated neighborhoods. Please contact the Department about eligibility requirements.

To obtain more information, or to request an application for one of these City of Portage Housing Assistance Programs, please call the Community Development Specialist at 324-9201.

Proper Child Restraints Help Insure Safe Kids

Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of accidental injury-related death among children ages 14 and under. Safe Kids USA reports that car seats are extremely effective when correctly installed and used and can reduce the risk of death by 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for children ages one to four. However, Safe Kids USA estimates that almost three quarters of all restraint systems are misused in a way that compromises their effectiveness.

The Portage Fire Department has partnered with Safe Kids Kalamazoo County to provide periodic clinics on the proper installation and use of infant and child vehicle restraint systems.

Portage firefighters who are certified child restraint technicians provide this service to citizens by appointment on the first Wednesday afternoon of each month at Fire Station No. 1 (7830 Shaver Road). During these 30-minute sessions, parents, grandparents and caregivers are shown the correct way to install an infant or child car seat in their specific vehicle and the proper way to restrain children safely.

Portage residents who wish to learn the proper way to install and use infant or child restraint seats may call the Portage Fire Department at 329-4487 to schedule an appointment.



Spring Water Hydrant Flushing Schedule

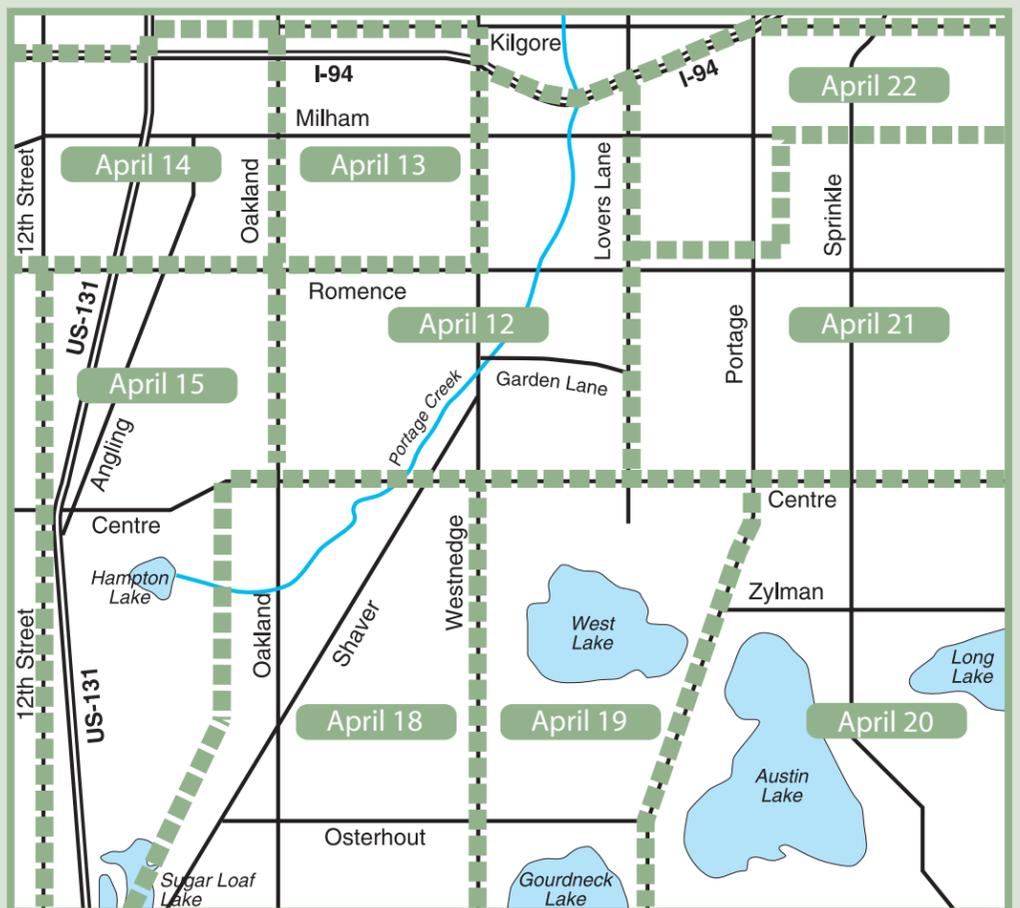
The City of Portage utility contractor United Water will conduct water hydrant flushing from Tuesday, April 12 through Friday, April 22. The map indicates dates hydrant flushing will take place in each area of the city. Most hydrants will be flushed between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7:30 a.m. so as to avoid high-traffic hours. This schedule is contingent on weather and emergency operations.

