

Results of the 25th Community Survey Are Encouraging Citizens Feel They Receive Good Services for Their Tax Dollars

The Portage Community Survey is a tool utilized by the City Council and the City Administration to obtain citizen feedback on the provision of services and to assist in setting future goals and objectives. For the 25th time, the City of Portage, with the assistance of the Kercher Center for Social Research at Western Michigan University, conducted the Portage Community Survey. The results of the 2011 survey were received by the City Council at their annual Goal Setting Session on December 9. As in 2008 and 2009 (as a cost savings measure, the Council elected to not conduct the survey in 2010), the 2011 survey was conducted in mail format, rather than a random-digit dialing (phone) survey, which has resulted in increased response rates. Highlights of the results include:

- ◆ An overwhelming majority of survey respondents (87.7 percent) feel they are receiving **good services for their tax dollars** (compared to 85.1 percent in 2009 and 85.4 percent in 2008).
- ◆ While **traffic on South Westnedge Avenue** remains the top concern among respondents with 67.6 percent perceiving traffic on the city's major thoroughfare as a problem, the concern has declined somewhat as compared to 73.6 percent in 2009 and 71.9 percent in 2008. Less than half of the respondents (42.5 percent) reported a perceived problem with traffic flow on streets other than South Westnedge Avenue.
- ◆ Concerns with **illegal drug use and underage drinking in neighborhoods** has declined in 2011, with 22.8 percent of respondents reporting problems with illegal drug use (24.7 percent in 2009) and 16.8 percent reporting problems with underage drinking (22.1 percent in 2009). Interestingly, approximately 40

percent of respondents answered "don't know" to each of these questions.

- ◆ While the **condition of neighborhood homes and yards** was not perceived as a severe problem, small proportions of respondents apparently feel the situation has become worse. A question added to the 2008 survey asked about the perceived change in the condition of neighborhoods in the past five years. The 2011 results show that 17.2 percent of respondents felt the condition of their own neighborhood had become worse, as compared to 16.2 percent in 2009 and 17.7 percent in 2008.
- ◆ Satisfaction with **bikeways / trailways, curbside recycling and the condition of parks** are ranked highest with 95.1 percent, 93.4 percent and 92.2 percent of the respondents indicating satisfaction with these services, respectively. As in previous years, satisfaction with city programs / services was high, so that even those services ranked lowest by respondents (snow removal at 76.3 percent and the condition of streets at 61.7 percent) were well regarded.
- ◆ Of those respondents having direct contact with a city employee over the past year, 77.7 percent expressed satisfaction with the **quality of service received from the employee** – matching the 77.7 percent in 2009 and up from 72 percent in 2008.
- ◆ The **level of fire protection** is not a pressing concern to residents, as 95.9 percent of those surveyed do not perceive a problem in this service area. The **level of police protection**, as well, is not perceived as a problem according to 86.7 percent of those surveyed.

- ◆ The **Portager newsletter** continues to be well received, with 93.4 percent of those surveyed believing the Portager is either a very or somewhat important source of information for happenings in Portage city government. Similarly, 75 percent of respondents feel that the **City of Portage website** is a very or somewhat important source of information about what is going on in Portage city government.
- ◆ A new question in 2011 asked **how the city should deal with continuing economic difficulties**. The results show that 46.5 percent of the respondents who had an opinion (21.6 percent responded "don't know") believe the city should maintain services and raise taxes while 53.5 percent believe maintaining taxes and further reducing services is best.
- ◆ With regard to **intergovernmental cooperation** (a new topic for the 2011 survey), 84.4 percent of respondents reported they would support intergovernmental cooperation and / or consolidated services only if it saves Portage money and results in improved service. Support for all other scenarios was minimal. Interestingly, 7.6 percent of respondents would not support any intergovernmental cooperation.

Responses to the 2011 Portage Community survey are encouraging. The high level of satisfaction continually demonstrated by the results of the Portage Community Survey indicates that the city has a well-defined understanding of the issues important to the Portage community, and supports the concept that the city provides an excellent level of service. The complete 2011 Portage Community Survey can be viewed at www.portagemi.gov > Departments > City Manager > Documents.

January Quarterly Curbside Brush Collection

The Quarterly Curbside Brush Collection Program will take place in January, including the collection of Christmas trees, which can be placed at the curb whole – no trimming necessary. Trees should be free of all decorations, including disposable tinsel.



Residents are asked to have brush and Christmas trees placed at the curb no later than Monday morning at 7 a.m. of their scheduled collection week but no sooner than three days prior to that day. Visit www.portagemi.gov > Departments > Streets & Equipment > Brush Pickup for a map of pickup zones and collection dates. Questions regarding the Quarterly Curbside Brush Collection can be directed to the Streets & Equipment Department at 329-4444.

Do You Qualify for a 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 2012 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.

The Property Tax Poverty Exemption Application form is available at the Office of the City Assessor or online at www.portagemi.gov > Departments > City Assessor > Property Tax Forms & Information. The approval process requires an in-person appointment before the Board of Review, which meets in March, July and December. To be considered, applications must be submitted to the Office of the City Assessor at least 10 days prior to the Board of Review session. Generally, the Board of Review considers completed applications in relation to the federal household income standards, along with household assets, and determines by a simple majority vote whether or not to grant an exemption. Exemptions granted to residents due to poverty income levels are subject to audit by the Michigan Department of Treasury. More information can be obtained by contacting the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433.

Household Size*	Maximum Income
1 person	\$10,900
2 persons	\$14,700
3 persons	\$18,500
4 persons	\$22,400
5 persons	\$26,200
6 persons	\$30,000
7 persons	\$33,800
8 persons	\$37,600

* For households with more than 8 persons, add \$3,800 for each additional person.

City Receives State and National Recognition in 2011



Portage continues to garner state and national recognition for excellence in areas such as service quality, public communications, innovative technology, financial budgeting, environmental activities and public safety. In all, the city received 11 awards in 2011.

- ◆ Top Ten Right of Way Project of the Year - International Right of Way Association - 12th Street / West Milham Ave Roundabout.
- ◆ Project of the Year - Southwest Region American Public Works Association - Lovers Lane Reconstruction Project
- ◆ Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce 2011 Public Servant of the Year - W. Christopher Barnes, Director of Transportation & Utilities
- ◆ Government Finance Officers Association - Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting
- ◆ Government Finance Officers Association - Distinguished Budget Presentation
- ◆ Tree City USA (21st consecutive year)
- ◆ Portage Senior Center Accreditation from the National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) - Third consecutive five-year accreditation.
- ◆ Apex Award For Publication Excellence - City Website
- ◆ CALEA Continued Certification
- ◆ e-Cities 4-Star Community Recognition - University of Michigan

New and Expanding Businesses (January to December 2011)

The City of Portage remains vital, ever changing and resilient by offering businesses unmatched opportunity, significant comparative advantages and a creative and capable public sector partner. The City of Portage congratulates these new or expanded businesses in the community.

Business / Address	# of Jobs	Business / Address	# of Jobs
Access First Federal Credit Union 233 West Centre Avenue	8 new	Old Chicago Pizza & Pasta 5314 South Westnedge Avenue	80 new
Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine 5827 Oakland Drive	N/A	One Main Financial 137 West Centre Avenue	N/A
The Air Zoo 6151 Portage Road	70 retained	Paul's TV 550 Ring Road	N/A
A-Kays Creative Hair Design 8842 Portage Road	n/a	Post Community Credit Union 2340 East Centre Avenue	6 new
American Fitness Partners 6022 South Westnedge Avenue	N/A	Prudential Financial 950 Trade Centre Way	N/A
Angies Groom Room 8606 Portage Road	N/A	Ruff Cuts Grooming Salon 8314 Portage Road	2 new
Anna Nail & Spa 229 West Centre Avenue	5 retained	Sage Orthodontics 3275 Cooley Court, Suite 155	2 new
Apple & Associates 7320 Garden Lane	3 new	Savvy Bridal & Formal Exchange 669 Romence Road	3 new
Auto World of Portage 7940 South Sprinkle Road	4 new	Specialized Staffing Solutions 5228 South Westnedge Avenue	4 retained
Blue Line Remodeling, LLC 7880 South Sprinkle Road, Suite AB	2 new/3 retained	Stryker 1901 Romence Road Parkway	N/A
Center for Vein Restoration 3810 West Centre Avenue	15 new	Subway 5121 South Westnedge Avenue	3 new
Chung's Tiger TaeKwanDo 7612 South Westnedge Avenue	3 new	The Computer Guild 5121 South Westnedge Avenue	4 retained
Complete Nutrition 5964 South Westnedge Avenue	6 new	Thermo Fisher Scientific Immunodiagnosics Division 4169 Commercial Avenue	72 retained
Business / Address	# of Jobs	Business / Address	# of Jobs
Crossroads Auto Service 6230 Lovers Lane	30 retained	TLC Eyecare & Laser Center 410 East Centre Avenue	10 retained
Depatie Fluid Power 6256 American Avenue	2 new/28 retained		
Easy on Hold 1918 West Milham Avenue	7 retained		
Economy Construction 7522 South Westnedge Avenue	3 new		
Green Earth Hydroponics 8127 Portage Road	3 new		
Hometown Urgent Care 245 West Centre Avenue	9 new		
Jazzercise 7117 South Westnedge Avenue	5 new		
John Koch State Farm 8108 Shaver Road	2 new		
Kalamazoo Choppers 9820 Portage Road	3 retained		
Koning & Jilek, PC 8080 Moorsbridge Road, Suite 103	1 new/4 retained		
Lake Michigan Credit Union 4084 West Centre Avenue	8 new		
Los Amigos Mexican Restaurant 7375 South Westnedge Avenue	7 new/3 retained		
Lovers Lane Mart 1256 East Centre Avenue	3 new		
Mega-Bev 7921 Oakland Drive	6 new		
Merrill Lynch 750 Trade Centre Way	5 new/25 retained		
Noggle Auto Repair 6902 Lovers Lane	2 new		

Estimated Number of Employees obtained from business representative or publication. N/A indicates that information was not available or not provided by business representative.

City Offers Convenient Bill Payment Options

For the convenience of Portage residents and customers, the City of Portage offers various payment options.

Cash, Check or Money Order

These safe, reliable payment options are available for over-the-counter transactions at the Treasury Office, in the 24-hour City Hall drop-box and for mail transactions. (Cash payments in the drop box and by mail are discouraged.) Payment by check authorizes the city to convert the check to an electronic transaction, which could result in funds being deducted from the customer's bank account as soon as the same day that the check is received.

Credit Cards

The City of Portage offers the option for customers to pay any city charge with a credit card through Official Payments Corporation. Customers may call 1-800-272-9829 or visit www.officialpayments.com to make credit card payments. Official Payments Corporation charges customers a small convenience fee for use of the service. Current fees are based on the amount being paid for all non-utility payments. The fee for making a utility (water

or sewer) payment is a flat \$3.95 per transaction. **Credit / debit card payments are not accepted at City Hall.**

Online Banking

Most banking institutions offer an online bill pay service, allowing customers to make electronic payments to the city. When making an online banking payment, please reference the specific customer account number shown on the City of Portage billing statement (utility account number, parcel number, etc.) to ensure the payment is applied to the appropriate account. Customers are advised that certain banking institutions may actually prepare a paper check and mail it to the city, rather than making payment electronically. This may result in a delay in the city receiving your payment. While the City of Portage does not charge a convenience fee for Online Banking, certain banking institutions do. Customers are encouraged to contact their banking institution with questions concerning the online banking option.

Automatic Bill Payment (Bank Drafting)

The City of Portage continues to offer automatic bill payment (bank drafting) for utility (water or sewer)

customers. This option involves the automatic payment of utility bills directly from the customer's bank account 29 days after the bill date, resulting in no late-payment fees. Visit the city website to sign up for Automatic Bill Payment of utility bills - www.portagemi.gov > Departments > Finance > Bill Payment Options.

Late Payments

For all late-payment disputes concerning mailed payments, the Portage Treasury Office will rely on the postmark applied by the U. S. Postmaster. Due to recent publicly-announced changes to mail processing and delivery, the City of Portage urges customers mailing payments to do so at least three days prior to the due date. Likewise, for online banking transactions, the city recommends payments be authorized at least one week prior to the due date. Credit card payments to the city are processed using the time stamp provided by Official Payments Corporation at the exact time the transaction is authorized and the customer is provided a payment confirmation number.

Please contact the Portage Treasury Office at 329-4455 with any questions concerning bill payment options.

Celebrate Winter in Your Portage Parks!

The month of January is normally the coldest and snowiest of the year. Seize the opportunity to participate in winter recreation programs sponsored by the City of Portage Parks and Recreation Department. Last year, approximately 7,000 people enjoyed ice skating at the Ice Rink at Millennium Park, downhill skiing at Timber Ridge and cross country skiing, snowshoeing and special events at Schrier Park. Contact the Portage Parks and Recreation Department at 329-4522 for more information about the following activities.

Schrier Park Winter Sports Fest

Saturday, January 21, 2012 12 noon - 3:30 p.m.
Schrier Park, 850 Osterhout Road

The Winter Sports Fest is a great opportunity to try out Nordic fitness walking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing, with assistance from Lee's Adventure Sports and Breakaway Bicycles instructors. Equipment demonstrations and instruction will take place between 12 noon and 3:30 p.m. Kalamazoo Nature Center staff will be on site to conduct outdoor adventure walks at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. The Schrier Park pavilion and fireplace will provide a welcome respite with free refreshments! The Winter Sports Fest is free of charge and no advance registration is required. Come out and rediscover winter at Schrier Park!

Ice Skating Lessons at Millennium Park

Saturday, January 14 and Saturday, January 21, 2012
Session 1: Ages 5 - 11 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.
Session 2: Ages 5 - Adult (Family Lesson) 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Fee: \$20 per person

This learn-to-skate program, in cooperation with the Greater Kalamazoo Skating Association, covers the early fundamentals of ice skating and allows beginners to discover the joy of outdoor skating. The two-session program will be held at the Ice Rink at Millennium Park. The fee, collected at the first session, includes skate rentals and instruction. Pre-registration is required and can be made by calling 329-4522.

Cross Country Ski Classes

Participants must provide their ski own equipment.

Pre-registration and fees are due by January 26, 2012 at:
◆ Breakaway Bicycles, 185 Romence Road (324-5555) or
◆ Lee's Adventure Sports, 311 Kilgore Road (381-7700)

A minimum of four inches of snow cover is required for skiing.

Youth Class - Saturday, January 28, 2012 9 - 11 a.m.
Schrier Park, 850 Osterhout Road
Fee: \$15 per person

An excellent opportunity for youngsters age 8 to 12 years old to learn the correct way to cross country ski. The introductory class will emphasize safety, proper use of equipment and how to traverse a variety of winter terrain. Minimum class size - 8 students Maximum class size - 15 students

Adult Class - Saturday, January 28, 2012 1 - 3 p.m.
Schrier Park, 850 Osterhout Road
Fee: \$20 per person

This class will teach those who are 13 and older the diagonal stride with opposite and double poling, moving and stationary turns, uphill / downhill techniques and how to choose and use various cross-country equipment and clothing. In addition, personal safety and recommendations on local, regional and state ski destinations are covered in this comprehensive introduction to cross-country skiing. Minimum class size - 8 students Maximum class size - 20 students



Learn to Ski in 3 Easy Steps at Timber Ridge!

Sundays: January 22, 29 and February 5 2 - 3:30 p.m.
Timber Ridge Ski Resort, 7500 23-1/2 Street near Gobles
Fee: \$55 per person (plus pre-registration fee)

Beginning group downhill ski lessons for adults and children 8 years and older will be provided at Timber Ridge on three consecutive Sundays, beginning January 22, 2012. The fee includes equipment rental, lift ticket and instruction for the three weeks and is payable on January 22 at Timber Ridge. A separate pre-registration fee is required for this program. To pre-register, send \$5 per person or \$10 per family to the Portage Parks and Recreation Department, 7719 South Westnedge, Portage, MI 49002, by January 20, 2012. (Make checks payable to the City of Portage.) Classes start promptly at 2 p.m. and end at 3:30 p.m. **Bonus:** You can ski until 8 p.m. on each of the instruction dates!

Scholarships

Youth scholarships, in cooperation with the Portage Community Center, are available for winter recreation programs to any City of Portage youth age 18 and under living in a household meeting the established income guidelines. Interested families may contact the Portage Community Center at 323-1942 for more information.



A minimum snow cover of four inches is required for this event.

2012 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 Summer Entertainment Series (SES) has been going strong for 24 years, with events and activities for everyone to enjoy! Planned highlights for the 2012 summer season include the popular children's Lunch & Learn series, Shakespeare in the Park, children's theatre, movies in the park 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 \$75,000.

As the New Year begins, consider making a donation to the SES and help make the City of Portage a **GREAT PLACE** in which to live, work and visit. Donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. All donations received before March 9, 2012 will be recognized in the annual SES brochure, distributed to over 35,000 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 make a donation, please complete the form below and mail it along with your check to 7900 South Westnedge Avenue, Portage, MI 49002. Your contribution is **critical** to providing another sensational cultural arts season in 2012.

Winter Snow Party!

Saturday, February 4th, 2012, 12 noon - 3 p.m.
Oakland Drive Park
Admission: FREE!

The Portage Youth Advisory Committee will host a Winter Snow Party at Oakland Drive Park. Come out and spend time with your family and friends, all while enjoying the white wonders of Michigan weather!

Many activities are planned, such as sledding, a snowman building contest and a bonfire! Build, decorate and bring your own cardboard sled! Create and dress the biggest and fanciest snowman! Prizes will be awarded for best in show for both contests as well as the fastest cardboard sled. When you need a warm respite from the winter activities, enjoy a bonfire and hot chocolate or coffee. All ages are welcome.



Please accept this donation to the 2012 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 _____

Heading to a Warmer Climate for the Winter?

Tips to Secure Your Home While You Are Away

Many City of Portage residents spend the winter months in warmer locations and leave their homes for months at a time. The Portage Department of Public Safety offers these safety tips to secure your home while you are away and reduce the risk of a break-in:

- ◆ Ensure that you have secure locks on all doors and windows and check that they are all engaged before you depart.
- ◆ Make sure your home looks lived in – not empty. Have someone clear snow from your driveway and walks. Ask a neighbor to park a car in your driveway. If **you** leave a car in your driveway, ask a neighbor move it occasionally.
- ◆ Ask a trusted neighbor to watch your home while you are away. Leave your vacation address and telephone number with the neighbor so you can be reached in case of emergency.
- ◆ Test your security system (if present) and smoke alarms before you depart.
- ◆ Stop all deliveries or arrange for a neighbor to pick up your mail, newspaper and packages.



- ◆ Use timers to turn lights and a radio or television on and off at various times.
- ◆ Turn the volume of the ringer on your telephone down or off. A burglar outside your home won't be alerted to your absence by calling your telephone.
- ◆ Don't announce your absence on an answering machine message; simply say that you are unavailable to receive the call. Consider having your calls forwarded to your vacation phone number or cell phone.
- ◆ Consider placing valuables in a safe deposit box.
- ◆ List your emergency contact information with the Portage Department of Public Safety so that you can be reached in the event of a problem at your home while you are away. Submit your contact information by visiting the City of Portage web site – www.portagemi.gov > Departments > Public Safety > Police Division and select **Residential Emergency Contact Information Forms**.



Questions concerning this information can be directed to the Portage Department of Public Safety Crime Prevention Officer at 324-9255.

Damaged 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 knock posts and mailboxes completely over.

Residents are encouraged to report mailbox damage resulting from snow plowing operations by contacting the City of Portage Streets & Equipment Department at 329-4444 or at www.portagemi.gov > Quick Links > Report It! 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 with labor). If payment is desired, the resident will be asked to sign and return a release form to the city and will be responsible for purchase and installation of a 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

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Dog Licenses Available at City Hall

Dog licenses are available for purchase at the Treasury Office in City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) in January and February. To purchase a license, please present:

- ◆ Preprinted renewal form, issued by Kalamazoo County Animal Control (if renewing a license).
- ◆ Proof of current rabies vaccination.
- ◆ Proof of dog being spayed / neutered, if applicable.

The fees for dog licenses, established by Kalamazoo County Animal Control, are \$10 for dogs that are spayed / neutered or less than one year old and \$30 for dogs that are not spayed / neutered. Kalamazoo County Animal Control no longer offers a senior discount for the purchase of dog licenses. The city accepts cash, money orders or checks made payable to the City of Portage. **Credit / debit cards are not accepted at Portage City Hall.** Please call the Treasury Office at 269-329-4455 or the Kalamazoo County Animal Control at 269-383-8775 with any questions.

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.



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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.



January

5	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
9	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
10	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
19	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
24	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting

February

1	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
13	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
14	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
16	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
28	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting