

BOARDS & COMMISSIONS INTERVIEW SESSION MINUTES FROM MAY 27, 2025

Mayor Patricia Randall called the Citizen Advisory Board Interviews to order at 4:01 p.m. in Conference Room #1 at Portage City Hall.

ROLL CALL: Councilmembers Chris Burns, Vic Ledbetter, Nicole Miller (5:19 p.m.), Terry Urban, Jihan Young, Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson, and Mayor Patricia Randall.

ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Pat McGinnis, City Clerk Erica Eklov, Deputy Director of Economic Development Jonathan Hallberg, and City Council & Records Coordinator Aaron Thiel.

SENIOR CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD (SCAB): At the invitation of the Mayor, the applicants introduced themselves. Returning members Joan Stommen and Linda Zoeller provided information about SCAB to new applicants, Louann Palmer and Nathan "Nate" Sachritz. Louann Palmer spoke to her background in educational leadership, and Nate Sachritz spoke to his experiences working in finance.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson asked Louann Palmer why she ranked the Park Board over the Senior Citizens Advisory Board on her application. Ms. Palmer explained that she spends much of her time in the city parks and wants to serve natural areas.

Councilmember Young asked Nate Sachritz, given his background in finance, if he would be interested in serving on a different board. Mr. Sachritz initially declined due to current commitments, but he would revisit the idea in the future.

Mayor Randall asked Ms. Zoeller, current board chair, if there was any additional support the Council may offer the SCAB or the Portage Zhang Senior Center. Ms. Zoeller said the goal of the board was to continue to expand access to the center even with an influx of new members.

HUMAN SERVICES BOARD (HSB): New applicant Dominick DiCesare was present. He introduced himself as having moved to Portage three months ago from California and hoped to be active in the community, with an interest in the HSB because of his own experience with organizations supported through the board's funding.

Mayor Pro Tem Person asked Mr. DiCesare to compare and contrast the cities of Portage and Kalamazoo as a recent transplant, and how he would determine which organizations received funding. Mr. DiCesare responded that he would make sure each organization provided meaningful support for Portage residents even if it is geographically outside the city limits.

Councilmember Young, a former member of the HSB, provided an overview of the application process for non-profits to receive funds from the board. There was discussion about the denial of 12 Baskets Food Pantry's application in 2024 and the Council's subsequent actions on the matter.

Councilmember Burns noted Mr. DiCesare's numerous referrals to his Catholic faith in his application and asked if Mr. DiCesare would ensure he would not have any biases for or against certain religious charities in his decision making. Mr. DiCesare confirmed he would not be biased.

PARK BOARD (PB): Present for Park Board interviews were new applicants Dominick DiCesare, Anthony Ladd, and Louann Palmer. Tara Gish, the current chair of the Park Board, was in attendance to provide additional insight on the board for the benefit of the applicants and the Council.

As Mr. DiCesare and Ms. Palmer had already interviewed, Mr. Ladd introduced himself as a regular user of the city parks but noted he was ultimately interested in serving on the Planning Commission.

Councilmember Burns asked Chair Gish to explain what she felt made a good Park Board member. Chair Gish emphasized teamwork and highlighted that the current board has been successfully putting on more outreach events because of their ability to work with one another. She noted that while the events were smaller, they were targeting more parks and as a result reaching more neighborhoods.

Discussion followed regarding park activities and events as well as board outreach and what separates a park from a green space.

Regarding Mr. Ladd's interest in the Planning Commission, Councilmember Burns asked if there would be a conflict of interest between Mr. Ladd's employer, an engineering consultant, and his serving on the commission. City Manager McGinnis explained that Mr. Ladd worked in a department that was uninvolved with the municipal side of the business. Mr. Ladd said he would recuse himself if a conflict of interest did appear.

ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD (EB): No applicants were present for the Environmental Board. There was discussion as to why since the EB tends to be a highly sought after board.

CONSTRUCTION BOARD OF APPEALS (CBA): Tim Earl was present. As he and the Councilmembers were familiar with one another, introductions were brief, and Mr. Earl was invited to provide an overview of his work in construction codes, including the recent 2024 International Property Maintenance Code.

There was discussion regarding the nature of board and its ability to determine when the code could be overlooked to complete a project. Mayor Pro Tem asked Mr. Earl, as author of the code, if he would be biased about providing exceptions. Mr. Earl explained there is a clause in each section of the code providing eligibility criteria for exceptions.

Mayor Randall asked Mr. Earl if he would be interested in serving on a board that meets more regularly than the CBA. Mr. Earl declined, saying the light schedule of the CBA is a reason why he applied. Councilmember Urban noted that, with all the new developments in Portage and the new rental inspection program, the appeals process may become more common.

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (DDA) & LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FINANCE AUTHORITY (LDFA): Present for interviews was applicant Anson Liu, owner of Pacific Rim Foods. He introduced himself as a long-term Portage resident and business owner hoping to provide his insight to the community.

Councilmember Urban questioned if a non-resident of Portage could serve on either the DDA or LDFA. City Manager McGinnis answered that business ownership qualified for the DDA, and that the establishing statute for the LDFA provided similar appointment allowances. Deputy Director Hallberg pointed out that it was a rare opportunity to have a business owner serve on the DDA and explained the benefits of overlapping membership between the two authorities.

There was discussion about the LDFA's history. Deputy Director Hallberg spoke about potential plans for the Authority but admitted it was outside the scope of the current meeting.

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC): Two applicants for Planning Commission, Anthony Ladd and Dominick DiCesare, interviewed during previous boards. There were no other applicants.

Sharon White of the SCAB arrived following the board's interviews and provided the Council with updates on the amount of money raised during the Friends of the Senior Center Purse Sale.

APPOINTMENT DISCUSSION: Clerk Eklov provided an outline of appointments the Council had considered up until that point. There was agreement among Council of placement. There was brief discussion about filling the two vacancies on the Environmental Board.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 5:22 p.m.

Aaron Thiel, City Council & Records
Coordinator