Hydrant flushing accomplishes important objectives for the water system:

- ◆ Improves water quality by removing sediment that accumulates in the water system between flushing operations.
- ◆ Provides the opportunity to test proper operation of the fire hydrants and the water pumping system.

Some water discoloration will occur during the flushing process. Residents are encouraged to check for discoloration prior to using water for laundry or cleaning during these flushing periods. Even though water may be somewhat discolored, it is safe to drink.

During the flushing process, large quantities of water are discharged from the hydrants. Motorists are urged to watch for vehicles and workers engaged in this work and reduce speeds accordingly. Please call United Water with any questions or concerns at 324-9235.



Park Volunteer Opportunities

Looking for projects for a youth or scouting group? The City of Portage encourages volunteer efforts from groups and individuals wishing to improve the quality of life for Portage citizens and visitors. During the spring months, several opportunities are available and the city welcomes ideas for new projects.

Invasive Plant Removal

Help by pulling Garlic Mustard on city park properties in late April through early May. The city will provide bags for disposal and gloves to participants.

Annual City Centre Flower Planting



Planting day is Friday, May 20 from 8:30 a.m. to 12 noon. Participants are encouraged to bring gloves and trowels, but extra supplies will be on hand.

Historic Building Spring Clean-up

Volunteers are needed in April to prepare the Grain Elevator and Schoolhouse for use during the summer season. The city will provide cleaning supplies.

Park Clean-up

Several parks will be in need of litter and debris removal prior to May 1, 2011. The city will provide bags and help with disposal.

Those interested in volunteering should contact the Portage Parks Department at 329-4522. Please consider offering service to keep Portage "A Place for Opportunities to Grow!"

Portage is a Tree City USA



The City of Portage conducts programs throughout the year to promote the health of the urban forest. Seasonal tree plantings add to the diversity of species and overall resistance to disease and insects and annual tree pruning efforts help contribute to promoting trees and their benefits in the city. These trees grace and beautify our streets, boulevards and public spaces.

The City of Portage has been named a "Tree City USA" for the 21st consecutive year. During the past 21 years, over 15,000 trees have been planted in our community. The Tree City USA award is given to those communities that have met or exceeded the requirements of the National

Arbor Day Foundation. The city per capita spending on tree and tree maintenance, a planting ceremony, **TREE CITY USA** ordinances regarding trees and tree governing board are necessary in order for Portage to receive the prestigious Tree City USA recognition.

Join Mayor Strazdas and members of City Council as they host a **tree planting ceremony** on City Centre grounds prior to the regularly scheduled City Council meeting on **April 26, 2011**. The ceremony takes place during Arbor Week in Michigan (last week in April), and provides the city an opportunity to highlight our remarkable achievements.



Green-A-Thon 2011

Portage Youth Advisory Committee Hosts Earth Day Event

The Portage Youth Advisory Committee, in cooperation with the Portage Environmental Board and Park Board, is hosting a community event to celebrate Earth Day. **Green-A-Thon 2011** will be held at the Celery Flats, 7335 Garden Lane on Saturday **April 23 from 12 noon to 4 p.m.**

At Celery Flats, throughout the afternoon, there will be multiple musical acts, games and numerous representatives from local organizations and businesses providing education about environmental ideas you can utilize in your home or business, opportunities to volunteer for "green" causes and meet other individuals that are committed to promoting environmentally-friendly action in Portage.

The Portage Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) was created by the Portage City Council in the spring of

2008 to give Portage students an opportunity to share their ideas and participate in local government. The YAC will host this event as way to raise awareness of environmental issues that affect the citizens of Portage and to provide opportunities to become more ecologically friendly. Providing a forum for such opportunities is a critical step to ensuring a sense of social responsibility in participating and encouraging in "green" behavior.

Please contact Adam Herringa at 329-4512 or herringa@portagemi.gov if you have an organization or business that would like to host a table at the event to share ideas and opportunities to live green in Portage.

No sign-up is required and the event is free. For more information please visit the city website at www.portagemi.gov or call 329-4512.

2011 Celery Flats Historical Area Events Calendar

The Celery Flats Historical Area will host many walk run events this coming year. These events are great opportunities for families to participate in fun activities that promote health and fitness while providing fundraising for area non-profit organizations.



Date	Event	Contact Number
4/16/11	Autism Society Walk	269-823-4783
4/23/11	Green-A-Thon 2011	269-329-4511
5/1/11	National Kidney Foundation of Michigan Walk	1-800-482-1455
5/7/11	March of Dimes Walk	269-343-5586
5/14/11	Izzy's Tumor Trample CTF.org	269-668-7887
5/21/11	National Childhood Cancer Foundation Walk	630-957-8003
6/4/11	Epilepsy Walk	1-800-377-6226
9/10/11	MI Cops Run @ CFHA	269-324-9255
9/17/11	PCC Strut Run/Walk	269-323-1942
9/24/11	ALS Walk	616-459-1900
9/24/11	Run For The Son	269-567-2028
9/25/11	Michigan SIDS Walk (Tomorrow's Child)	248-650-3729
10/1/11	Active: Water Walk/Run	269-492-6470
10/2/11	Alzheimer's Association Walk	269-342-1482
10/8/11	International Alliance of Hope Walk	269-290-6503
11/13/11	Michigan Arthritis Foundation Jingle Bell Run	248-649-2891

Kalamazoo Nature Center Spring Break Camp

The Sounds of Spring

Wednesday, April 6, 2011 – 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Schrier Park, 850 Osterhout Road (between Oakland Drive and South Westnedge Avenue). For all area children currently in grades 1, 2, & 3.

Hey, children what's that sound? Everybody look what's going down - the tree. In the woods we hear the birds before we see them. During this camp we will explore the sounds of nature, learn who makes what sounds and what all that noise means. Discover how we can use sound to attract wildlife and how animals hear and make sound.

Fees: KNC members and Portage city residents \$35/day
Non-members and non-residents \$40/day

Materials: Bring a sack lunch (with snacks if desired) and a water bottle. Wear weather-appropriate clothing. No electronics or distracting toys, please.

Register online today at www.KNCCamp.org or call 269-381-1574, ext. 0.

Spring & Summer Seasonal Employment Opportunities

The City of Portage is an award-winning, recognized leader for its parks and recreational facilities. We welcome you to become a part of our team this season and experience the quality of life that attracts people throughout the State of Michigan. Interested candidates may submit an application to the City of Portage, Department of Employee Development, 7900 S. Westnedge Avenue, Portage, MI 49002 or apply on-line at www.portagemi.gov. For further information, call the Department of Employee Development at 329-4533.

The City of Portage is an Equal Opportunity Employer

Position	Pay Rate
Seasonal Laborers	\$8.25 Per Hour
Lifeguards/Senior Lifeguards	\$8.25 - \$8.75 Per Hour
Ramona Park Supervisors	\$9.75 Per Hour
Technical & Cultural Assistants (for Summer Cultural Programs)	\$7.75 Per Hour
Summer Fun Center Aides & Supervisors	\$7.40 - \$7.75 Per Hour



Portage PD Launches Nixle Application

On March 1, 2011, the City of Portage Police Department will begin using Nixle, an innovative, advanced technology communication tool. Nixle's Municipal Wire is a secure mass communication service that allows public safety agencies and municipal governments to connect with residents by text messages, email and web. Use of this service will allow the Portage Police Department to help solve crimes, build safer communities and promote a positive dialogue and partnership between Portage residents and the Police Department. Nixle has been used around the country to help find missing seniors, evacuate flooded areas and capture dangerous criminals in short periods of time.

Residents of Portage and surrounding areas may register to receive Nixle messages and choose how and on what devices those messages are received – on smart phones as text messages, via email or the web. Portage residents may also register for a Portage Police Twitter account to receive Nixle messages on a personal Twitter account. Nixle messages can be broadcast to a specific neighborhood or to the whole city. Portage Police will broadcast four types of messages:

Alerts are for time-sensitive, need-to-know information that may require proactive action on the part of residents. Examples include a crime in progress with a suspect that is running at large in a neighborhood, a missing or abducted child, a missing adult, a stolen credit card that may be used at retail establishments in Portage, a road closure due to a major accident, a fire or other event or an evacuation order for a hazardous

materials incident. Road closings due to hazardous road conditions may also be sent out as alerts.

Advisory Messages include need-to-know information that is important and timely, but not necessarily immediately time-sensitive. Examples of advisory messages include suspect information from a series of home invasions that occurred over a specific time period, a road closed due to a structure fire or accident, retail fraud suspect information or suspect vehicle information from a not-in-progress crime.

Community Notifications are messages that are more informational in nature. Examples include neighborhood watch information, meetings, special police events and reminders to residents, such as a reminder to register bicycles or of winter parking restrictions.

Traffic Messages are for traffic-related information. This information includes major road and highway closures.

Portage Police Chief Richard White applauds the Nixle program and believes it will keep residents informed about the neighborhoods where they live, work and visit with timely and relevant communication. "We look forward to a solid partnership with Nixle and the residents of the City of Portage to solve crime," said Chief White, "and to help each other with timely, trusted and effective communication that will be provided with this new tool."

Nixle is a free service to the City of Portage and its citizens. Portage residents can register to receive Nixle messages at www.nixle.com or at www.portagemi.gov/Nixle.aspx.

Payments Mailed in Portage are Processed in Grand Rapids

For the benefit of Portage residents paying tax or utility bills, where the date of the postmark determines whether the payment is on time or late, the



city reminds residents that US mail originating in Portage is processed in Grand Rapids, Michigan as a result of a recent consolidation on the part of the US Postal Service. This means that payments mailed from Portage may be postmarked after the due date – even if the postal carrier picks it up on the due date. Residents choosing to mail tax or utility payments on the due date are encouraged to hand-deliver payments to a clerk at the Portage Post Office, where it will be postmarked with the current date.

Payments can also be made by cash, check or money order at City Hall, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. A drop box is available 24 hours per day near the south exit of City Hall. Payments placed in the drop box are processed the next business day.

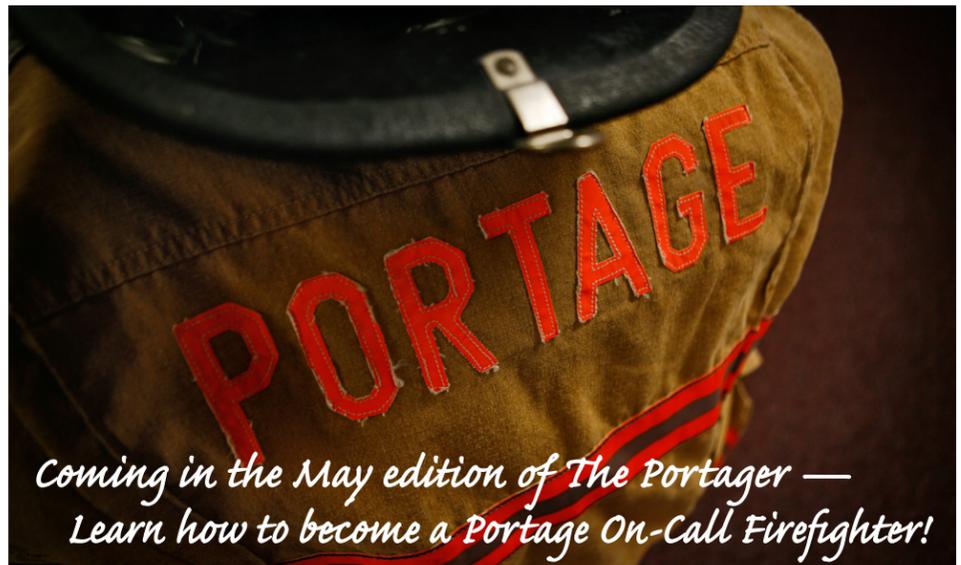
Online payments are also accepted at www.portagemi.gov/OnlinePayments.aspx. Please note that the online payment vendor, Official Payments Corporation, charges a convenience fee of approximately 3% for payments completed online.

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



*Coming in the May edition of The Portager —
Learn how to become a Portage On-Call Firefighter!*



Portage City Council

Portage City Council meetings are held on Tuesday evenings at Portage City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) in Council Chambers at 7:30 p.m. and are open to the public.

Televised City Meetings

All City of Portage City Council, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of appeals meetings can be viewed live on channel 21. AT&T U-Verse customers can access the City of Portage government meetings on channel 99 and then follow the prompts to access the various meetings.



March

3	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
8	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
14	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
17	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
22	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting

April

7	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
11	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
12	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
21	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
26	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting

Maurice S. Evans, City Manager 329-4400
Mary Beth Block, Editor 329-4405
blockm@portagemi.gov

Mayor Peter J. Strazdas
327-4478
peter.strazdas@portagemi.gov



Mayor Pro Tem Ed Sackley
323-8119
edsackley@msn.com



Cory A. Bailes
271-2045



Elizabeth Campbell
321-9383
campbell4portage@yahoo.com



Patricia M. Randall
324-7779
patricia.randall@portagemi.gov



Claudette Reidclaudette.reid@portagemi.gov



Terry R. Urban
323-8160
terry.urban@portagemi.gov