

BOARDS & COMMISSIONS INTERVIEW SESSION MINUTES FROM MAY 27, 2025

Mayor Patricia Randall called the Board & Commission Interviews to order at 04:02 PM in Conference Room #1 at Portage City Hall.

ROLL CALL: Councilmembers Vic Ledbetter (4:18 PM), Nicole Miller, Terry Urban, Jihan Young, and Mayor Patricia Randall were present.

ABSENT: Councilmember Chris Burns and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Pat McGinnis and City Clerk Erica Eklov.

YOUTH ADVISORY COMMISSION (YAC): At the invitation of the Mayor, the applicants introduced themselves, and stated their school, upcoming grade level, if they previously served on the commission, and what inspired them to apply. Applicants included Dallen Ekola-Labra, Kate Elias, Dharshna Chandra Mouleeswaran, Samanvi Parsa, Mahi Patel, Taryn Ploski, Viktor Robertson-Wicks, Justin Zhou, Sarina Choudhury, Adrian Dudek, Ian Isaak, Aurora Knowlton, Jessica Mastin, Myles Roland, and Devin Stotz-Ghosh.

Returning members were asked to describe the meeting schedule, time commitment, favorite activities, and events the Committee organizes. It was noted that YAC doesn't take as much time as other extracurricular activities, but it is important and requires commitment.

Councilmember Urban relayed the Council had originally established YAC to hear directly from young people about issues the Council themselves would be unaware of. Councilmember Young highlighted the applicants' diversity in extracurricular activities but their shared values in commitment, leadership, and initiative.

Mayor Randall asked applicants if there were any activities or events they wanted to see implemented. Applicants responded with strong support for a winter soup kitchen and/or non-perishable food drive, a pen pal program, and more outdoor events to promote exercise and health. The Council then asked the applicants how they learned about YAC, with responses ranging from word of mouth, social media, the *Portager* and the school newspapers, and adult leaders. Mayor Randall closed with introductions of the YAC staff liaisons from the City Clerk's Office.

CONSTRUCTION BOARD OF APPEALS (CBA): The Council interviewed applicant Ron Pelak and returning member Marvin Potts. Mr. Pelak spoke about his 25-year residence in the City and his employment as a mechanical engineer at Pfizer. Mr. Potts has worked in Portage for six years in consumer stacking and operations.

The Council asked the applicants for their board preferences. Mr. Pelak said he was more interested in the Planning Commission in part due to the infrequency of the CBA meetings. Mr. Potts said he wanted to transition to the Local Officer Compensation Commission, noting that the board had not reviewed an appeal since 2020.

There was additional discussion regarding the oversight of the CBA in comparison with the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals.

ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD (EB): The City Council interviewed two applicants interviewed for the vacancy. At the invitation of the Mayor, applicant Kristi Potts relayed her background as a student in horticulture and culinary arts at Kalamazoo Valley Community College; she also highlighted her ownership of a zero-waste cookie business. Chase Dechnik spoke about his background in Portage and his participation in 4H. He noted his appreciation for the city's parks and commitment to nature.

Mayor Randall noted that the board currently had only one vacancy and asked the applicants about their other interests. Ms. Potts expressed interest in the Human Services Board, while Mr. Dechnik stated his preference for the Environmental Board as compared with the Parks Board due to their differences in focus.

LOCAL OFFICERS COMPENSATION COMMISSION (LOCC): Following the Environmental Board interviews, the Mayor transitioned to the Local Officers Compensation Commission (LOCC). With no applicants present, she relayed that the two applicants under consideration included Marvin Potts, who had interviewed earlier for the CBA, and former Councilmember Lori Knapp, making both applicants familiar to the Council. She then highlighted that, in addition to the vacancy, current LOCC member, Mr. Roberts, had missed the last two meetings in the prior four years. Clerk Eklov explained that the LOCC typically meets only once every two years, and relayed that her office had sent Mr. Roberts a letter in November 2024 regarding the meeting in the upcoming summer and advisement regarding the absences. Councilmember Urban asked if she had scheduled the upcoming LOCC meeting, and if Mr. Roberts had been responsive. Clerk Eklov noted recent contact efforts with Mr. Roberts had proven unsuccessful. Following some discussion, the Council reached a consensus to appoint Ms. Knapp to the vacant position and Mr. Potts to replace Mr. Roberts.

As time permitted, the Council then returned to discussion of the two EB applicants as well as the EB's current composition. It was decided to recommend Mr. Dechnik for the Environmental Board vacancy and return Ms. Potts' application for consideration with the Human Services Board later.

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC): Mayor Randall reviewed the positions on the Planning Commission, noting former member Sarah Joshi resigned, current member Becky Sue Baldwin was up for reappointment, current member Keith Crowell had finished completing five months of a term that was held by Matt Longjohn, who resigned in December 2024.

Becky Sue Baldwin attended interviews with new applicants, Randy Orwig and Hillary Taylor. At the Council's request, Commissioner Baldwin, who noted she would reach her term limit after this reappointment, explained the expectations for the new applicants, Ms. Taylor noted her experience in city and urban planning but highlighted a conflict with the meeting schedule due to a standing commitment on the first Thursday of each month. Given her background described in her application, Councilmember Urban asked Ms. Taylor about her interest in serving on the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). She confirmed her interest in the ZBA, and that its meeting schedule was ideal. Mr. Orwig spoke about his life in Portage, his volunteer experience with the Portage Rotary Club, and his interest in safeguarding the city's development.

STATEMENTS OF CITIZENS: None.

BOARD AND COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS DISCUSSION: Clerk Eklov reviewed her notes regarding the Council's preferred appointments. The Councilmembers discussed appointing Randy Orwig to the Planning Commission. Councilmember Young inquired about the demographics of the Planning Commission as well as the make-up of each advisory board. There was discussion regarding whether incumbent members were reappointed with new applicants not receiving due consideration, as well as a quick look at which boards would have vacancies at the upcoming interview sessions.

Discussion turned to Mr. Orwig's current appointment on the City Council's Utility Rate Study Committee (URSC) and if this posed a conflict of interest. The Council reached a consensus regarding a conflict, and that this would present a vacancy on the URSC. Discussion then returned to Mr. Pelak's application to consider if he was qualified to serve on the URSC. Clerk Eklov suggested the Council defer the resulting vacancies to the CBA and URSC while the Clerk's Office inquired with Mr. Pelak regarding his interests. The Council agreed.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 05:30 PM.

Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk