

**MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING OF THE
PORTAGE CITY COUNCIL
OF APRIL 24, 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, Terry Urban, Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson and Mayor Patricia Randall. Also present were City Manager Laurence Shaffer, Deputy City Manager Rob Boulis, Director of Technology Services & Community Marketing Devin Mackinder, Assistant to the City Manager Mary Beth Block, City Clerk Adam Herringa and City Attorney Randy Brown.

Mayor Randall shared that this Committee of the Whole Meeting was to review and discuss current and future use of social media by the City. At the request of Mayor Randall City Manager Larry Shaffer introduced Devin Mackinder and Mary Beth Block who are involved in social media and media relations for the City. Mr. Mackinder stated that social media is one tactic associated with the overall marketing strategy of the City of Portage. He then highlighted other marketing efforts related to both digital and print media. Mr. Mackinder continued by stating that the overall marketing/communications strategy of the City is focused on branding the City as a natural place to move, communicating important information to citizens and business/resident recruitment and retention. One advantage of digital media tools like social media is the ability to develop and track performance measures. Mr. Mackinder discussed website hits and page "likes" along with results of the Community Survey as excellent methods by which to gauge citizen interest, engagement and satisfaction. One key factor in any communications strategy, Mr. Mackinder stated, is to determine the "value added" by the effort.

Mr. Mackinder then initiated a presentation on communications efforts and strategies utilized by the City of Portage and emphasized components related to digital media. Mr. Mackinder discussed risks associated with social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Mayor Randall inquired as to who is currently responsible for crafting and promoting the message to residents. Devin stated that it was his responsibility in cooperation with the Office of the City Manager. He continued by reviewing the importance of having an established brand and being consistent with messaging to residents and staff alike. Mr. Shaffer commented that the message being sent communicates the values of the City of Portage and highlighted messages related to the importance and value of diversity and the community being a great place to live, work and recreate. Mr. Shaffer then complimented Mr. Mackinder on the work he has done related to communications and social media. However, Mr. Shaffer stated, demands are increasing in both the realm of information technology and communications. He stated that he has asked Mr. Mackinder to focus on demands related to information technology and that a new "Communications Manager" position will be created to address matters related to social media, messaging, branding, etc.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson commented that Twitter can provide instant communication and asked if there are other platforms or tools that can communicate in a similar manner. Mr. Mackinder discussed possibilities related to podcasting and the potential for live presentations with call-in capabilities. Mr. Mackinder expressed concern as to the viability of Twitter as a tool because, in his opinion, it has become a "political weapon." Mayor Pro Tem Pearson restated his question as to tools that would allow the City to have instant communication with residents that would be similar to a brief text message. Mr. Shaffer pointed out that Portage

Alert offers such communication and currently has 3,000 subscribers. Councilmember Knapp inquired if Portage Alert is used for primarily urgent notifications. Mr. Shaffer responded in the affirmative but stated that users can also subscribe to receive less urgent notifications such as Parks and Recreation information.

Next, Mr. Mackinder shared that the City has a Social Media Policy in place that helps to manage Facebook pages affiliated with the City. He stated that the City has three Facebook pages because each one caters to an interested audience. Councilmember Knapp inquired that, even though users subscribe to Facebook pages that cater to their interests, how do we know users wouldn't also appreciate an overall City Facebook page? Mr. Mackinder stated that a Facebook page cannot accomplish or hold as much information as the City website. He commented that a City Facebook page could be created but the purpose and goal of the page would need to be identified. Furthermore, he stated any Facebook page would have to direct users to the City website for more information. In addition, he continued, the Communication Manager would have to ensure that every City affiliated Facebook page carries a common message. Councilmember Knapp questioned if it would make more sense to have an overall City Facebook page that could accommodate the various issues and topics that are currently addressed by the three disparate pages? Mr. Mackinder commented that he could be supportive of a single City Facebook page that afforded direct linkages to the other pages. Assistant to the City Manager Mary Beth Block commented that the City does currently make an effort to push common messages onto the three City-affiliated Facebook pages.

Mayor Randall inquired if the Communications Manager position will help to feed information into communications platforms besides Facebook. Mr. Mackinder commented that the value of this new position is to engage in a more centralized effort. He commented that the new position will work to make sure items that are posted are accurate and consistent and monitor social media on a frequent basis. City Manager Shaffer stated that the Communications Manager would be responsible for social media posts in a manner similar to the review and issuance of press releases and articles in the Portager.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson stated that the addition of a Communications Manager position implies the possibility of additional staff related to the role. Mr. Shaffer stated that it could be one person although, depending on the City Council discussion and determination related to Public Media Network, the number could rise to four or five personnel. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson commented that one of the drawbacks associated with current cable broadcasts of City Council Meetings is that there are no analytics related to how many people are watching. He continued by commenting that programs related to social media and digital media afford the opportunity to utilize Google Analytics to demonstrate usage and need.

Councilmember Ford inquired if anyone had explored what the City of Kalamazoo is doing related to social media. Mr. Mackinder responded in the negative but commented that he has been to other communities in which a Communications Manager is utilized. He continued by stating that the roles and responsibilities of a Communications Manager would change over time.

Mayor Randall inquired if the City had goals for pushing and promoting social media and the other identified platforms into the community. She questioned if the efforts of the City in this regard could be promoted by other civic groups. Mr. Mackinder responded that one of the responsibilities of the Communication Manager will be to determine the best ways to access the community and then determine effectiveness. Councilmember Ford commented that he

recently attended a meeting involving Discover Kalamazoo and he was impressed by the statistics regarding social media penetration. Mr. Mackinder speculated that Discover Kalamazoo may have brought in a marketing company to assist with their media efforts. He then suggested that the City consider doing the same on a periodic basis.

Mr. Mackinder continued his presentation and reviewed the various digital media efforts the City utilizes to interact with the public. Councilmember Reid inquired how many downloads there have been of the MiPortage App. Mr. Mackinder stated there have been approximately 800. Councilmember Reid inquired as to whether the cost estimate provided by Mr. Mackinder for digital media included staff time or was it fees only. Mr. Mackinder responded that it was fees only.

Next, Mr. Mackinder reviewed upcoming digital media initiatives. Regarding the OpenGov program identified by Mr. Mackinder, Mayor Randall inquired if people would be allowed to comment anonymously. She stated that she finds people to be more accountable when they must provide their name. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson expressed his strong support for requiring people to use their names when utilizing platforms such as OpenGov. Mr. Mackinder stated that it was his understanding that OpenGov would allow the City to require users to provide their name. He then discussed how and why he believed a program like OpenGov would benefit the community.

Councilmember Reid inquired as to the status of podcasts by the City. Mr. Mackinder shared that he had just recorded podcasts with the City Manager and Director of Parks and Recreation. He continued by stating that these podcasts would be available when the new website goes live. Mr. Mackinder concluded his presentation by reviewing the various awards the City received over the years related to digital media.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson speculated that, given current technology trends, the *Portager* newsletter may be phased out in a decade or so and inquired as to the annual cost of the publication. Ms. Block shared that it was approximately \$80,000. Councilmember Ford commented that the Portage Community Survey will be a good tool to monitor effectiveness of the *Portager*. Councilmember Knapp stated that she understands Mr. Mackinder's hesitation with Twitter and Instagram and questioned if he had explored how other municipalities effectively utilized these social media platforms. Mr. Mackinder commented that other municipalities may not be using such platforms properly or have experienced problems with inappropriate tweets or responses. He encouraged City Council to consider the risks associated with social media and shared his belief that contingency plans be put in place before activating any social media account.

Councilmember Urban commented that Mr. Mackinder has spent time discussing risks to the City and inquired about risks to the user. Mr. Mackinder commented that users bear an inherent risk by signing on with Twitter and Facebook. Councilmember Urban commented that the City can help mitigate risks by choosing methods that are inherently less risky. Councilmember Reid complimented Mr. Mackinder on his point about first identifying what problem is being solved. She expressed support for using media that is redundant and searchable. She continued by emphasizing the importance of having a consistent message across all platforms. Next, Councilmember Reid inquired if the new website and other social media platforms under consideration take into account citizens with disabilities. Mr. Mackinder responded in the affirmative. Mr. Mackinder concluded his thoughts by reviewing the "Connect" page of the upcoming website and how it can be used to advertise social media

and other City offerings.

Mayor Randall concluded the meeting by expressing support for the City moving ahead with social media efforts.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 6:39 p.m.

Adam Herringa, City Clerk