

Portager

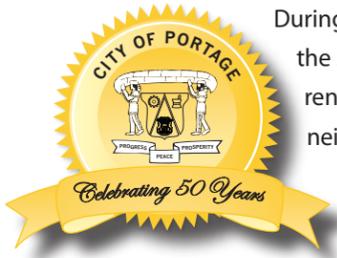
CITY OF
PORTAGE
A Place for Opportunities to Grow

December 2012

LIVING • WORKING • LEARNING

www.portage.mi.gov

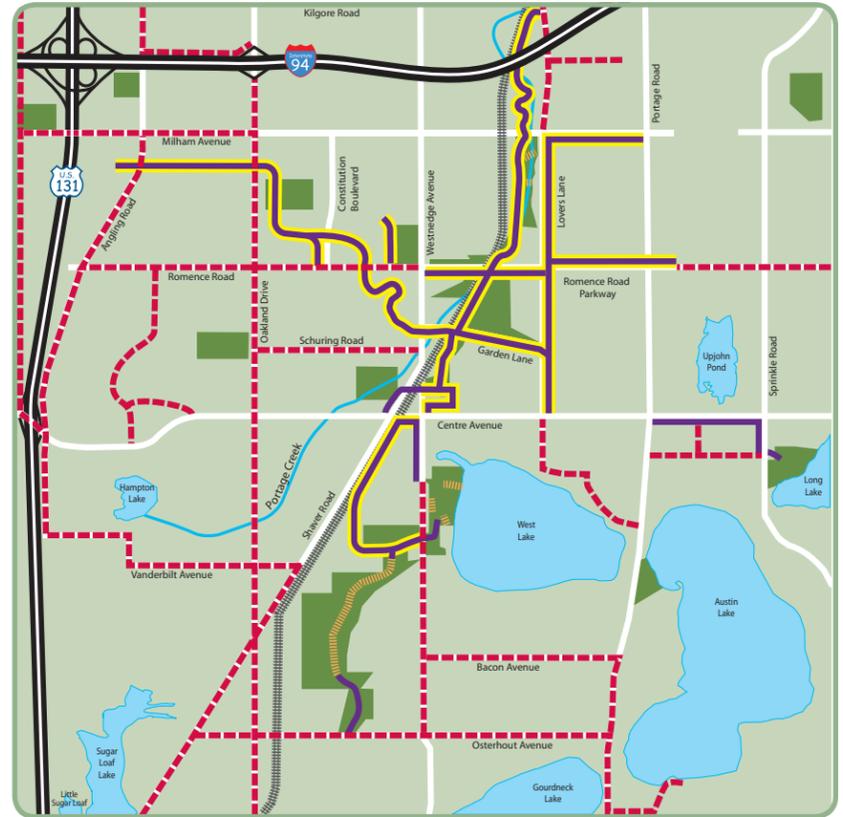
City Commits to Maintaining Recreational Trails for Winter Use



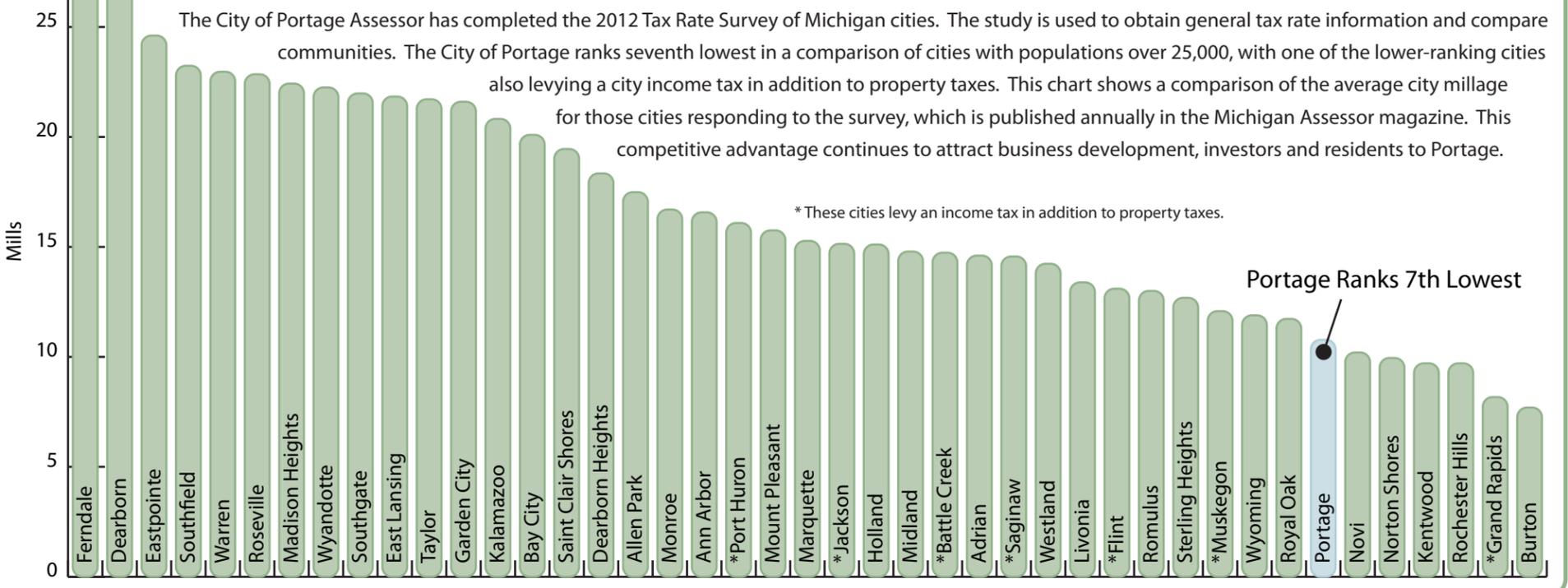
During 2013, the city will embark on a year of celebration to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the City of Portage. As an initial action, the city is renewing its commitment to promoting healthy, active lifestyles and strong neighborhoods through the use of natural resources and development of sustainable, well-maintained recreational amenities. The city will refocus efforts to maintaining and expanding past city investments in open space preservation and park, bikeway and trailway development.

As the first effort, the city has committed to maintaining nearly all of the recreational trails in the city for the duration of the 2012-2013 winter season, allowing for year-round use. The popular Portage Creek Bicentennial Park Trail, along with the Northwest Portage Bikeway, the Shaver Road Bikeway and the Lovers Lane Bikeway, will all be cleared of snow as needed. The map to the right identifies the segments of the recreational trails that will be maintained.

For more information regarding this expanded winter maintenance, please contact the Department of Parks, Recreation & Public Services at 269-329-4522.



Annual Tax Rate Survey Shows Portage Remains Among Lowest in Michigan



2012 Customer Service Awards Presented

The 2012 Customer Service Awards were announced by City Manager Maurice Evans on November 13, 2012 at an annual customer service event attended by City of Portage employees. Nominations for the Outstanding Customer Service Awards were made by city employees and Portage residents. The award winners were selected by the city's Customer Service Task Force and City Manager Evans.

Honorable Mention

Ron Deering, Electrical Inspector for the Department of Community Development was nominated by a Portage resident for the advice and assistance Ron provided with the installation of a generator by a private contractor. The resident said, "Common knowledge says that you cannot expect this kind of helpful service from a unit of government. Ron has made a very favorable impression of Portage city government on me." Ron was presented with the 2012 Honorable Mention Award.

Outstanding Customer Service Award

Treasury Specialist, Ingrid McGuire plays a key role in accepting tax, water bill and other payments at the Treasury Office window. Ingrid, who received the 2011 Honorable Mention award, was nominated again this year by a Portage resident. The individual shared that during a very stressful period, Ingrid stepped up to help with a tax payment and that Ingrid was kind, gentle and so caring that she will never forget the encounter. For these reasons, City Manager Evans presented Ingrid with the 2012 Outstanding Customer Service Award.

The City of Portage congratulates the recipients of the 2012 Customer Service Awards and pledges a continued commitment to providing superior customer service to all residents and customers.



City Manager Evans presents Treasury Specialist Ingrid McGuire with the 2012 Outstanding Customer Service Award.

Snow Plow Operators Ready for Winter Weather



The City of Portage Streets and Parks Maintenance Division provides a comprehensive snow removal program along 219 miles of city streets to ensure the maximum degree of safety for drivers and pedestrians. As early as 3:30 a.m. during the winter months, snowplow operators are plowing, sanding and salting city streets. In order to maximize the benefit to Portage drivers, streets are prioritized for snowplow operations according to how heavy a street is traveled in the following manner:

- Priority I:** All major streets (e.g., South Westnedge Avenue, Oakland Drive, Milham Avenue, Kilgore Road, Shaver Road, Lovers Lane, etc.)
- Priority II:** All primary “feeder” streets leading into various residential neighborhoods, including access streets to all schools.
- Priority III:** All interior neighborhood streets.
- Priority IV:** Cul-de-sac and dead end streets.

When a snowstorm is in progress, crews make every effort to keep Priority I and II streets clear. In general, the snowplow

operators can complete all Priority I and II streets in four to eight hours. Once the major roads are clear, the operators begin to clear Priority III and IV streets, usually requiring 24 to 48 hours to complete. De-icing materials are applied as needed throughout the duration of a storm with major streets, bridges, intersections, hills and curves receiving priority attention. It is important to note that as conditions warrant, snowplow operators may be required to return to Priority I and II streets before Priority III and IV streets can be completed.

To improve the efficiency and safety of snowplow operations, residents are asked to abide by city ordinances and state law:

- ◆ Portage Code of Ordinances prohibit residents from having basketball stands in the city right-of-way. Basketball stands impede safe snowplow operations and can damage equipment on plow trucks.
- ◆ Portage Code of Ordinances prohibit vehicle parking on the streets between 2 and 6 a.m. from October 15 to April 15. Vehicles parking on the streets during this time period interfere with snowplow activities.
- ◆ Michigan law prohibits residents and private snowplow operators from depositing snow from private driveways, parking lots and sidewalks onto any public roadway.
- ◆ During trash and recycling removal days, citizens are asked to keep their rubbish containers on the curb rather than on the actual roadway. This action allows snowplow operators the opportunity to clear the entire neighborhood street without damaging private property.

Questions about snow removal operations may be directed to the Parks, Recreation and Public Services Department at 329-4444.

Mailbox Replacement Program

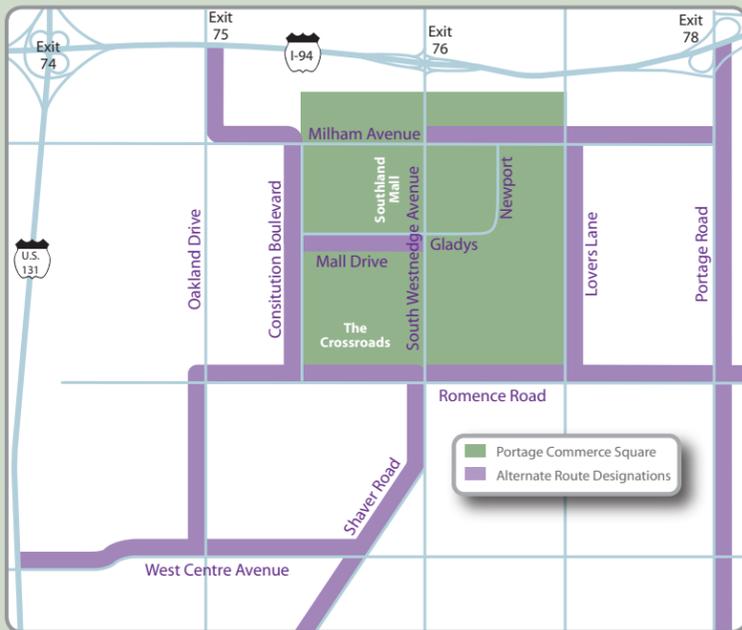
City snowplow operators make every attempt to minimize damage to mailboxes, but at times this type of damage is beyond the control of the operator. The City of Portage Mailbox Replacement Program provides options to residents for repair or replacement of damaged mailboxes due to snowplow operations. If a mailbox is damaged and cannot be repaired by the city, the mailbox and / or post will be replaced with a U.S. Postal standard mailbox and / or post. The standard black or white mailbox will measure 6.5” x 19” x 8.5” with a hinged door and flag. Damaged posts will be replaced with a U.S. Postal standard 4” x 4” wooden cross-arm post.



Residents desiring a specialty mailbox and post can choose to receive a payment of \$44, which represents the cost of a standard style mailbox and post. The resident is then responsible for the difference in cost and for the installation of a specialty mailbox and post.

Questions about repair or replacement of damaged mailboxes can be directed to the Parks, Recreation and Public Services Department at 329-4444.

Holiday Shopping Traffic Tips and Alternate Routes



The holiday shopping season is in full swing in the Portage Commerce Square area – the retail center of Southwest Michigan offering The Crossroads, many specialty shops and large department and discount stores to fit every shopping need. Shoppers can ease the typical holiday stress by shopping early and using alternate routes to and from this busy retail area. Peak traffic days usually occur on the Friday after Thanksgiving and on Fridays and Saturdays before Christmas. During the past three holiday seasons, the peak traffic days on the South Westnedge Avenue corridor exceeded 50,000 vehicles per day, making the corridor one of the busiest roadways in the state under local jurisdiction.

While the volume of traffic on the South Westnedge Avenue commercial corridor continues to be significant, travel times have actually decreased in recent

holiday seasons and are considerably below the travel times of the late 1990s, owing to the recent completion of the I-94 / South Westnedge Avenue interchange and widening of South Westnedge Avenue north and south of the interchange. The new interchange, completed in November of 2011, has greatly improved traffic safety and access to and from I-94 and the Portage Commerce Square.

Other improved routes to the Portage Commerce Square area are shown on the accompanying map. Motorists are encouraged to use the **Holiday Alternate Traffic Routes** to reach the Portage Commerce Square area and South Westnedge Avenue.

Shopping early, taking advantage of the **Holiday Alternate Traffic Routes** and shopping during off peak traffic times can help to reduce holiday stress and enhance the holiday shopping experience.

Quarterly Curbside Brush Collection Program

January Collection Includes Christmas Trees

The January Quarterly Curbside Brush Collection will begin the first full week of January (January 7). Residents are asked to place brush at the curb by 7 a.m. on the Monday of the designated week (see map at right). Brush and branches of any length can be delivered to the curb, however, a minimum length of four feet is preferred. Branches exceeding three inches in diameter **WILL NOT** be collected.

The January collection also includes the pickup of Christmas trees. Please remove all decorations, lights and tinsel from the tree prior to placing at the curb for collection. No trimming is required however.

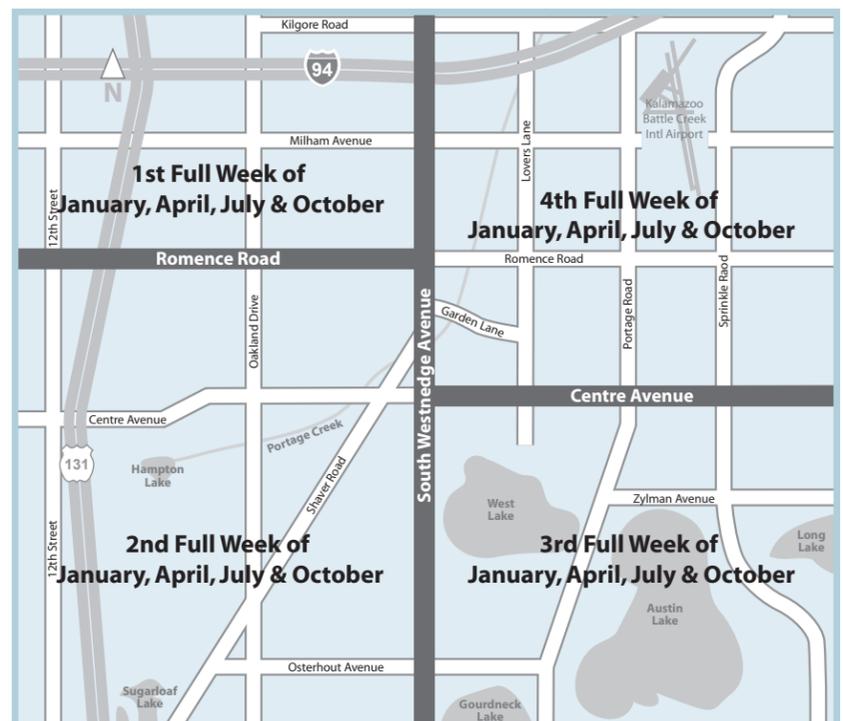
The following items **WILL NOT** be collected:

- ◆ Brush or branches resulting from removal of a tree with a trunk greater than four inches in

diameter or any parts of a whole tree removal.

- ◆ Brush or branches generated by a professional tree removal service.
- ◆ Brush or branches in excess of three inches in diameter.
- ◆ Grass clippings, flowers, weeds, garden materials.
- ◆ Firewood.
- ◆ Lumber, timber, building materials, railroad ties.
- ◆ Roots or tree stumps.
- ◆ Yew branches or vines.
- ◆ Loose or bagged leaves and ornamental grasses. (Bagged leaves are only collected during the April collection.)

Questions about the Quarterly Brush Pickup Program can be directed to the Parks, Recreation & Public Services Department at 329-4444.



Enjoy the Holiday Season with Tea at Stuart Manor

This holiday season enjoy time with family members and friends by attending one of several holiday teas offered at Stuart Manor (7340 Garden Lane). Beautifully decorated for the holidays, historical Stuart Manor is also a great location for a family gathering or an office holiday party.

Chari-Tea

Thursday, December 6, 12 noon

Help spread the joy of the season with a "Chari-Tea." Each guest is asked to bring an item(s) for the Portage Community Center. Items needed are gifts for older children and cold weather wear. In return, take in the sights and sounds of the season including beautiful holiday décor and music performed by local favorite Tom McCoy. The tea will end with an opportunity for everyone to join in a round of Christmas carols.

Cookie / Recipe Exchange Tea

Saturday, December 8, 1 p.m.

A traditional cookie exchange! Each guest will enjoy a full four-course tea and then take home holiday cookies and recipes of each cookie to enjoy. Each guest is asked to bring dozens of a favorite holiday cookie (no store bought cookies allowed) and swap cookies for a half dozen of the other guests' creations. Bring a container to take cookies home. When making reservations, please provide your e-mail address and phone number. The

total number of cookies needed will be sent to guests ten days prior to the tea. Please also e-mail the cookie recipe to vanleeluk@portagemi.gov for creation of a recipe book. Nothing rings in the holidays like a big plate of Christmas cookies!

White Christmas Tea

Wednesday, December 12, 12 noon

A Christmas tea party is the perfect opportunity to reconnect with family and friends during the holiday season. Guests will have a delightful time enjoying a tasty tea and creating holiday memories. After tea, guests are invited to the Portage District Library to enjoy the winter scenes art exhibit and the holiday classic film *White Christmas* at 2 p.m.

Who Stole the Joy from Christmas Mystery Tea

Saturday, December 15, 1 p.m.

Back by popular demand is the mystery tea party with a holiday theme. Be sure to set aside the hectic frenzy of preparing for Christmas and join in a hilarious afternoon poking fun at the trappings of the holidays. This is a perfect tea for friends, family and business associates.

Auld Lang Sine Tea Cup Exchange

Thursday, December 27, 12 noon

Ring out the old and bring in the new! Celebrate the New Year with friends and family with a nice, relaxing tea. Each guest is asked to bring a wrapped teacup to participate in a teacup exchange. Many tasty treats and surprises are in store for all.



American Girl Celebration Tea

Thursday, January 3, 12 noon

Take in the holiday décor and enjoy a kid friendly four-course tea and make memories together. Spend time sharing dolls and playing games. Afterwards, tea guests are invited to the Portage District Library for a free showing of the movie *Samantha: An American Girl Holiday* at 1:30 p.m.

Unless stated otherwise, a four-course tea is \$22 for adults and \$15 for youth (ages 5-12), which includes tax and gratuity. Pre-paid reservations are required as seating is limited. If you have any questions, please call the Parks & Recreation Division at 329-5622. Make your reservations online at www.portagemi.gov > Departments > Parks & Recreation > Tea at Stuart Manor.

Ice Rink at Millennium Park Set for Season Opening – December 8



The Ice Rink at Millennium Park will open for the 13th season on Saturday, December 8, 2012 and remain open through March 3, 2013, weather permitting. This large outdoor refrigerated ice rink features an excellent skating surface, warming house, rest rooms, skate rental, skate sharpening and food concessions.

See the enclosed 2012-2013 Winter Recreation Program for rink schedule, fees, special activities and other important information.

Recreation & Open Space Plan Update Available for Review

The City of Portage Recreation and Open Space Plan, an element of the city Comprehensive Plan, must be updated every five years to comply with community recreation planning guidelines established by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants Management Division. The proposed 2013 Recreation and Open Space Plan includes updated community profile information, citizen survey data gathered from the 2011 Community Survey, park facility additions and modifications as well as recreation program revisions that reflect the changing needs occurring in the community and park system since the 2008 plan update. The Recreation & Open Space Plan is available for review at www.portagemi.gov > Departments > Parks and Recreation. Questions or comments can be directed to the Department of Parks, Recreation & Public Services at 329-4522.

we get it!
A Portage Collaborative

If you value education, you can't help but be impressed by the City of Portage resume. Over 38 percent of Portage adults possess a bachelor's degree or higher.

The public school system in Portage significantly outperforms any other in the region on every standardized test. Portage Public Schools have distinguished themselves as an accountable system, offering a competitive curriculum and focused on student achievement and success. Portage Public Schools are the only providers of the International Baccalaureate program in the region.

City residents also enjoy close proximity to three exceptional area colleges, including Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and Kalamazoo Valley Community College. These established area schools and extension campuses for five other colleges and universities make it easy for citizens to learn new skills, enhance careers and remain life-long learners.

For more information on area educational offerings, please visit www.portagemi.gov > About Portage > Community > Education.

Snowbird Home Security

Many Portage residents spend the winter in warmer locations and leave their homes for months at a time. The Portage Department of Public Safety reminds Portage "snowbirds" of ways to keep homes safe and secure.

- ◆ Install high-quality locks on all doors and windows.
- ◆ Ask a neighbor to keep an eye on the residence and provide a vacation address and telephone number so you can be reached in case of emergency.
- ◆ Make the residence look lived-in, not empty. Ask a neighbor or family member to clear snow from the driveway and walks and park a car in the driveway. If leaving a car in the driveway, see that it is moved occasionally.



- ◆ Test the burglar and smoke alarms before leaving.
- ◆ Stop all deliveries and arrange for a neighbor or family member to pick up mail, newspaper and packages.
- ◆ Use timers to turn lights and a radio or television on and off at various times.
- ◆ Do not announce your absence on an answering machine message; leave the normal greeting on the machine. Consider having calls forwarded to a vacation phone number or cell phone.
- ◆ Consider placing valuables in a safe deposit box.
- ◆ Consider having municipal water supply turned off to prevent frozen or ruptured plumbing (call 324-9235).

For more information, please contact the Portage Department of Public Safety Crime Prevention Officer at 324-9255.

Dog Licenses Can Be Purchased at City Hall

Kalamazoo County dog licenses are available for purchase at the City of Portage Treasury Office in City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) during the months of December, January and February. When purchasing a license at the City of Portage, payment can be made with cash or check / money order **made payable to the City of Portage. Credit or debit cards are not accepted at Portage City Hall.**



To purchase a renewal license, bring the pre-printed renewal form issued by Kalamazoo County Animal Control **and** proof of current rabies vaccination. To purchase a new license, bring proof of current rabies vaccination and proof that the dog has been spayed / neutered. The fees for licenses as established by Kalamazoo County Animal Control are \$10 for dogs that are spayed / neutered or less than one year old and \$30 for dogs that are not spayed / neutered.

The Portage Treasury Office is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with the exception of Tuesday, December 25, 2012 and Tuesday, January 1, 2013. Please call the Treasury Office at 329-4455 with questions about payment options and Kalamazoo County Animal Control at 383-8775 with any other questions about dog licenses.

Winter Property Tax Bills Issued to Property Owners

The 2012 winter tax bills for the City of Portage were mailed to property owners on November 21, 2012 and payment is due by 5 p.m. on Thursday, February 14, 2013. Property owners who did not receive a winter tax bill are asked to contact the Portage Treasury Office. Failure to receive a tax bill does not relieve the property owner of the responsibility for payment of the tax and applicable fees.

Payments can be made by cash, check or money order.

Please be aware that payment by check authorizes the city to convert the check to an electronic funds transfer and that the associated bank account may be debited as soon as the same day the city receives the check payment.

- ◆ The Treasury Office (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) is open Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with the exception of Tuesday, December 25, 2012 and Tuesday, January 1, 2013.
- ◆ Mailed payments must be postmarked by the post office on or before February 14, 2013 and received by the city no later than February 21, 2013 to avoid a 3 percent late fee. The Portage Treasury Office strongly recommends that taxpayers choosing to mail tax payments on or after February 10, 2013

hand-deliver payments to the US Post Office and witness a clerk postmark the payment. In all late-payment disputes, the Portage Treasury Office will rely on the postmark applied by the Postmaster.

- ◆ A drop box is available 24 hours per day near the south exit of City Hall. Payments made in the drop box will be processed the next business day.

Payments can be made by credit card.

Call 1-800-272-9829 and follow the instructions on the front of the property tax statement. When using this payment method, a convenience fee will be added.

Payments can be made by online banking.

Use the parcel number as the account number. Payments should be made no later than February 7, 2013 to ensure timely delivery of funds to City Hall to avoid late fees.

Questions regarding tax bills may be directed to the Portage Treasury Office at 329-4455. Property tax information is also available by visiting www.portagemi.gov > Quick Links > Property Information > Launch Property Tax and Assessment Lookup. Property tax information is updated daily. Taxes that remain unpaid on March 1, 2013 will be turned over to the Kalamazoo County Treasurer for collection where additional fees will be added.

Please Clear Snow from Sidewalks and Fire Hydrants

The city reminds residents and businesses of the requirement for property owners and occupants with public sidewalks adjacent to their properties to clear the sidewalks within 24 hours of a snowfall and within 12 hours when ice has formed on the sidewalks. Enforcement action for those not in compliance with this city ordinance could involve the assessment of fines. The Department of Public Safety – Fire Division also asks residents to also clear snow away from any fire hydrants on or adjacent to their property. Should there be a fire nearby, it is imperative that firefighters have clear access to fire hydrants so that fire hoses can be immediately attached and used to fight the fire. Your assistance in clearing snow away from sidewalks and fire hydrants is greatly appreciated.

CITY OF PORTAGE
A Place for Opportunities to Grow
 7900 South Westnedge Avenue
 Portage, Michigan 49002-5160

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 KALAMAZOO, MI
 PERMIT NO. 33

ECRWSS

POSTAL CUSTOMER



City Closings

Non-emergency city offices will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

Christmas Day

Tuesday, December 25, 2012

New Year's Day

Tuesday, January 1, 2013

The next edition of the **Portager** will be published in January 2013.

Portage City Council

Portage City Council meetings are held on Tuesday evenings at Portage City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) in Council Chambers at 7:30 p.m. and are open to the public.

The City Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. Citizens are encouraged to contact the City Administration with concerns or complaints about city services by calling Complaint Resolution at (269) 329-4404 or by visiting www.portagemi.gov > Report It!



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Televised City Meetings

All City of Portage City Council, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings can be viewed live on channel 98. AT&T U-Verse customers can access the City of Portage government meetings on channel 99 and then follow the prompts to access the various meetings.

December

4	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
6	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
10	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
18	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
20	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting

January

3	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
8	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting
14	7:00 p.m.	Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting
17	7:00 p.m.	Planning Commission Meeting
22	7:30 p.m.	City Council Meeting