

CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES FROM JANUARY 27, 2026

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, and Mayor Patricia Randall were present.

ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Jim Pearson.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Pat McGinnis, Chief Operating Officer Adam Herringa, 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 making Portage a stronger, more inclusive, and unified community. Following the moment of silence, the City Council recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

PROCLAMATIONS:

Black History Month: Councilmember Young read the proclamation.

PETITIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CITIZENS:

1. Judy Kangas-Salters (9240 Portage Road) spoke in support of Phase One of Portage Road 360, while expressing concern about the isthmus area as it related to Phase Two.
2. Cheryl Secor (10429 Oakland Drive) expressed concerns regarding the waste hauler topic, campaign finance donations, and decorum at recent meetings.
3. Brian Harris (6314 Redfern Circle) spoke via phone and inquired about how the ballot initiative would affect the existing single waste hauler contract with Waste Management if it passed.
4. Dusti Morton (5816 Iowa Avenue) spoke via phone, noting she served as a member of the Historic District Commission (HDC), asked the Council to consider the historic aspects of the city cemetery as they review the amended ordinance.

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 Olmsted removed Item A.9, noting she would be recusing herself. Councilmember Miller removed Item A.8.

Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve Consent Agenda as amended. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

Approval of Minutes: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve the City Council Meeting Minutes of the Board & Commission Interviews of January 13, 2026; Regular Meeting of January 13, 2026; and, the Special Meeting of January 20, 2026. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

Accounts Payable Register: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve the Accounts Payable Register of January 27, 2026, as presented. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

Portage Road Lake Center Corridor Reconstruction Project – Phase 1: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to award a construction contract to Brenner Excavating of Hopkins, Michigan, for the Portage Road Reconstruction project for an amount not to exceed \$4,477,268.10; amend a contract with Wightman in the amount of \$721,600 to provide

construction engineering and right-of-way services for the Portage Road Reconstruction project; and authorize the City Manager to execute all documents related to the contract on behalf of the city. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

2026 Local Streets Reconstruction Program Bid Tabulation: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to award a construction contract to Michigan Paving and Materials Company of Kalamazoo, Michigan for the 2026 Local Streets Reconstruction Program in an amount not to exceed \$1,862,255 and authorize the City Manager to execute all documents related to the contract on behalf of the city. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

MDOT Contract No. 25-5607 (West Centre Avenue - Oakland Drive to Shaver Road): Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to approve Contract No. 25-5607 between the Michigan Department of Transportation and the City of Portage for the reconstruction of West Centre Avenue from Oakland Drive to Shaver Road and adopt a Resolution authorizing the City Manager to sign all documents related to the contract on behalf of the city. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

2026 Board of Review Recommendations: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to adopt the resolution setting the schedule for the 2026 Board of Review and approve the compensation rate for the Board of Review meetings and training. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

Moratorium Ordinance for Data Centers and BESS Projects: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to accept a temporary moratorium ordinance pertaining to data centers and battery energy storage systems for first reading and consider ordinance adoption on February 24, 2026. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

Minutes of Boards & Commissions: Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to receive the minutes of the Human Services Board of December 4, 2025; and, the Environmental Board of December 10, 2025. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 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 6 to 0.

COMMUNICATIONS:

Presentation of the Government Finance Officers Association Award: City Manager McGinnis, alongside Finance Director Lauren VanderVeen, presented the background information on the award. The Council commended Director VanderVeen for receiving the award for the 39th year running.

REGULAR BUSINESS AGENDA:

Appointment of Director of Public Works: City Manager McGinnis noted the City Charter stipulation regarding City Manager appointments to be confirmed by the Council relayed the accomplishments of Mr. Rowland. At the invitation of the City Manager, Mr. Rowland introduced himself. Mayor Randall thanked Mr. Rowland and highlighted the City Administration promoting within. Councilmember Miller thanked Mr. Rowland. Councilmember Burns read a citizen's letter in support of Mr. Rowland's promotion. Councilmember Ledbetter also spoke in support, appreciating Mr. Rowland's movement through the department.

Motion by Councilmember Burns, seconded by Councilmember Young, to confirm the appointment of Jereme Rowland as Director of Public Works. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

Chapter 18 Cemetery Ordinance Update: Councilmember Miller highlighted the last citizen commenter's inquiry regarding preservation in the cemeteries and requested the City Manager or the HDC liaison to comment. City Manager McGinnis responded, noting the City Administration was focused on updates to the cemetery ordinance, highlighting the prior Council meeting's agenda inclusion of a request for a marker variance. Clerk Eklov highlighted her experience in historic preservation, noting the city recently joined the Michigan Association of Municipal Cemeteries to ensure adherence to best practices as the city's cemeteries continued to grow and evolve and that staff would ensure involvement of the HDC when appropriate. Mayor Randall noted cemeteries in nearby municipalities had found ways to celebrate their settler families and history in a more permanent ways that she would like to see used in Portage.

Motion by Councilmember Miller, seconded by Councilmember Young, to accept for first reading the amendment to Chapter 18, Cemeteries, of the Code of Ordinances, and set the second reading for February 10, 2026. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 6 to 0.

May Special Election Proposal Resolution: Mayor Randall noted Councilmember Olmsted had removed the item from the Consent Agenda and deferred to her. Councilmember Olmsted stated she would be recusing herself on the matter. Councilmember Burns noted he would be recusing himself from the matter as well, noting an indirect personal financial conflict of interest. Both stepped out of Council Chambers.

Councilmember Miller inquired about the wording as presented in the resolution and the potential impact on the city's current brush/leaf collection, as well as curbside recycling. City Attorney Kaufman responded that the proposed wording was taken verbatim from the heading of the initiative petition as prepared by the Take Back the Trash committee. She then noted that the proposed ordinance language prohibited an exclusive contract for any type of collection, including recycling and yard waste, if adopted by voters. Attorney Kaufman further stated that she had yet to provide an opinion regarding how the city would handle the current contract for those services. There was additional discussion regarding the ordinance provisions and waste services.

Councilmember Young inquired about the deadline for submission of the ballot language to the County Clerk. Attorney Kaufman responded that by 4:00 PM on February 10th was the requirement and noted that the City Council's next Regular Meeting was scheduled for the same date.

Councilmember Ledbetter suggested revisions to the resolution's wording, proposing increased clarity for voters. He stated that he preferred "provider(s)" instead of saying "person(s)" in all instances where the former was used. He then recommended replacing the word "choose" with the word "select" where it was noted. Councilmember Young asked Attorney Kaufman to confirm that this would not alter the intent of the original petition signers, to which Attorney Kaufman relayed that she would need to take the proposed revisions to the Take Back the Trash committee for approval. Discussion followed regarding the potential for an additional special meeting.

Councilmember Ledbetter formalized his recommendations as a motion for the proposed ballot proposal language resolution to replace instances of "person(s)" with "provider(s)" as well as replace "choose" with "select" for the May 5, 2026 Special Election, presuming the ballot proposal language with the changes is approved by the representatives of the petition committee. Seconded by Councilmember Miller. Upon a roll call vote, motion carried 4 to 0.

City Attorney Kaufman stated she, alongside the outside counsel, would contact the petitions committee's attorneys regarding the language revisions and follow-up with the Council. Following the vote, the recused members returned to the Chambers.

COUNCIL COMMITTEE REPORTS: None.

STATEMENTS OF CITY COUNCIL AND CITY MANAGER: Councilmember Olmsted noted Item A.7's moratorium, stating that staff's effort to compile an ordinance before the issue could come about was greatly appreciated. She then expressed excitement for the America 250 celebrations, highlighting its recognition of veterans and partnership with Portage HDC, noting the Commission is looking for an architect to serve.

Councilmember Ledbetter noted the many accolades for the city's snow removal. He encouraged safe driving in winter conditions and addressed the decorum comment and closed with disappointment regarding the expenditure needed for the special election and potential effects of the petitions initiative ordinance.

Councilmember Miller is looking forward to attending the upcoming Southwest Michigan First State of Economic Development event and highlighted the return of United Airlines to the Kalamazoo Airport, which will increase businesses in the area.

Councilmember Young began by encouraging the use of the skating rink once the temperatures increase and issued a reminder to help neighbors shovel or plow sidewalks. She then highlighted the Black History Month event on February 6 and the Portage Business Community Town Hall on February 10th. Councilmember Young closed with a reminder about local warming centers.

Councilmember Burns welcomed Jereme Rowland and thanked outgoing Director Rod Russell, highlighting his cost-saving efforts for the city during his career and completing many construction and road projects in-house.

City Manager McGinnis noted a farewell event for Director Russell on February 6th and the Parks & Recreation Cozy Market event scheduled for Sunday, February 1.

Mayor Randall thanked those in attendance despite the winter weather, as well as staff for their efforts during the week of winter storms. She then congratulated both incoming Public Works Director Jereme Rowland and outgoing Director Rod Russell. The Mayor also noted Portage's February 6th Black History Month celebration. She then discussed the single waste hauling contract and the resulting special election questions. She thanked city snow plowing crews and public safety officers and closed by expressing hope that the schools can resume soon.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 7:10 PM.

Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk