

**MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING OF THE  
PORTAGE CITY COUNCIL  
OF FEBRUARY 27, 2018**

Mayor Patricia Randall called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. The following Councilmembers were present: Councilmembers Chris Burns, Richard Ford, Lori Knapp, Claudette Reid and Terry Urban and Mayor Patricia Randall. Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson was absent with excuse. Also present were City Manager Laurence Shaffer, Deputy City Manager Rob Boulis, Assistant City Attorney Charlie Bear and City Clerk Adam Herringa.

Mayor Randall shared that this Committee of the Whole Meeting was to review plans and share thoughts and ideas regarding a potential new or renovated Senior Center. Mayor Randall then invited the City Manager to begin the discussion. City Manager Shaffer reviewed the current condition and concerns of the existing Senior Center and highlighted recent efforts to design and fund a potential new or renovated Senior Center. Mr. Shaffer then invited the Director of the Portage Senior Center Kim Phillips and Director of Parks, Recreation and Senior Citizen Services Kathleen Hoyle to the podium. Ms. Phillips and Ms. Hoyle provided a detailed presentation regarding the limitations of the current Senior Center, history surrounding the current Senior Center and advantages of a new or renovated facility. In the presentation, Ms. Phillips emphasized that the Senior Center would be focused on senior citizens but not exclusively for the use of senior citizens.

Following the presentation, Councilmember Ford inquired what would happen to the current Senior Center if a new facility is built and Mr. Shaffer and Ms. Phillips provided a series of possibilities and indicated that a final determination has not been made. Councilmember Reid inquired as to where a new Senior Center would be located indicating that city property along Brown Street was originally purchased with an eye toward commercial development and not the Senior Center. Mr. Shaffer reviewed the "Center City" concept and indicated that the City has received little interest by developers for the land, but also indicated that the City has not heavily marketed the property for commercial development. Mr. Shaffer also made the point that even though development is currently rampant in Portage, the City has not been approached regarding the property along Brown Street.

Councilmember Knapp inquired if the proposed design contained space flexible enough to meet demands twenty or thirty years in the future. Ms. Phillips explained the flexible nature of the design and Mr. Shaffer explained how the design concept promotes social interaction and open spaces. Councilmember Knapp inquired if the proposed design includes the provision of dedicated community space in lieu of spaces primarily dedicated to the Senior Center that may hold programming anyone can go to. Mr. Shaffer stated that City Administration is currently looking at this project as a new Senior Center that has broader community attributes and can meet broader community needs.

Councilmember Burns inquired as to the age of the existing Senior Center and the membership trend. He continued by inquiring if the proposed design will be able to meet community needs in 40 years. Ms. Phillips stated that the current building is 40 years old, membership continues to increase and the design should be able to meet needs far into the future.

Councilmember Knapp inquired as to the current hours of operation of the Senior Center and how often the space is used for special events. Ms. Phillips responded and indicated that building use outside of normal business hours is common but varies based on the season of the year. Ms. Hoyle expressed the desire to expand programming for the Parks and Recreation

Department but lamented the limitations of existing facilities and susceptibility of events to inclement weather.

Mayor Randall shared her personal connection with the Senior Center and the importance for seniors to have a place to go and feel a part of the community. She continued by stating that there has been tremendous focus in the community on the schools and she believes, given the aging population, an equal effort should be directed to senior citizens. She continued by stating that she is looking forward to seeing the results of a feasibility study that is planned to gauge philanthropic interest and financial feasibility of building a new facility. She stated that City Council is in support of doing something to address the limitations of the current Senior Center but the debate is on how to get there.

Councilmember Reid stated that there is debate between having a Senior Center versus having a Community Center. She stated her understanding that there are many groups interested in a community center and suggested that, since a new building is constructed only once every 40 years, the City must involve all populations that could benefit from the new structure. Ms. Reid inquired if senior citizens would be opposed to having a facility that also served broader community needs and stated her support for a larger facility if it meant greater opportunities for more residents. Ms. Phillips said that the issue of a community center versus a dedicated Senior Center had been discussed and that she does not believe there is strong opposition to a facility that can accommodate broader community needs. She cited how often younger people are embraced and welcomed at the Senior Center as support for her statement. Mr. Phillips pointed out the value of connecting people of differing generations.

Councilmember Knapp stated that, like Ms. Reid, she is struggling with the community center v. Senior Center issue and supports the idea of a new facility provided it is opened up to the entire community. Ms. Knapp inquired if staff had visited other facilities and conducted best practice research. Ms. Knapp also pointed out the importance of having a clearly defined project when it comes to fundraising. Director Phillips shared that she and others had visited other facilities and conducted research. Ms. Hoyle commented that staff will be working to explore the needs and interests of potential donors.

Mayor Randall emphasized the importance of having a clear vision for the project and that it needs to be goal-specific. She continued by stating that having a dedicated focus, such as a Senior Center, will result in greater fundraising success. Councilmember Knapp commented that a multi-purpose facility would allow a community activity to be occurring in one part of the building while a senior-focused activity could be held in another.

Councilmember Reid stated her support for creating a facility that is reflective of the needs of the broader community and discussed the failure of three separate millage requests related to a new Senior Center. Mayor Randall pointed out that two of the millages also involved a community center. Councilmember Urban shared that he was familiar with the previous millage requests that occurred in 1994, 1995 and 2002. He shared his recollection as to what was being requested and the shortcomings of each effort. Mr. Urban stated that his one disappointment during his tenure on City Council is that the City does not yet have a community center. Councilmember Urban inquired as to the on-going operations of a new facility and how the facility might be funded and cited naming rights, commercial space and public/private partnership as possibilities. City Manager Shaffer stated that, of the items listed by Councilmember Urban, only naming rights has been discussed. Mr. Shaffer stated that there are benefactors in the community that could help fund the facility and the City would be

looking to approach them for support. Mr. Shaffer also reviewed the financial health of the City and indicated that the City is in excellent position to take on a new facility without increasing millage rates or putting the City in a position of excessive debt. Mr. Shaffer questioned if some donors would be willing to offer an endowment to assist with on-going costs. Mr. Shaffer then thanked Ms. Phillips and Ms. Hoyle for their efforts and reviewed the next steps in the process. Councilmember Knapp stated that while she supports a new Senior Center she challenges everyone to think bigger. Mayor Randall opened the floor to public comment.

Andrea Stork, 1515 Dogwood, complimented Ms. Phillips on the presentation and complimented the design of the facility. She shared her opinion that the current Senior Center is in need of improvements and spoke in favor of a facility that supports intergenerational interaction.

Mr. Bill Wieringa, 7735 Angling Road, shared that he works with seniors on a daily basis as part of his profession and that he believes seniors would be happy to share a facility with younger generations. He stated that seniors are most upset when they feel marginalized and would love additional opportunities for intergenerational interaction. He encourage the City to get as great a facility as financially possible.

Mr. Lawrence Smith, 2211 Gray Oak Cove, shared that he has been a resident of Portage and member of the Senior Center for many years. He stated his belief that Kim Phillips is the best Senior Center Director in the State of Michigan and that he strongly supports a new Senior Center that will meet the needs of the growing senior population.

Mr. Art Roberts, 9614 Woodlawn Drive, shared that he was a longtime member of the Portage community and been civically active for many years. He stated that he was honored to be able to give input into the proposed design of the new Senior Center and emphasized that additional space is essential. He concluded by expressing support of a new building instead of renovating the existing one.

Mayor Randall thanked City staff for their efforts and energy and stated that additional discussion and debate on a dedicated Senior Center versus a facility that is more open to the broader community will continue.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 6:49 p.m.

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Adam Herringa, City Clerk