

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 26, 2021

Mayor Patricia Randall called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. The regular meeting was held virtually as permitted by PA 228. Mayor Patricia M. Randall, Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson, and Councilmembers Chris Burns, Lori Knapp, Vic Ledbetter, Claudette Reid, and Terry Urban were present. All members participated virtually from Portage, Michigan. Also in attendance were City Manager Joe La Margo, City Attorney Catherine Kaufman, Deputy City Manager Adam Herringa, Deputy City Manager Mike Carroll, and City Clerk Erica Eklov.

At the request of Mayor Randall, the audience observed a moment of silence to reflect on the role each person plays as stewards for the world's environment. Following the moment of silence, the City Council recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

PROCLAMATIONS: Councilmember Ledbetter read the proclamation in honor of Black History Month 2021.

CONSENT AGENDA: Mayor Randall shared where the public can access the meeting agenda and asked if any Councilmember or anyone in the audience would like an item removed from the Consent Agenda. Councilmember Reid removed Item A.6. Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to approve the Consent Agenda as amended. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to approve the minutes of the Board and Commission Interviews of January 12, 2021; Regular Meeting of January 12, 2021, and Pre-Council Meeting of January 25, 2021. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

APPROVAL OF ACCOUNTS PAYABLE REGISTER OF JANUARY 26, 2021: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to approve the Accounts Payable Register of January 26, 2021. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

ELIJAH ROOT DAM REMOVAL FEASIBILITY STUDY: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to award a contract in the amount of \$119,805 to Wightman for engineering consulting services for the Elijah Root Dam Removal Feasibility Study, and authorize the City Manager to execute all documents related to this action on behalf of the city. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

EARLY REDEMPTION OF OUTSTANDING BONDS: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to adopt Refunding Bond Resolutions for City of Portage Capital Improvement Bonds, Series 2021A: approve a budget amendment in the Sewer Fund for \$178,736, and in the Water Fund for \$292,929, to fund portions of the early redemption of Capital Improvement Bonds, Series 2012; and adopt Refunding Bond Resolution Approving Redemption of City of Portage Capital Improvement Bonds, Series 2012. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

ORDINANCE AMENDMENT-STORM WATER ILLICIT DISCHARGES & CONNECTIONS: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to Accept for first reading the proposed amendments to

the City of Portage Code of Ordinances Chapter 64 Storm Water, Illicit Discharges and Connections. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

MATERIALS TRANSMITTED OF JANUARY 8, 2021: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to receive the Materials Transmitted of January 8, 2021. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

CALENDAR OF MEETINGS: Motion by Burns, seconded by Knapp, to receive the Calendar of Meetings. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

COMMUNICATIONS:

ANNUAL UPDATE FROM THE YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE: At the invitation of Mayor Randall, Youth Advisory Committee Chairperson Genevieve Kim, Vice-Chairperson Amiti Goel, and Secretary Fayyaz Razi provided City Council with an update on the committee's goals, objectives, and activities, including a new activity regarding virtually pairing youth with seniors during COVID-19. Mayor Randall thanked the youth for their hard work and dedication. Councilmember Reid inquired regarding the logistics of the newly proposed youth/senior connection program. Motion by Pearson, seconded by Knapp, to receive the Annual Goals and Objectives Update of the Youth Advisory Committee. Upon a voice vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

COMMUNICATION FROM MR. ANDY DEVRIES OF MIDWEST FASTENER CORPORATION: Mayor Randall acknowledged the thank you letter from Mr. DeVries. Motion by Burns, seconded by Reid, to receive the communication from Mr. Andy DeVries of Midwest Fastener Corporation as information only. Upon a voice vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM FORMER CITY EMPLOYEES REGARDING RETIREE HEALTH INSURANCE: Councilmember Reid highlighted that the collection of communications were from former department heads, each of whom had a huge impact in molding the city to its present resilient position. She expressed concern with the perception the former employees had with the recent health insurance rollout and associated communication issues, urging the City Administration to improve the process in the future. Motion by Burns, seconded by Pearson, to receive the communications from former City employees regarding retiree health insurance as information only. Upon a voice vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

AMENDMENT TO CODE OF ORDINANCES - TAXATION: City Manager La Margo noted this was the second reading for the amendment to the Taxation ordinance to revise the dates upon which the late fees are assessed.

Motion by Reid, seconded by Knapp, to adopt the amendment to Article 1, In General, of Chapter 70, "Taxation" in the City of Portage Code of Ordinances. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

CONSTRUCTION BOARD OF APPEALS RAZE ORDER FOR AN UNSAFE BUILDING LOCATED AT 8833 SHAVER ROAD:

City Manager La Margo stated that the City Administration had received notification of a draft contract from a potential purchaser of the property earlier that afternoon. He noted that the contract entailed several conditions, including reimbursement of demolition costs, and had yet to be completed between the prospective buyer and property owner. Councilmember Reid inquired whether the new contract required the property owner to demolish both the building and the foundation. City Manager La Margo confirmed conditions included removal of the foundation.

Lisa Calhoun, co-owner of 8833 Shaver Road spoke in favor of the contract and expressed happiness with the recent development. Mayor Randall congratulated Ms. Calhoun, noting she was happy to see a resolution to this matter. Councilmember Reid asked Ms. Calhoun whether she planned to perform the demolition or have the city demolish the building and place a lien on the property. Ms. Calhoun responded that the preference was that the city complete the demolition and the buyer would reimburse the costs entailed with the lien.

Motion by Ledbetter, seconded by Burns, regarding 8833 Shaver Road to deny the property owner's appeal of the 30-day raze order issued on November 10, 2020, by the Construction Board of Appeals involving an unsafe building at this site, and authorize the City Administration to solicit bids to raze/remove the building and debris on the site should the owner fail to comply with the order by February 25, 2021. Councilmember Reid inquired whether the property owner or buyer desired demolition to be completed before February 25. City Manager La Margo responded to the city's process to advertise the demolition bid and the contract could not be completed any earlier. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD COMMUNICATION OF DECEMBER 1, 2020:

At the invitation of Mayor Randall, Deputy City Manager Herringa relayed a presentation highlighting the City Administration's efforts towards environmentally conscious measures and anticipated next steps concerning the Environmental Board's request. Mr. Herringa stated the city is not denying climate change, but noted City Council historically remains non-partisan on certain issues that are larger in scope. Mayor Randall then opened the discussion to members of the Environmental Board and the public for comment.

Deirdre Courtney (1414 Regina Avenue), a member of the Environmental Board, thanked the City Administration and City Council for their efforts to date and continued work on the Board's proposals.

Emerson Wesselhoff (2330 Glenwood Drive, Kalamazoo) spoke in favor of the Environmental Board's recommendations, noting she was a former Portage resident and current representative of the Kalamazoo Ardea Youth Climate Coalition. She urged the city to do more in response to climate change, including the adoption of a Resolution of Climate Emergency.

Daniel Smith (3022 Fleetwood Drive) spoke in favor of the Environmental Board's recommendations and thanked both the city and the Board for their efforts to date. He encouraged City Council to adopt a Resolution of Climate Emergency.

Mary Beth Henry (2621 Bach Avenue) relayed her appreciation for Portage as a more quiet and natural city landscape but expressed concerns with increased urbanization. She encouraged collaboration with local partners for addressing climate change.

Rick Freiman (3218 Bennington Court) spoke in favor of the Environmental Board's recommendations and thanked both the city and the Board for their efforts to date. He encouraged City Council to adopt a Resolution of Climate Emergency, noting the action would not be an expenditure. He highlighted other local and national governments who have formally adopted stances regarding climate change.

Jill Braman (14894 Portage Road, Vicksburg) spoke on behalf of her sister as a Portage resident. Ms. Braman spoke in favor of Portage adopting a Resolution of Climate Emergency and Climate Action Plan.

Jim Justice (2855 Vanderbilt Avenue) spoke in favor of the Environmental Board's recommendations and thanked both the City Council for its efforts to date and city amenities. He encouraged City Council to adopt a Resolution of Climate Emergency.

Deb Freiman (3218 Bennington Court) also spoke in favor of the Environmental Board's recommendations and encouraged City Council to adopt a Resolution of Climate Emergency.

Following public comments, Councilmember Urban noted Deputy City Manager Herringa's comment regarding the City Council's history of abstaining from political topics beyond the scope of Portage. However, Mr. Urban voiced support for breaking tradition due to the nature of climate change being both global and local. He expressed support for the City Administration drafting a resolution or proclamation regarding Climate Emergency for City Council consideration.

Councilmember Reid agreed with Councilmember Urban and urged increased citizen education regarding climate change, including the creation of a dashboard on the city website, as well as drafting a Climate Action Plan for consideration with the annual budget. Councilmember Knapp thanked Deputy City Manager Herringa and staff for the presentation and environmental efforts to date. She also thanked the Environmental Board for its efforts and the citizens for their comments. Councilmember Knapp also agreed with drafting a resolution or proclamation regarding Climate Emergency for City Council consideration and drafting a Climate Action Plan with measurable goals. Mayor Pro Tem Pearson and Councilmember Ledbetter also agreed with drafting a resolution or proclamation regarding Climate Emergency for City Council consideration. Councilmember Burns also agreed and requested the City Administration to create an inventory of shovel-ready projects as part of a Climate Action Plan in the event of funding opportunities. Mayor Randall expressed support for drafting a resolution or proclamation regarding Climate Emergency for City Council consideration, as well as additional education and collaboration with the Environmental Board. She also highlighted the various environmentally friendly design aspects planned to be part of the new Charles and Lynn Zhang Portage Community Senior Center.

Motion by Urban, seconded by Burns, to direct staff to craft a proclamation of a climate emergency for consideration by City Council and to further investigate how the City of Portage can make use of and take action on the recommendations from the Environmental Board and report back to City Council as appropriate. Councilmember Reid inquired whether a date certain was required for the City Council's review of a draft proclamation. Councilmember Urban responded he wanted to allow staff flexibility to complete the project. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

STATEMENTS OF CITY COUNCIL AND CITY MANAGER: Councilmember Urban noted January 27th was International Holocaust Remembrance Day and highlighted the recent resurgence of

similar and concerning themes. He urged everyone never to forget the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Councilmember Reid expounded upon Councilmember Urban's comments, relaying a prior experience with a Japanese foreign exchange student unaware of the Holocaust. She then highlighted her oldest grandson's birthday, expressing hope that future generations have a happy and healthy world in the future. Councilmember Reid closed by noting a recent update from Governor Whitmer concerning COVID-19 vaccinations and urged everyone to continue safety protocols.

Councilmember Ledbetter began by commending the city snowplow drivers for their recent efforts. In line with Councilmember Urban's comments, Councilmember Ledbetter highlighted the Holocaust Memorial Center in Metro Detroit, which he had previously visited. He then quoted Martin Luther King, Jr., stating that mending the nation begins with empathy.

Councilmember Knapp thanked the staff and the Environmental Board for their efforts in addressing climate change. She stated she looks forward to the collaboration and appreciates the collective City Council endorsement on the matter.

Councilmember Burns highlighted the city's upcoming "Fridays in February" virtual events in honor of Black History Month and noted he planned to attend.

Mayor Randall began by thanking the citizens who called into the meeting and noted the personal connection associated with in-person meetings is lacking. She noted the City Council's history of remaining non-partisan on issues but expressed appreciation for open minds as the city progresses. Mayor Randall highlighted the more recent City Council recognition of Black History Month and thanked Councilmember Ledbetter for his efforts on City Council.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk