

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 2, 2025

Mayor Patricia Randall called the Regular Meeting to order at 06:00 PM in the Council Chambers at Portage City Hall.

ROLL CALL: Councilmembers Chris Burns, Victor Ledbetter, Nicole Miller, Kathleen Olmsted, Jihan Young, Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson, and Mayor Patricia Randall were present.

ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Pat McGinnis, Chief Development Officer Peter Dame, City Attorney Catherine Kaufman, and City Clerk Erica Eklov.

At the request of Mayor Randall, the audience observed a moment of silence to reflect on recognizing Chief Nicholas Arnold, his 36 years of service in public safety, and his contributions to the City of Portage. Following the moment of silence, the City Council recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

PROCLAMATIONS:

Resolution of Respect for Nicholas J. Arnold: The resolution was read by Assistant Police Chief Matthew Wolfe, Assistant Chief Bryan Mayhew, PPCOA President Lt. Craig Begeman, IAFF representative Derek Dunn, and PPOA President Brett Stapert.

PETITIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CITIZENS:

1. Doug Brown (9626 Oakland Drive) expressed concerns regarding the removal of trees surrounding his and his neighbor's properties on Oakland Drive by the development firm, Allen Edwin, for the Oakland Commons housing development, which he relayed communications with Allen Edwin's representative, Mike West, about the pathways for Consumers Energy power lines to the development. Mayor Randall informed Mr. Brown that City Manager McGinnis would review the matter and respond to him.

CONSENT AGENDA: Mayor Randall shared where the public can access the meeting agenda and asked if any would like an item removed from the Consent Agenda. Councilmember Ledbetter removed Item A.5. Councilmember Miller removed Item A.6.

Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to Approve the Consent Agenda as amended. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Approval of Minutes: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of November 18, 2025. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Accounts Payable Register: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve the Accounts Payable Register of December 2, 2025, as presented. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Board and Commission Interviews: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to set a Special Meeting for Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. to interview applicants for Boards and Commissions. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Ordinance Amendment Chapter 38 Historic Preservation: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to receive for first reading the Ordinance Amendment to amend the Code of Ordinances, City of Portage, Chapter 38 Historic Preservation, and schedule second reading for December 16, 2025. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Natural Resources Trust Fund \$400,000 for Austin Lake Trail Project: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve the revised Resolution to receive a grant of \$400,000 from the Natural Resources Trust Fund and commit matching funds toward construction of the Austin Lake Trail Project, 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.

Amend the General Appropriations Act (Budget): Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to amend the General Appropriations Act for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Minutes of Boards & Commissions: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to receive the minutes of the Environmental Board of October 8, 2025, and the Zoning Board of Appeals of October 13, 2025. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Materials Transmitted: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to receive the Materials Transmitted of November 18, 2025. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

Calendar of Meetings: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to receive the Calendar of Meetings as presented. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Communication from the Environmental Board - Bee City USA: Motion by Burns, seconded by Young, to receive the communication from the Environmental Board - Bee City USA. Upon a voice vote, motion carried 7 to 0. Mayor Randall noted that Councilmember Miller had made valuable suggestions to staff prior to the meeting and encouraged the City Administration to pursue her suggestions.

REGULAR BUSINESS AGENDA:

Axon Drone First Responder System: Mayor Randall opened the floor to Councilmember Ledbetter, who had several questions regarding the drone proposal, particularly if the price of the equipment was worth the cost. Assistant Chief Bryan Mayhew and Sergeant Kyle Doster responded on behalf of the Police Division. Sergeant Doster noted that the current drone owned by the city had reached the end of its serviceable life. Sergeant Doster highlighted current drone use and that drones can search an area within minutes that would take hours to cover on foot. Assistant Chief Mayhew noted a specific case from 2018 where drone software was able to locate a missing autistic minor after several K9 units had searched the subject area without success.

Councilmember Ledbetter inquired if the drone had been or could be used to assist neighboring jurisdictions, which could potentially offset the cost of the purchase. The Public Safety officers provided information on the drone's flying range and battery life.

Councilmember Young noted three vendors had offered quotes and inquired how Axon sets apart. Sergeant Doster explained that Axon's drone technology integrates with PD's current Axon video evidence program. Councilmember Burns asked who is responsible for the hardware upkeep. Sergeant Doster said the City owns the unit, and that service and maintenance are included in fee, including being issued a temporary replacement drone if the other is out of service for an extended period.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson asked whether the drone was Taser equipped. Sergeant Doster responded that it was not.

Councilmember Burns asked about data privacy policies with flyover video. Assistant Chief Mayhew noted current policy #200-86, which the public can read on the City's website, is applicable. He explained that video must pertain to certain situations and retention policy is strict as is with current body-cam footage.

City Manager McGinnis asked about the ease of deployment. Assistant Chief Mayhew and Sergeant Doster responded, noting the drone would no longer be tied to an officer's vehicle. Sergeant Doster noted that the City of Kalamazoo is currently working to purchase their own, while the City of Portage has assisted with drone support in the past.

Councilmember Ledbetter stated he thought the purchase was a good one but was concerned with the annual price and encouraged finding ways to offset the cost, either through grants or other means. He again questioned if other jurisdictions which had benefitted from the drone would be willing to help share the price for its operations.

The Mayor expanded upon Councilmember Ledbetter's concerns and asked the Division to track the device's use for a year to revisit to see if there were opportunities to capitalize on. Sergeant Doster elaborated on the device's battery life, and the difficulty of assisting nearby communities due to the distance. Assistant Chief Mayhew noted the need of sending a Portage officer to accompany the drone flight as a pilot.

Councilmember Burns commented that the staff have made a compelling case at this time, noting the technology is ever evolving.

Motion by Councilmember Ledbetter, seconded by Councilmember Burns, to approve the purchase of the comprehensive five-year Drone First Responder System from Axon in the amount of \$255,043 using the Sourcwell cooperative purchasing agreement #101223-AXN and authorize the City Manager to execute all documents related to this action. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0. Councilmember Ledbetter later asked what staff planned to do with the old drone(s). Sergeant Doster responded.

2026 Service, Permit, and Activity Fees: Councilmember Miller noted her requests for additional information regarding the 2026 proposed Community Development and Building Permit fees, specifically the "Keeping of Chickens" fees. CDO Dame explained the rationale for the fee, which was that it had been included in previous fee schedules but had been overlooked during the current calendar year's, which has necessitated its return.

Councilmember Olmsted asked about how many chicken permits were issued. CDO Dame responded that he would report back to the Council with the information.

Motion by Miller, seconded by Ledbetter, to adopt the: 2026 Proposed Freedom of Information Act fees; 2026 Proposed Cemetery Fees Schedule; 2026 Proposed Community Development and Building Permit fees; 2026 Proposed Recreation and Park Facility fees, and 2026 Proposed Special Assessment Rates. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 7 to 0.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORTS: None.

Mayor Randall confirmed that City Manager McGinnis would be publishing the new City Council Committee assignments before January 1.

STATEMENTS OF CITY COUNCIL AND CITY MANAGER: Councilmember Young began by extending gratitude to the first responders and Public Works plow crews for working during the Thanksgiving holiday. She then highlighted the December *Portager* article with information about snow plowing. Councilmember Young also noted the city's annual "Decked Out" house decorating contest and Traditional Holiday celebration coming on December 6. She then closed with a reminder to be a good neighbor during the holiday season.

Councilmember Burns provided a reminder about Giving Tuesday, using the Human Services Board grant list as a good basis for donating. He stated that the Council had adopted a family of seven through the Portage Community Center's holiday program.

Councilmember Olmsted had no comment.

Councilmember Ledbetter expressed appreciation for the Police Division for their research on the drone expenditure and program benefits.

Councilmember Miller also noted the Traditional Holiday celebration which will include the Mayor's Tree Lighting ceremony, a performance by the Portage Northern High School Choir, events at Celery Flats to follow. She closed with a reminder about the Millennium Ice Rink, with its schedule being weather-dependent.

City Manager McGinnis provided a quick update on the Public Works Department's snow removal efforts during the recent multi-day snowfall. He echoed Councilmember Young's mention of the PlowTraxx app on the city's website.

Mayor Pro Tem Pearson thanked Councilmember Burns for coordinating the Council's family gift adoption effort.

Mayor Randall expressed gratitude to the Public Works staff for working during the Thanksgiving holiday and clearing the roads, noting that the last leaf collection was interrupted by the snow fall. She stated that the Fall Leaf Collection Program may need reconsideration due to climate change, but efforts would be made with the current leaves. She closed by highlighting the upcoming last call for Chief Arnold on December 16, thanking him for his service and that of the Portage Police Division.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 6:59 PM.

Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk