



7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002
www.portagemi.gov
(269) 329-4400

2016 Board of Review Time: Change Notices to be Mailed in February, Board of Review Convenes in March

The annual Assessment Change Notices will be mailed to Portage property owners by Friday, February 26, 2016. The Assessment Change Notice provides property owners pertinent information regarding their property, such as the valuation of the property, the amount of change from 2015 to 2016 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. Many issues can be addressed by assessing staff, without the necessity of appearing before the March Board of Review. City Assessor, Edward VanderVries says, "We welcome the opportunity to address citizen concerns and answer any questions about property assessments." 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. Taxpayers will still have the opportunity to appeal to the Board of Review if they are not satisfied with the results of the assessor review process. The City Assessor cannot make any changes to 2016 property valuations after the 2016 Assessment Roll has been turned over to the Board of Review.

Board of Review

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. In addition to its organizational meeting on Monday, March 14 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, the Board of Review is scheduled to meet:

- ◆ Monday, March 14 - 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
- ◆ Tuesday, March 15 - 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. & 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Wednesday, March 16 - 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. & 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.
- ◆ Tuesday, March 29 - 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon (final meeting)



"We welcome the opportunity to address citizen concerns and answer any questions about property assessments."

– City Assessor, Ed VanderVries

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



Contact the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433 beginning March 1, 2016 to schedule an appointment before the Board of Review. Appeals may also be made by signed letters submitted to the Office of the City Assessor (Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue, Portage, MI 49002) no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 15, 2016. 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, disabled 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), as determined by the State Tax Commission, unless there has been new construction or an uncapping event (transfer of ownership). For 2016 the CPI is 1.003, 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 by 1.003.

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 the 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, 2013 and September 30, 2015, 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. The Office of the City Assessor may also supply supporting documents to justify the valuation placed on the assessment roll or as part of the review process.

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.

Do you Qualify for a 2016 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 and meet the federal household poverty exemption guidelines for the previous calendar year as shown to the right.

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 (City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue, Portage, MI 49002) or on the city website at www.portagemi.gov > Departments > City Assessor > Property Tax Forms & Information.

Federal Household Income Guidelines	
Household Size*	Maximum Annual Income
1 person	\$11,770
2 persons	\$15,930
3 persons	\$20,090
4 persons	\$24,250
5 persons	\$28,410
6 persons	\$32,570
7 persons	\$36,730
8 persons	\$40,890

* For households with more than 8 persons, add \$4,160 for each additional person.

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 the Office of the City Assessor by March 1, 2016.**

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 may be obtained by contacting the Office of the City Assessor at 329-4433.

Don't Fall Victim to a Telephone Scam

Telephone scams are being reported to the Portage Department of Public Safety at an alarming rate, from both would-be victims and those who have already fallen victim to a scam. Fraudulent schemes involving the loss of \$8,000, \$13,000 and even more than \$100,000 have been reported to the Police Division.

Avoid falling victim to a telephone hoax by reviewing the following information.



Common Telephone Scams

- ◆ A caller claims to be a family member and says he or she is in jail and needs bond money, or has been involved in an accident and needs money.
- ◆ A caller tells you that you won the lottery but must pay the taxes in advance to receive your winnings.
- ◆ A caller invites you to invest in an overseas company with a promise of future gains from the investment.

- ◆ A caller claims to represent a government agency (such as the Internal Revenue Service) or a legitimate service company (such as Consumers Energy) and threatens action if money is not paid, whether it be arrest, deportation, large fines or discontinuation of a service.
- ◆ A caller claiming to be from Microsoft reports that there is a problem with your computer and offers to help repair it remotely – for a fee.

How to Avoid Falling Victim to a Scam

The mere fact that you were contacted by telephone is the biggest hint that a scammer is trying to defraud you. Most legitimate claims are made by U.S. Mail. Furthermore, trustworthy agencies will never call you and ask for personal information, such as a social security number or bank account / credit card number. Other hints that you are likely being deceived include:

- ◆ Did the caller apply a great deal of pressure, even threatening you, to take action immediately?

- ◆ Were you instructed to pay in a specific way, such as a gift card, Green Dot prepaid card, iTunes, Western Union, money order?
- ◆ Did you receive the call at a time of day when the purported company / agency would be closed?

Protect yourself by following these simple steps:

- ◆ Slow Down! Take time to think about what is being asked of you; don't make a rushed decision. Talk to family or friends before taking any action.
- ◆ Research the potential scam. Determine if the company or agency is legitimate. Call the Police Division to learn if a similar scam has been reported. Visit www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us to view scams in the area reported to the Better Business Bureau.
- ◆ Report it! You can report a fraudulent scheme online at ftc.gov/complaint (Federal Trade Commission) or www.portagemi.gov/ReportIt.aspx (City of Portage) or call the Portage Police Division at 329-4567.

Home Buyer Assistance Available from the City of Portage



Have you been pre-approved for a mortgage and are looking to buy a home in the City of Portage? If so, and you fall within the income guidelines listed on the table below, you may be eligible for down payment assistance. Qualified applicants (purchasing homes in specific Portage neighborhoods) may receive a deferred loan at 0% interest up to \$3,000 that will cover 50% of the required down payment plus eligible closing costs. Up to \$5,000 may be available for the purchase of bank-owned foreclosed properties or vacant properties that were previously renter-occupied homes.

Household Size	Maximum Annual Income*	Minimum Annual Income*
1 Person	\$33,750	\$16,880
2 Person	\$38,550	\$19,280
3 Person	\$43,350	\$22,880
4 Person	\$48,150	\$24,080
5 Person	\$52,050	\$26,040
6 Person	\$55,900	\$27,920
7 Person	\$59,750	\$29,880
8 Person	\$63,600	\$31,800

*Income requirements established annually by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

For more detailed information, a map of eligible neighborhoods or for an application package, please call the City of Portage Community Development Department at 329-4477.

Research into Deer Activity and Management Options Continues

Over the last year, the Portage Environmental Board has been studying deer population data in Portage and is seeking additional input from Portage residents. In August 2015, the board initiated an online survey regarding deer population and observed activity. As the data collection and research continues, the Environmental Board has posted new, updated surveys at www.portagemi.gov > Boards & Commissions > Environmental Board. Portage residents who have experienced deer activity or observed deer in Portage are encouraged to complete a survey - even if you responded to the previous survey. Survey results will be compiled and discussed at a town hall meeting regarding deer activity and management planned by the Environmental Board in the spring.

Residents are encouraged to not feed deer or other wildlife, which leads animals to congregate and lose



their fear of humans. Food handouts from people can disrupt a deer's digestion causing acidosis, often leading to the deer's death. In addition, germs and bacteria can be spread through public feeding by bringing animals together and sharing the same food source, increasing the risk of the transmission of diseases.

Look for additional information and details of the planned town hall meeting in upcoming Portager editions.

Winter Weather Reminders



The city reminds residents and businesses that City Ordinance 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 City of Portage also has a winter parking ordinance that is in effect from November 1 through April 15 of each year, stating that it is unlawful for any person to park any motor vehicle within five feet of the main traveled portion of the roadway between the hours of 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. This restriction is in effect whether or not there is snow present. The City of Portage also recommends that in times outside those restrictions when snow is present, residents make an effort not to park on the street if at all possible. This ensures that city snow removal equipment can complete the snow clearing process as rapidly and effectively as possible.

The Portage Fire Division asks residents to 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.



Fourth Annual Winter Blast Half Marathon, 10k & 5k Kicks Off February 28

The fourth annual Winter Blast Half Marathon, 10k and 5k, presented by the City of Portage and the Kalamazoo Area Runners, will be held on **Sunday, February**

at Portage Central Elementary and Middle Schools, Portage Community Center, Portage District Library, Portage Senior Center and Portage City Hall.

28, 2016. Runners and spectators are invited to join in this extraordinary community celebration of health and wellness. The 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

The 5k will kick off at 8 a.m., with the start for the 10k and 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 information, to view the course maps or to register or volunteer for this event, visit www.portagewinterblast.wordpress.com.

Portagers are Encouraged to Review Road Closures and Traffic Restrictions

Road closures and traffic restrictions for the Winter Blast are noted below and are illustrated in the map to the right:

- ◆ Full closure on South Westnedge Avenue between East Centre Avenue and Bacon Avenue (7:45 to 9:30 a.m.)
- ◆ Full closure on East Centre Avenue between South Westnedge Avenue and Currier Drive (8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon)
- ◆ Full closure on West Melody Avenue at the South Westnedge Avenue intersection (8:00 to 9:30 a.m.)
- ◆ Full closure on Currier Drive between East Centre Avenue and Brown Avenue (8:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon)
- ◆ Local traffic only on West Melody Avenue between Shaver Road and South Westnedge Avenue (8:00 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 12:00 noon)
- ◆ The southbound curb lane of Lovers Lane will be closed completely to vehicular traffic between Kilgore Road and Garden Lane (8:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon)

- ◆ Traffic will be controlled by Police at the intersections of Lovers Lane / Romence Road Parkway and Lovers Lane / East Milham Avenue (8:30 to 11:00 a.m.)
- ◆ Traffic will be controlled by Police at the intersection of Shaver Road / Melody Avenue (8:00 to 9:30 a.m.)
- ◆ Local roads along the route – Larkspur, Marigold, Melody, Barberry, Crocket, Parkland, South Shore, West End, Lakeview, Eastern, Quarterline, Organdy, Gingham, Velvet, Calico, Corduroy, Gabardine, Chambray, Cherryview and Oakview – will have limited access (7:45 to 9:30 a.m.)

Drivers should be prepared for detours and traffic delays by planning for additional travel time during this period and using alternate routes. Please drive with caution, watch for police, volunteers, runners and traffic control devices.

If you would like to speak to someone regarding traffic or road closure matters, please contact the city Traffic Engineer at 324-9221.

More information and contacts for all other matters related to the event can be found at www.portagewinterblast.wordpress.com.



City to Host Central State University Chorus to Celebrate Black History Month

In celebration of Black History month, the City of Portage will host the highly acclaimed Central State University Chorus, of Wilberforce, Ohio, for a free concert! "Living the Dream: A musical Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." will be presented on Friday, February 26 at 7 p.m. (doors open at 6:30 p.m.) at the Portage Northern High School auditorium (1000 Idaho Avenue).

Recent performance highlights include a tour to Medellin, Colombia and a performance with the EAFIT Symphony Orchestra. In 2013, the Chorus performed at the White House for their annual holiday celebration at the invitation of First Lady Michelle Obama. View a video of the Central State University Chorus White House performance by visiting <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FddNP2x9mLQ>.

Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by black Americans and a time for recognizing the central role of African Americans in U.S. history. The event grew out of "Negro History Week," the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Other countries around the world, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also devote a month to celebrating black history.

~ Source: History.com

2016 Recycled Art in the Park

To promote recycling in the City of Portage, the Park Board will host **2016 Recycled Art in the Park**, a recycled sculpture event, May 7 - 14, 2016 at the beautiful Celery Flats Historical Area, (7336 Garden Lane). This non-juried art show is a venue for area artists to express creativity and enhance public awareness about recycling. Entries must be received no later than April 1, 2016 and will be limited to the first 30 entries. Anyone can enter, including artists or classes. Entry forms and sponsorship information can be obtained by visiting the Friends of the Parks website at www.FriendsoftheParksPortage.com.

A panel of area artists will judge the artwork based on adhering to the recycling content for eligibility, with 60% creative use of materials as they were not originally

intended and 40% overall artistry and originality. Prizes will be awarded in a variety of categories including a Popular Choice from visitor voting conducted on designated days and the city website. The judging will be conducted on Saturday, May 7, with prizes awarded that day for 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Youth (to 15 years of age), Public Choice and Sponsor's Choice Awards. The Popular Choice Award will be announced on Saturday, May 14, following the online voting period.

The City of Portage Parks Board endeavors to promote family, health and educational oriented events to increase the quality of life in the community. For more information contact the Portage Parks & Recreation Division at 329-4522.

Almost Time for Adult Softball Fun!

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 co-workers. No matter your skill level or experience, Portage has a league for you! Visit www.portagemi.gov for softball updates and registration information.

Important Dates

Over 50 League Meeting February 25
5:30 p.m. @ Portage Senior Center
Co-Ed, Men's League Meeting February 25
7:00 p.m. @ Portage Senior Center
Registration Deadline March 23
Registration Deadline (Non-Resident Teams) ... March 16
League Play Begins April 25

Attention Team Managers!

Please plan to attend the league meeting on March 3. This will be a critical time to clarify league rules and updates, review the registration process, and ask questions. Players are also welcome to attend.

2016 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 and Co-Ed Church Leagues
Men's Fastpitch League

*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.

Umpires Needed!

New umpires are always welcome! If you have an interest in umpiring, please call 329-4522, before March 1, for information and training details.



2015 Winter Property Taxes Reminder

As a reminder for Portage property owners, payments for 2015 winter property tax bills are due by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, February 16, 2016. Property owners who have not received a winter tax bill may contact the Portage Treasury Office at 329-4455. Failure to receive a tax bill does not relieve the property owner of the responsibility for payment of the tax and applicable fees. Property tax information can be viewed at www.portagemi.gov – click on the Access My Gov icon. The Treasury Office in City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. A 24-Hour Drop Box is located near the south exit of City Hall; payments deposited in the drop box are processed on the next business day. Mailed payments must be postmarked by the U.S. Post Office on or before February 16, 2016 to avoid the late fee. In all late-payment disputes, the Portage Treasury Office will rely on the postmark applied by the Postmaster (metered postmarks are not accepted).

Payment Options	Payment Type Accepted						
	Cash	Check	Money Order	Credit Card	Debit Card	EFT	
Treasury Office	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
24-Hour Drop Box		✓	✓				
U.S. Mail		✓	✓				
Pay Online (www.portagemi.gov)				✓	✓		
Pay by Phone (1-866-270-5701)				✓	✓		
Online Banking						✓	

Purchase Dog Licenses at City Hall

Kalamazoo County dog licenses can be purchased or renewed at the Treasury Office in City Hall until the end of February. To purchase a **renewal license**, bring the pre-printed renewal form issued by Kalamazoo County Animal Services & Enforcement (KCASE) and proof of current rabies vaccination if it shows expired on the renewal form. To purchase a **new license**, bring proof of current rabies vaccination and proof of spaying/neutering (if applicable) from your veterinarian.

- ◆ \$10 for dogs that are spayed/neutered or less than one year old
- ◆ \$40 for dogs that are not spayed/neutered

Questions can be directed to KCASE at 383-8775.

City Employees Collect and Donate 1 1/2 Tons of Food

During November and December, City of Portage employees competed in their second annual "Biggest Giver Challenge" food drive, collecting 3,523 pounds of non-perishable food items, beating the 2014 total of 2,408 pounds by more than 1,000 pounds!

City employees were divided into three work groups based on their building site and worked to collect the largest amount in pounds of non-perishable food items over a period of four weeks. Winning the "Biggest Giver Challenge" trophy for 2015 was City Hall with 1,581 pounds of food. The Public Safety Complex came in a close 2nd with 1,372 pounds and the Public Services Building collected 570 pounds of food. A ceremony to announce total amount of food collected and to award the trophy to the City Hall group was held at Portage City Hall on December 22, 2015. After the ceremony, all of the food collected was loaded up and delivered to the Portage Community Center (PCC). The PCC used the donations to fill holiday food baskets and restock their Loaves & Fishes food pantry for the coming months. "The Portage Community Center is so very thankful to our friends at the City of Portage for the more than one and a half tons of food they donated to us," commented PCC Executive



Chris Buckley (left), Executive Director of the Portage Community Center accepts more than one and a half tons of non-perishable food donations from City of Portage employees.

Director, Chris Buckley. "Not only did this food help many families during the holiday season, it will help us provide meals to all the families who utilize our food pantry throughout the year. On behalf of the board and staff of PCC, we thank the city for helping us **Make Life Better!**"



7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002-5160

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household
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Tuesday & Friday
8:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
2nd Saturday
8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Wednesday
12:00 noon - 6:00 p.m.
Open Year Round



Kalamazoo County
Household Hazardous Waste Center
1301 Lamont Avenue, Kalamazoo
373-5211
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!



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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 190 and via live streaming at <http://www.publicmedianet.org/watch-live>. 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

- 4 7:00 p.m. Planning Commission Meeting
- 8 7:00 p.m. Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
- 9 7:30 p.m. City Council Meeting
- 18 7:00 p.m. Planning Commission Meeting
- 23 7:30 p.m. City Council Meeting

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