



7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002
www.portagemi.gov

It's Property Assessment and Board of Review Time Property Assessment Change Notices to be Mailed to Property Owners in February — Board of Review to Convene in March

The annual Assessment Change Notices will be mailed to Portage property owners on Friday, February 13, 2015. The Assessment Change Notice provides the property owner tax information regarding their property such as the valuation of the property, the amount of change from 2014 to 2015 and whether the property's taxable value was "uncapped" as a result of an ownership transfer.

Property owners are encouraged to review their Assessment Change Notice for accuracy and contact the Office of the City Assessor with questions or concerns.

"We evaluate more than 20,000 parcels each year," said City Assessor Jim Bush. "If we make a mistake, we welcome the opportunity to make it right." Many issues 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. The City Assessor cannot make any changes to 2015 property valuations after Friday, March 6, 2015.

The City of Portage Board of Review, appointed by the City Council, is responsible for hearing property tax valuation appeals from Portage property owners. If you believe your

property valuation is inaccurate, and assessing staff were not able to address your concerns, you may appear before the March Board of Review to appeal the valuation. The Board of Review is scheduled to meet:

- ◆ Tuesday, March 10 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- ◆ Wednesday, March 11 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- ◆ Thursday, March 12 from 1 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 9 p.m.

Additional dates and times will be scheduled as necessary to ensure that all Portage property owner concerns are addressed.



Contact the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433 beginning Monday, March 2, 2015 to schedule an appointment before the Board of Review. Appeals may also be made by original signed letters submitted to the Office of the City Assessor (Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue) by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 11, 2015. Please visit the city website at www.portagemi.gov > *Boards & Commissions* > *Board of Review* to view the policy for written appeals to the Board of Review.

Issues that can be brought before the Board of Review include property valuation (SEV), assessment roll classification changes, veterans' exemption and Property Tax Poverty 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), unless there has been new construction or an uncapping event (transfer of ownership). For 2015 the CPI is 1.6%, so unless new construction or physical improvements have taken place or the assessed and taxable values are not the same amount, the taxable value may increase up to 1.6%.

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. Selling price is only one measure of value for the Board of Review to consider.

Property owners who choose to meet with assessing staff or appeal before the Board of Review should provide appropriate support for a particular position, such as documentation of sales of similar homes in the neighborhood occurring between October 1, 2012 and September 30, 2014, current appraisals of the home, receipts or invoices for recent construction activity, photographs of property damage or deterioration or any additional information relevant to the assessment of the property.

Additional information is available on the city website at www.portagemi.gov > *Boards & Commissions* > *Board of Review*. Questions concerning any of this information can be directed to the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433.

*"We evaluate more than 20,000 parcels each year. If we make a mistake, we welcome the opportunity to make it right."
– City Assessor Jim Bush*

2015 Property Tax Poverty Exemptions

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 and meet the federal household poverty exemption guidelines for the previous calendar year as shown below.

Federal Household Income Guidelines	
Household Size*	Maximum Annual Income
1 person	\$11,670
2 persons	\$15,730
3 persons	\$19,790
4 persons	\$23,850
5 persons	\$27,910
6 persons	\$31,970
7 persons	\$36,030
8 persons	\$40,090

* For households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,060 for each additional person.

The Federal Household Income Guidelines determine the eligibility of the applicant and must be supported with proper income documentation (such as federal and state income tax returns for all persons residing in the principal residence, including any property tax credit returns) or by filing an affidavit for all persons residing

in the residence who were not required to file federal or state income tax returns for the current or preceding tax year. Household assets (a maximum of \$25,000) are also considered and must be reported on the application.

The Property Tax Poverty Exemption Application form is available at the Office of the City Assessor (Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue) or on the city website 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 for the exemption at the March Board of Review, submit your completed application to Office of the City Assessor by February 24, 2015.**

Generally, the Board of Review considers completed applications in relation to the federal household income guidelines and household assets, then determines by a simple majority vote whether 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.

Awards and Recognitions

The City of Portage continues to receive state and national recognition for excellence in areas such as service quality, public communications, technology, infrastructure and budgeting. In 2014, the following awards and recognitions were received:

Government Finance Officers Association Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting



Government Finance Officers Association
Distinguished Budget Presentation

American Public Works Association Project of the Year, Southwest Michigan Region for the Portage Road/Centre Street Traffic Signal Interconnection Project



League of American Bicyclists Bicycle Friendly Community



National Arbor Day Foundation
Tree City USA

Apex Grand Award For Publication Excellence - Portager



City Employees Collect More Than One Ton of Food to Benefit the Portage Community Center Food Pantry

For three weeks in December, City of Portage employees participated in the first ever "Biggest Giver Food Drive Challenge." Four collection sites were identified, including the Police Division, the Fire Division, City Hall and the Public Services building (including the Senior Center). The winner of the challenge would be the site that collected the most food by weight. An ambitious goal was set to collect 1,000 pounds of food. At the end of the third week city employees had collected 2,408 pounds of food!

An award ceremony was held on December 23, 2014, where a trophy was awarded honoring the Police Division as the 2014 Biggest Giver for collecting the most food. The food donations were delivered to the food pantry at the Portage Community Center, a Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes pantry site. While city employees certainly had fun with the contest, which brought out the competitive side of many, the true meaning of the Biggest Giver Food Drive Challenge was to make a positive difference in the lives of fellow Portage community members.



City of Portage employees collected more than one ton of food to benefit the Portage Community Center food pantry as part of the first ever Biggest Giver Food Drive Challenge.

City of Portage Offers Home Buyer Assistance Programs

During these cold winter months, many people begin to consider purchasing a new home in anticipation of a spring or summer move date. There are several steps to making the dream of home ownership a reality, including securing the necessary financing.

Through a grant received from the U.S. Department of



Housing and Urban Development, the City of Portage can provide assistance with down payment and closing costs to home buyers who meet program income eligibility requirements (see table at right to determine if you are within the minimum and maximum annual income range) and are looking to buy and occupy a home in specified Portage neighborhoods.

Deferred, zero percent interest loans up to \$3,000 are available to assist with up to 50 percent of required down payment and eligible closing costs. Deferred loans up to \$5,000 will be provided to home buyers who purchase and occupy a foreclosed home or a home that was previously renter-occupied (rental and foreclosed properties must be vacant prior to being listed for sale). If you qualify



Household Size	Minimum Annual Income	Maximum Annual Income
1 Person	\$16,600	\$33,200
2 Person	\$18,975	\$37,950
3 Person	\$21,350	\$42,700
4 Person	\$23,700	\$47,400
5 Person	\$25,600	\$51,200
6 Person	\$27,500	\$55,000
7 Person	\$29,400	\$58,800
8 Person	\$31,300	\$62,600

for a deferred loan, no monthly payments are required as long as you continue to live in your home.

For additional information, including a map of eligible neighborhoods, please contact the Department of Community Development at 329-4477.

Stay Connected, Sign Up for PORTAGEALERT

Keeping Portage residents informed of important, up-to-the minute information is critical during emergency situations such as severe weather events and hazardous traffic or road conditions. The city implemented PORTAGEALERT in December to stay connected to residents and efficiently provide direction when it's most important.

PORTAGEALERT allows the city to send voice messages to home phones, businesses, local agencies and mobile phones in just minutes. The service will also send email, text messages and posts on Facebook and Twitter. Messages can also be sent to TTY/TDD devices for people who are hearing impaired. PORTAGEALERT will also be used to distribute service reminders such as snowplowing progress updates during major snow events, Spring Cleanup Program dates, Quarterly Brush Collection dates and more.

Residents interested in receiving alerts can sign up on PORTAGEALERT. Publicly available primary residential and business phones are automatically included in the system. However, to ensure the City of Portage has the most up-to-date and accurate contact information, including cell phone numbers and email addresses, residents can visit www.portagemi.gov and click on the PORTAGEALERT icon to provide complete contact information for the database. Users can also manage message preferences by indicating the preferred mode of contact (phone, text, email, etc.), language and message topics.



Visit www.portagemi.gov or scan the QR Code to register your contact information. Those without internet access are encouraged to call 329-4405 to provide current contact information.

Sure Signs of a Scam

The popularity of phone scams that prey on a victim's fears has risen in recent years. These schemes typically involve a demand for payment and if the victim refuses to pay, threats of arrest, discontinuation of a service, suspension of a license, etc. Two phone scams currently making the rounds involve callers impersonating representatives from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Consumers Energy.



In an aggressive and sophisticated phone scam targeting taxpayers, a caller claims to be an employee of the IRS and can sound very convincing. The caller uses a fake name and IRS identification number, may have specific information about their target and usually alters the caller ID to appear as though the IRS is calling. The victim is told he or she owes money to the IRS, which must be paid promptly through a prepaid debit card or wire transfer. If the victim refuses to cooperate, the caller will make threats of arrest, deportation or suspension of a business or driver's license. Alternatively, the victims may be told he or she is due a refund and asked to provide personal information to facilitate the transfer of funds, which can then lead to identity theft. If the intended target fails to answer the phone, the scammers often leave an "urgent" message requesting a call back.

Similar to the IRS play, the Consumers Energy scheme involves a caller representing themselves as a collection employee aggressively demanding payment for a Consumers Energy bill within one hour. The victim is told to purchase a "Green Dot" prepaid debit card, or another specific card, then directed to call an (866) toll-free phone number to pay the bill using these cards.

If you think a caller is trying to scam you, there are a few key signs for which you should watch. It's probably a scam if a caller:

- ◆ demands immediate payment and threatens you with consequences if you refuse
- ◆ demands payment for something without giving you an opportunity to question the amount they say you owe
- ◆ require you to use a specific payment method, such as a prepaid credit card
- ◆ ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone
- ◆ threaten to contact police or other law enforcement if you refuse payment

If you think you have been a victim of this or another type of scam, call the Portage Department of Public Safety at 329-4556. To read more about common fraud scams and how to avoid being a victim of fraud, visit the FBI website at www.fbi.gov/scams-safety.

Registration is Open for the 3rd Annual Winter Blast Half Marathon and 5K!



A young runner celebrates as he crosses the finish line at the 2014 Winter Blast.

The third annual Winter Blast Half Marathon and 5K, presented in partnership by Kalamazoo Area Runners and the City of Portage will be held on Sunday, March 1, 2015. Runners and spectators alike are invited to join in this extraordinary community celebration of health and wellness. The USA Track & Field certified half marathon and 5K courses highlight the Portage trail system and include a mix of mostly flat paved bike trails and roads.

All running events will start and end at Portage Central High School, 8135 South Westnedge Avenue. Parking is available at Portage Central Middle School, Portage Central Elementary School, Portage Community Center, Portage District Library and Portage City Hall.

The 5K will kick off at 8 a.m., with the start for the half marathon set for 8:10 a.m. Post-race refreshments and entertainment will be available and awards will be presented at the Portage Central High School Commons Area.

Registration for the half marathon will close once it reaches a cap of 1,500 participants. For more information, to register or volunteer for this event, or to view race routes, please visit www.portagewinterblast.wordpress.com.

Winter Blast Road Closures for Sunday, March 1

Portage drivers should be prepared for traffic delays and detours as depicted in the map below on Sunday, March 1. A complete description of road closures, limited access and the race route are also detailed below.

- ◆ Full closure on South Westnedge Avenue between East Centre Avenue and Gabardine (7:45 to 9:30 a.m.)
- ◆ Full closure on East Centre Avenue between South Westnedge Avenue and Currier Drive (8 a.m. to 12 noon)
- ◆ Full closure on Currier Drive between East Centre Avenue and Brown Avenue (8:30 a.m. to 12 noon)
- ◆ Full closure on West Melody Avenue at South Westnedge Avenue intersection (8 to 9:30 a.m.)
- ◆ Local traffic only on West Melody Avenue between Shaver Road and South Westnedge Avenue (8 to 9:30 a.m.)
- ◆ Full closure on Garden Lane between the railroad tracks and Kingston Drive. Local traffic permitted on Garden Lane between Lovers Lane and Kingston Drive (8:15 a.m. to 12 noon)
- ◆ Southbound curb lane on Lovers Lane will be closed completely to vehicular traffic between Kilgore Road and Garden Lane (8 a.m. to 12 noon)
- ◆ Local roads along the route will have limited access (7:45 to 9:30 a.m.), including Larkspur, Marigold, Melody, Barberry, Crocket, Parkland, South Shore, West End, Lakeview, Eastern, Quarterline, Organdy, Gingham, Velvet, Calico, Corduroy, Gabardine, Chambray, Cherryview, Oakview and South Westnedge between Gabardine and Bacon.



Questions about how the marathon will affect road travel may be directed to the city Traffic Engineer at 324-9221.

Fifth Annual Winter Snow Party

Saturday, February 7, 2015, 12 noon to 3 p.m.
Oakland Drive Park, 7650 Oakland Drive
Admission: FREE!!

A great opportunity to enjoy time with your family and friends, all while enjoying the white wonders of Michigan weather. There will be many activities to enjoy such as sledding and a snowman building contest! Build, decorate and bring your own cardboard sled! Build and dress up the biggest and fanciest snowman! Prizes will be awarded for best in show for both contests as well as the fastest cardboard sled! Cardboard sled contest begins at 1 p.m., with snowman building immediately following. When you need warm respite from the activities, enjoy a bonfire, with hot chocolate and coffee available for purchase. The event is hosted by the Portage Youth Advisory Committee and all ages are welcome.



A family participates in the cardboard sled contest during the 2014 Winter Snow Party.

Softball Season is Right Around the Corner

Winter may be upon us now, but it's never too early to think about warmer weather and softball! Softball is a great way to enjoy the warmer months with your friends and coworkers. No matter your skill level or experience, all are welcome to join!

Important Dates

Online Registration Opens	February 18
portagemisoftball.leaguetoobox.com	
Over 50 League Meeting	February 24
5:30 p.m. @ Portage Senior Center, 320 Library Lane	
Co-Ed, Men's League Meeting	February 24
7:00 p.m. @ Portage Senior Center, 320 Library Lane	
Registration Deadline	March 25
League Play Begins	April 27

Attention Team Managers!

Please plan to attend the League Meeting on February 24 as noted above. This will be a critical time to ask questions, learn about league rules and updates, review the registration process and meet your 2015 Softball Coordinator. Players are also welcome to attend.

2015 League Offerings*

Monday	Co-Ed Leagues
Tuesday	Co-Ed and Over 50 Leagues
Wednesday	Men's Leagues
Thursday	Men's and Doubleheader Leagues
Friday	Men's, Co-Ed and Church Leagues

*All leagues are subject to availability and a minimum number of teams. Teams are accepted by date of registration and division placement is at the discretion of the Parks & Recreation Division staff.

Are you interested in a Men's Fast Pitch or a Women's league? Please contact Softball Coordinator, Mark at kloosterm@portagemi.gov or 329-4435. Visit portagemisoftball.leaguetoobox.com for softball updates and registration information.

Umpires Needed!

We always welcome new umpires in Portage! If you have an interest in umpiring, please call 329-4522, prior to March 1, for additional information and training details.

A Friendly Reminder Please Keep Sidewalks Free of Snow and Ice



The city reminds residents and businesses that City Ordinance (Chapter 66, Article 1, Section 66-4) requires property owners and occupants with public 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. Enforcement action for those not in compliance with this city ordinance could involve the assessment of fines.

Your cooperation in keeping sidewalks on major roadways and neighborhood streets clear for use by pedestrians is appreciated.

The Portage Fire Division asks residents to also clear snow away from any fire hydrants on or adjacent to their property. Should there be a fire nearby, it is imperative firefighters have clear access to fire hydrants so that fire hoses can be immediately attached and used to fight the fire. Your assistance in clearing snow away from fire hydrants will make a big difference in how quickly a fire can be extinguished.



Veteran City of Portage Employees Promoted to Fill Key Positions

Vacancies in the positions of Deputy City Manager and Finance Director have recently been filled by two long-time City of Portage employees. In December, City Manager Laurence Shaffer announced the promotion of Rob Boulis to Deputy City Manager and William Furry to Finance Director.

Mr. Boulis has served the City of Portage as the Director of Employee Development since 2002. He has a Bachelors in Business Administration from the University of West Georgia. Prior to his employment with the city, Mr. Boulis served as Human Resource Manager for Kalamazoo Stamping and Die / Tower Automotive for eleven years, preceded by his role as Human Resource Manager for Hydreco Hydraulics for twelve years. "Rob has continued to provide wise, ethical and timely advice on all administrative issues," said Shaffer. "I value his institutional memory and sage recommendations."



Mr. Furry has been a member of the City of Portage Finance Department since 1999. He has a Masters of Science in Accountancy from Western Michigan University. Mr. Furry had been the Deputy Director of Revenue / Capital Improvements in the Finance Department with a focus upon the management of the Treasury Office function, tax collection, utility accounting and the Capital Improvement Program. "Bill has proven to be an excellent public finance professional and receives my full support as the city continues to move forward," said Shaffer.

Be an On-Call Firefighter

The City of Portage is an Equal Opportunity Employer



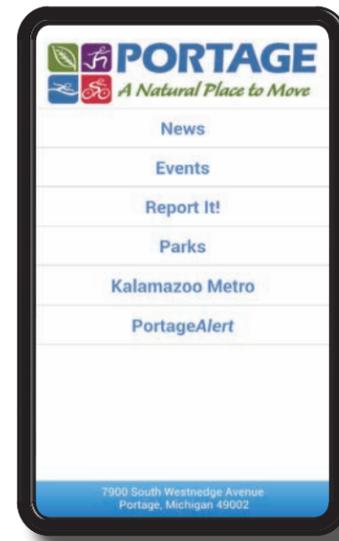
The City of Portage is seeking qualified candidates for the paid position of On-Call Firefighter. Successful candidates must hold State of Michigan certifications of Firefighter I, Firefighter II and Medical First Responder and must pass a written test, physical agility test, background investigation and post-offer physical examination. Some residency requirements apply. A fully-trained on-call firefighter will receive \$16 per hour. Qualified candidates are asked to submit an application to Employee Development, City of Portage, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue, Portage, Michigan, 49002 or online at www.portagemi.gov. Interested candidates are asked to call the Department of Employee Development for further information at 329-4533.

Download the MI.Portage App and Connect with the City on the Go!

The City of Portage mobile app, MI.Portage, available at the Apple Store and Google Play store has been updated with new features that may be of interest to you. With MI.Portage, mobile users can connect with the city in a number of ways:

- ◆ view city news and events,
- ◆ look up parks information and locations,
- ◆ report a concern (potholes, streetlight outages, etc.) with the Report It! tool
- ◆ track Kalamazoo Metro Transit buses and bus stop arrival times
- ◆ receive emergency and community outreach notifications with the **PortageAlert** system
- ◆ Connect to the city website – www.portagemi.gov

If you haven't downloaded the MI.Portage app already, you may want to give it a try. MI.Portage is a great way to connect to city information. Best of all, MI.Portage is free. The app is designed for smart phones only and will not currently work on tablet devices. If you would like to see other features on the MI.Portage app, please send an email to webmaster@portagemi.gov.



7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002-5160

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FREE HOME RADON TEST KIT

Bring in your household hazardous waste materials for recycling and receive your Home Radon Test Kit!

Offer valid for Kalamazoo County Residents only. Offer good while quantities last. Expires February 28, 2015.
Tuesday & Friday 8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. | Wednesday 12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.
Open Year Round

www.kalcounty.com/hhw

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 always open to the public.

The City Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. Citizens are encouraged to contact the City Administration with concerns or complaints about city services by calling Complaint Resolution at (269) 329-4404 or by visiting www.portagemi.gov > Report It!



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



Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson
327-9136
jimpearson4@gmail.com



Nasim Ansari
327-0016
nasimhansari@yahoo.com



Richard Ford
616-560-8328
richard.ford@portagemi.gov



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



Claudette Reid
491-9725
claudette.reid@portagemi.gov



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



Laurence Shaffer, City Manager
329-4400
shafferl@portagemi.gov

Televised City Meetings

All City of Portage City Council, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings can be viewed live on channel 190. 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.



February 2015

- 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