

**MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING OF THE
PORTAGE CITY COUNCIL
OF MAY 22, 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 and City Clerk Adam Herringa.

Mayor Randall shared that this Committee of the Whole Meeting is to review and discuss the new city website which is scheduled to go live on June 1, 2018. At the request of Mayor Randall, City Manager Larry Shaffer introduced Devin Mackinder who has been leading the redesign effort of the city website. Mr. Mackinder began by discussing efforts and reviewing materials related to the “rebranding” of the city. He emphasized that the website is one aspect of the city’s “brand” and pointed to signage, brochures and similar publications as key elements in promoting a common brand for the city. Mr. Mackinder stated that the rebranding effort is beginning with programs under the purview of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Senior Citizen Services. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired as to whether signage at City Hall would be replaced as part of this rebranding effort. City Manager Shaffer stated that he understands the concerns raised by Mayor Pro Tem Pearson and Councilmember Urban regarding City Hall signage and City Administration is looking into both new signage for City Hall and better signage for the Farmer’s Market.

Mr. Mackinder displayed promotional videos that have been developed and reviewed the planned launch date for the website. Mr. Mackinder then described the rationale for the appearance and functionality of the new website and how it differs from the existing website. He explained that, among other considerations, usage analytics, staff input, technology and expertise from the company Civic Plus were used in the creation of the new website. Mr. Mackinder displayed a video that may run on a loop on the city’s homepage and Councilmember Urban inquired if the sound could be set to turn on rather than a user having to turn the sound off. Mayor Randall inquired if images displayed on the website would change seasonally and Mr. Mackinder stated that the city could change the images as necessary.

Mr. Mackinder next began reviewing and highlighting various components and features of the new website. He explained that the most popular items on the current website have been made easily available on the new website. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired as to the “I Want To” option on the website and asked if the link to GIS mapping could be included.

Mr. Mackinder reviewed the podcast component of the website along with a component called “Community Voice” in which residents can share ideas. Councilmember Reid inquired how the city can avoid questionable posts and Mr. Mackinder explained that certain words and phrases are prohibited by the website. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired if individuals would be permitted to post anonymously and Mr. Mackinder confirmed that as currently configured, this would be permitted. The Mayor and several councilmembers expressed concern with permitting users to post anonymously. Mr. Mackinder stated he would revisit this matter to see if settings can be changed to require users to provide their name. Councilmember Burns expressed concerns about limiting speech and Mr. Mackinder emphasized that care must be taken in this regard.

City Manager Shaffer stated that one goal of the website and of the “Community Voice”

section is to promote community and civic engagement. He explained that there is inherent risk with an online forum and shared that he supports the notion of requiring users to provide their name to participate in the forum.

With regard to podcasts, Mayor Randall asked if there would be an effort to discuss items on the City Council Agenda, future developments, etc. City Manager Shaffer stated that podcasts would occur on a regular schedule and that some would incorporate video.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired if the website could allow for residents to participate in a “snap vote” to weigh in on an issue. Mr. Mackinder responded in the affirmative but clarified that instant/real-time voting would be another matter. Councilmember Knapp stated that it appears the website provides the city with flexibility and adaptability. Mr. Mackinder confirmed this statement and demonstrated additional functionalities of the website. Councilmember Burns inquired if the items featured on the Events page were “calendar-enabled.” Mr. Mackinder stated he would look into it. Councilmember Urban asked about the need to scroll down to access additional information and how users would know to do that. Mr. Mackinder stated that websites are moving toward scrolling and users are getting used to it. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson stated that there are several services provided by the County that residents take advantage of and asked if information on those services were incorporated in the new website. Mr. Mackinder demonstrated where the information can be found. Councilmember Ford inquired if the background could be modified with a banner or something similar to convey critical information and Mr. Mackinder responded in the affirmative.

Mayor Randall commented that one of the most common questions heard by City Council is related to development projects. Both she and other members of City Council are frequently asked “what is happening there” in reference to a new business development. Mr. Mackinder demonstrated how citizens can access information on city projects such as street repaving, park projects, etc. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson echoed Mayor Randall’s comment and asked that a page be developed to provide residents with information on business development so that, for example, when a Starbucks is being built, residents can look on the website and find out about it.

Councilmember Knapp commented that, for example, street construction information would be very valuable to residents and questioned the difficulty in being able to find the information if it takes several “clicks” to get there. Mr. Mackinder commented that it is a learning process. User statistics and feedback will help to drive changes and modifications to the website. In response to a query from Mayor Randall, Mr. Mackinder reviewed the “business” section of the website and the linkages between the city website and the website of Southwest Michigan First.

Councilmember Urban stated that he was surprised to see some items under the “residents” option and not under “government” and vice versa. Councilmember Knapp questioned the ease with which a resident could find information on parks. Mr. Mackinder stated that users will need to do some navigation to access information because it cannot all be on the front page. He continued by stating that user analytics would be monitored and he is reluctant to start making changes until there is better understanding of how the website is being utilized. Councilmember Urban commented on the color of the font and Mr. Mackinder explained that the color scheme is designed to be easier to read on a phone. He also reviewed the rationale for the minimalistic design and layout. Councilmember Urban inquired how it looks on a phone and Mr. Mackinder stated that City Council could check out the website on

their phone now. Mr. Mackinder pointed out that there are a variety of phones and each type may display the new website slightly differently.

Mayor Randall summarized questions and concerns raised at the meeting and City Manager Shaffer reiterated that the website is one component of the overall marketing strategy of the city.

Councilmember Reid inquired if consideration has been given to accessibility citing persons with low-vision as an example. Mr. Mackinder stated that he would look into this.

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

Adam Herringa, City Clerk