

**MINUTES FROM THE PRE-MEETING
OF THE PORTAGE CITY COUNCIL
OF JANUARY 25, 2021**

Mayor Patricia Randall called the virtual meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. Councilmembers Chris Burns, Lori Knapp, and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson also joined virtually. In compliance with Michigan Public Act 228, the Mayor and Councilmembers disclosed their virtual participation from Portage, Michigan. Councilmembers Vic Ledbetter, Claudette Reid, and Terry Urban were absent with excuse. Also in attendance were City Manager Joseph La Margo, Deputy City Manager Mike Carroll, Deputy City Manager Adam Herringa, and City Clerk Erica Eklov.

Mayor Randall began by noting Councilmember Reid was unable to attend but had previously provided questions concerning items on the January 26, 2021 agenda. Mayor Randall then reviewed the Proclamation, noting Councilmember Ledbetter would be reading it.

With regard to Item A.3, Elijah Root Dam Removal Feasibility Study, Mayor Pro Tem Pearson requested clarification regarding funding from the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), noting the potential \$1 million total cost for the entire Elijah Root Dam removal. City Manager La Margo noted he had provided initial CIP figures to City Council via e-mail. Deputy City Manager Herringa stated that the Elijah Root Dam was further deteriorating and there was now concern with negatively affecting the adjacent Milham Avenue/I-94 overpass. Mr. Herringa noted the feasibility study would allow the city to have a plan should the Dam collapse before removal. City Manager La Margo relayed that the feasibility study was included in the CIP for the current fiscal year, with the engineering proposed for the subsequent fiscal year, followed by anticipated repairs in fiscal year 2022-23. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson relayed that the City Manager's Report did not detail issues with the overpass in the proposal's justification and asked that staff include the information. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson then inquired whether the remainder of the project would be presented to City Council for approval in the next CIP review. City Manager La Margo confirmed. Deputy City Manager Carroll stated that Councilmember Reid had also inquired in her earlier e-mail as to why the staff was not recommending one of the lower bidders. Mr. Carroll relayed that staff does not believe the low bidder possesses experience for this type of project and the remaining three bids were only within \$2,000 of each other with Wightman having the most experienced and dedicated engineers for this project.

With regard to Item A.4, Early Redemption of Outstanding Bonds, Councilmember Burns stated the proposal appeared to be a private sale to Southwest Michigan Bank and Trust. He inquired whether the City Administration considered a public sale and requested the bid solicitation details. City Manager La Margo stated he would research and respond.

With regard to Item A.6, Poverty Exemption Guidelines for 2021, Mayor Randall inquired about the recommendation to extend the Board of Review poverty exemptions within three consecutive years instead of a single year. City Manager La Margo stated he would research and respond.

With regard to Item C.1, Youth Advisory Committee Update, Mayor Randall inquired whether the members of the Youth Advisory Committee would be present for the annual Committee update. City Clerk Eklov confirmed the three officers would be attending virtually.

With regard to Item C.3, Former City Employee Health Care Communications, Mayor Pro Tem Pearson inquired whether each communication was required to be read into the record. City Manager La Margo replied that Council only needed to accept the communications. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson stated that he and Councilmember Reid had also experienced transitions to Medicare Advantage health care plans at the age of 65. Deputy City Manager Carroll relayed Councilmember Reid's e-mail inquiry requesting a line item detail of the plans. He noted that the retired employees had been offered equal or better coverage at an improved cost to the city and the change in plan was likely causing angst. Mr. Carroll then noted that Councilmember Reid had inquired whether alternative plans were available. Mr. Carroll relayed that staff had previously conducted a meeting with the former staff to review plan

options. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson relayed that many of the former staff complained in their communications of a short Open Enrollment window. Deputy City Manager Carroll provided clarification of the timeline and ensured ample future Open Enrollment periods.

With regard to Item F.2, 8833 Shaver Road Raze Order, Mayor Pro Tem Pearson requested clarification regarding the city's policy regarding water connection to properties and adherence to the policy. City Manager La Margo responded, stating that the city offers utility connections to adjacent properties as part of road construction projects as part of the restructuring, noting that property owners are then required to reimburse the city for the work. He confirmed the city has abided by the policy, stating that the property to the south of 8833 Shaver Road accepted the offer to connect to city water during the prior reconstruction of Shaver Road. Deputy City Manager Carroll noted that routing utilities to the property at 8833 Shaver are complicated by the adjacent railroad tracks and a need for right-of-way access, but that more direct routes could be achieved via the properties to either the south or the east by way of purchasing easements with those property owners. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson then asked about the anticipated timeline for the current property owner or potential buyers to remediate or improve the property. City Manager La Margo offered a summarized history of city action on the property. Mr. La Margo noted the City Administration would be conversing with the property owner or property owner's attorney and not the real estate agent going forward. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson stated that the new property owners and heirs appeared to be more actively engaged with the property following the death of the prior owner. Mr. Pearson also inquired whether a representative of the property would be available for the Regular Council Meeting. City Manager La Margo responded that he would confirm with the owners, as compared with the real estate agent. Mayor Randall urged the city to collaborate with the real estate agent and owners to find a viable solution for this particular property and inquired whether there were exceptions to city policy for properties with more complicated situations. Mayor Randall then requested the property record cards from 2013 and 2020 for the property to evaluate the city assessments, as well as the city policy regarding water utility connections. She inquired whether the policy addressed commercial/industrial properties. The City Manager confirmed staff would research and respond. Councilmember Knapp inquired whether property seizure for failure to pay taxes was an issue for the property. City Manager La Margo responded that the property owner has three years to redeem the taxes with penalties via the Kalamazoo County Treasurer. Mayor Randall confirmed that property owners can pay the third year alone to avoid delinquency and public auction.

With regard to Item F.3, Environmental Board Climate Action Response, Mayor Randall requested the development of a proclamation agreeable to both the Environmental Board and the city. City Manager La Margo confirmed staff would work on the development of a document. Mayor Randall then requested City Manager La Margo to evaluate alternative opportunities to address the Environmental Board's concerns. City Manager La Margo confirmed he would follow-up with Deputy City Manager Herringa and related staff to illustrate City Administration efforts to date and going forward.

ADJOURNMENT: Following a summary of the meeting, Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 8:53 a.m.

Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk