

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING - CITY MANAGER CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS MINUTES FROM AUGUST 19, 2026

Mayor Patricia Randall called the Special Meeting to order at 03:00 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: Acting City Manager Adam Herringa, Human Resources Director Shannon Hertz, Assistant to the City Manager Tom Rossiter, City Clerk Erica Eklov, and Frank Walsh of Walsh Municipal Services, LLC.

REVIEW OF INTERVIEW STRUCTURE: Mayor Randall began the meeting by explaining the planned format and timing for the candidate interviews. She noted all candidates received the same questions.

INTERVIEW WITH AARON MITCHELL: At 3:02 PM, City Council began interviewing Aaron Mitchell, City Manager of the City of Otsego, Michigan. Mayor Randall welcomed Mr. Mitchell and provided a brief review of the interview process and invited Mr. Mitchell to begin by providing an introductory statement. Mr. Mitchell reviewed his background, experience, and employment history. Following his statement, Mayor Randall initiated the interview.

City Council asked questions, and Mr. Mitchell responded to inquiries regarding his background, experience, and desire for the City of Portage. Councilmembers then rotated, inquiring about who Mr. Mitchell was as a leader, his preparedness to lead the City of Portage, his ability to work with Council, staff, residents, and neighboring communities, his ability to execute Portage's strategic and financial priorities, as well as whether he could build trust, handle conflict, and deliver results. The Council expressed a desire to understand whether Mr. Mitchell could step into Portage, build relationships quickly, make difficult decisions, and turn Council's vision into measurable results.

BREAK: 4:01 PM - 4:15 PM

INTERVIEW WITH KAREN DEMPSEY-HORAN: At 4:16 PM, City Council began interviewing Karen Dempsey-Horan, Chief Administrative Officer of The Woodlands Township, Texas. Mayor Randall welcomed Ms. Dempsey-Horan and provided a brief review of the interview process and invited Ms. Dempsey-Horan to begin by providing an introductory statement. Ms. Dempsey-Horan reviewed her background, experience, and employment history. Following her statement, Mayor Randall initiated the interview.

City Council asked questions, and Ms. Dempsey-Horan responded to inquiries regarding her background, experience, and desire for the City of Portage. Councilmembers then rotated, inquiring about who Ms. Dempsey-Horan was as a leader, her preparedness to lead the City of Portage, her ability to work with Council, staff, residents, and neighboring communities, her ability to execute Portage's strategic and financial priorities, as well as whether she could build trust, handle conflict, and deliver results. The Council expressed a desire to understand whether Ms. Dempsey-Horan could step into Portage, build relationships quickly, make difficult decisions, and turn Council's vision into measurable results.

MEAL BREAK: 5:05 PM - 5:40 PM

INTERVIEW WITH AARON DESENTZ: At 5:41 PM, City Council began interviewing Aaron Desentz, City Manager of the City of Mount Pleasant, Michigan. Mayor Randall welcomed Mr. Desentz and provided a brief review of the interview process and invited Mr. Desentz to begin by providing an introductory

statement. Mr. Desentz reviewed his background, experience, and employment history. Following his statement, Mayor Randall initiated the interview.

City Council asked questions, and Mr. Desentz responded to inquiries regarding his background, experience, and desire for the City of Portage. Councilmembers then rotated, inquiring about who Mr. Desentz was as a leader, his preparedness to lead the City of Portage, his ability to work with Council, staff, residents, and neighboring communities, his ability to execute Portage's strategic and financial priorities, as well as whether he could build trust, handle conflict, and deliver results. The Council expressed a desire to understand whether Mr. Desentz could step into Portage, build relationships quickly, make difficult decisions, and turn Council's vision into measurable results.

BREAK: 6:41 PM - 6:53 PM

INTERVIEW WITH SARAH MOYER-CALE: At 6:54 PM, City Council began interviewing Sarah Moyer-Cale, City Manager of the City of Hastings, Michigan. Mayor Randall welcomed Ms. Moyer-Cale and provided a brief review of the interview process and invited Ms. Moyer-Cale to begin by providing an introductory statement. Ms. Moyer-Cale reviewed her background, experience, and employment history. Following her statement, Mayor Randall initiated the interview.

City Council asked questions, and Ms. Moyer-Cale responded to inquiries regarding her background, experience, and desire for the City of Portage. Councilmembers then rotated, inquiring about who Ms. Moyer-Cale was as a leader, her preparedness to lead the City of Portage, her ability to work with Council, staff, residents, and neighboring communities, her ability to execute Portage's strategic and financial priorities, as well as whether she could build trust, handle conflict, and deliver results. The Council expressed a desire to understand whether Ms. Moyer-Cale could step into Portage, build relationships quickly, make difficult decisions, and turn Council's vision into measurable results.

BREAK: 7:50 - 7:58 PM

STATEMENTS OF CITIZENS: None.

DELIBERATION AND NEXT STEPS: Mayor Randall summarized the City Council's next steps in the City Manager search process. She stated the objective now was to eliminate one candidate from the pool of four, reducing it to three for the next round of interviews. Councilmembers were allotted up to two minutes to express their thoughts, with comments required to be positive, focusing on candidate strengths. Mayor Randall stated that the initial pool consisted of 53 candidates, which was narrowed down to the current four through a competitive process. Consultant Frank Walsh was thanked for presenting a talented pool of candidates. Council then discussed the City Manager Profile's emphasis on a strong communicator who's community-minded with expertise in financial management, redevelopment, placemaking, and diversity. All four candidates were noted to have equipped themselves very well during the interviews.

Mayor Randall then asked Councilmembers to name three candidates for the next round, without ranking them. The outcome was as follows: Karen Dempsey-Horan received seven selections; Sarah Moyer-Cale received seven selections; Aaron Desentz received six selections; and Aaron Mitchell received one selection. The conclusion was that Karen Dempsey-Horan, Sarah Moyer-Cale, and Aaron Desentz were selected to proceed to the second round of interviews.

Mayor Randall closed by reviewing the schedule, interview format, preparations, and logistics for the second interview session on August 25.

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Randall adjourned the meeting at 8:11 PM.

Erica L. Eklov, City Clerk