

PORTAGER

A Natural Place to Move



A Message from Mayor Patricia M. Randall

"From chaos to calm," is how I viewed our city's response to the tornadoes on May 7, 2024. The twisters traveled eleven miles in twenty-two minutes leaving a trail of destruction to homes, businesses, trees, and utility poles along its indiscriminate course. We have all been kept up to date by the local and national media in the days since the devastating event. News crews have reported stories of the loss of property along with photos and videos of the worst hit sites. If a picture can convey a thousand words, we have all witnessed the equivalent of volumes of damage up close and personal. If there was a silver lining to the destruction, it was that not a single life was lost. That miraculous news was what propelled us forward together, as a city. Now that the media has moved on to other stories in distant places, I would like to share a Portage-centric view of the city's response and how we put years of training and drills into practical use. Immediately following the second tornado, an Emergency Response Team was assembled consisting of the leadership within City Hall and our Department of Public Safety. It was definitely an all-hands-on-deck process. Our team immediately took charge of the situation and worked together quite calmly, I may add.

Damage assessment was the first step, but the impending darkness, rain, and fog that first night complicated it. Police officers went door to door offering assistance and immediate shelter within the Portage Zhang Senior Center. In the early morning hours, all vital city staff had reported to

assist within their given area of expertise. As the sun rose on a new day, assessment went into full gear. Re-confirmation of the fact that there were no fatalities and only a handful of injuries rallied our spirits and allowed all involved to focus on addressing property damage.

Consumers Energy reported that over 21,000 customers were without power. As inconvenient as that can be to a household, the city had real concerns. A large number of our most important safety measures were inoperable, including the following:

- » Twenty-one traffic signals
- » Eight intersections with broken poles and mast arms
- » Five public water well fields
- » Thirty-one sanitary sewer lift stations

To ensure public safety, we had to take immediate action to restore the infrastructure critical to residents' well-being regardless of cost. With the aid of Severance Electric and Veolia staff, our systems were restored in record time. Only three minor accidents occurred at intersections without signals, which can be attributed to the patience of our drivers. Not a single household had sewage issues or unclean water because portable generators were moved from one station to the next throughout that night and the following days. As generators became available to rent or borrow, the lift became lighter.

Extensive tree removal enabled us to open all major roads within twenty-four hours. Restoring the trail system required four days due to complications caused by five fallen utility poles. All trails are now open, except our beloved Celery Flats, which received extensive damage to the historical buildings.

The pickup of natural debris commenced immediately to clean up our roadsides, parks, cemeteries, and residents'

properties. All remaining debris will be sorted and picked up until cleanup is complete. I'd like to thank the hundreds of volunteers who answered the call in our time of need to help with the cleanup effort. Team Rubicon volunteers came from afar, stayed on cots in the Portage Zhang Senior Center for two weeks, and were fed by numerous organizations.

We know cleanup will be expensive: estimates total at least two million dollars. "Reserve" funds will pay the bills thanks to smart planning by the Council and staff. I declared a "State of Emergency" the evening of the tornadoes, primarily to trigger state and/or federal reimbursement of storm-related expenses. I am optimistic that this will happen, but patience is required as we navigate the various government processes. Insurance will cover the additional three million dollars in damage to our buildings, traffic signals, street lights, fences, etc.

Technology is great, especially when it works: our PortageAlert was picked up on many types of devices from here to as far away as a river cruise in Europe. Our investment in the PortageAlert system and neighborhood sirens paid off; those lacking the devices to receive alerts were still able to hear the city's alarms and seek shelter.

Many people do not fully understand all of the things that our city government is responsible for. The recent tornadoes highlighted many of them. The infrastructure we manage requires tax dollars to plan, maintain, and improve. Know that your investment in our community is well-managed. When the tornadoes hit, we were ready. Once they had passed, we acted. I am immensely proud of our city, residents, volunteers, and staff.

Here's my standing ovation, People of Portage!

– Patricia M. Randall

City Council Adopts Balanced Budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025

On May 28, 2024, the Portage City Council took a significant step forward in fortifying the city's financial future by adopting the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget proposed by the City Administration. The budget:

- » Maintains the city tax rate (millage) at 10.6400 mills;
- » Maintains the City Council prescribed fund balance for the General Fund of at least 20% of General Fund expenditures; and
- » Preserves the City of Portage position in the lower 20% of Michigan cities with populations between 30,000 and 70,000 in millage level.

Totaling 25 funds, the City of Portage budget outlines planned expenditures totaling nearly \$103 million. Notably, the General Fund allocation is close to \$35.5, marking an increase of approximately \$4.4 million (14%) compared to the preceding fiscal year. Within the General Fund, provisions have been made for various essential initiatives, including a new business façade improvement program, enhanced inclusion support efforts, additional employee positions, cost of living adjustments, and other necessary inflationary expenses.

The Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget contains projects totaling \$26.5 million, reflecting a \$2.5 million (10%) increase from the previous year. Key projects in the CIP budget include major street reconstruction, development of the City Marketplace & Farmers Market, a crucial water project on Meredith Street, upgrades to the City Hall parking lot, and renovations to lift stations.

To address the needs of essential services, expenditures within the Water and Sewer funds have increased to \$19.6 million, reflecting a \$586,219 (3%) rise from the previous year. Factors contributing to this increase include higher sewer treatment charges from the City of Kalamazoo and a mandatory trunk sewer video inspection. Consequently, the City Council has approved a 6.22% increase in water

charges and a 10.05% rate increase in sewer charges, resulting in a combined rate hike of 8.44%. For the typical residential customer, this translates to an additional monthly expense of \$5.86, or \$0.19 per day (see article to the right).

Net Change to Typical Portage Residential Customer			
Change	Sewer	Water	Combined
Per Month	\$4.04	\$1.82	\$5.86
Per Day	\$0.13	\$0.06	\$0.19

Expenditures from the Streets Fund total just over \$10 million, an increase of nearly \$1.7 million (19.5%) compared to the previous year. The uptick predominantly stems from transferring the Streets Fund fund balance, totaling \$1.63 million, to the CIP fund. This transfer will specifically support the vital Meredith Street reconstruction project.

Debt management remains a critical aspect of Portage's financial strategy, with previous efforts resulting in a notable reduction in municipal debt over the past 16 years. Since Fiscal Year 2007-2008, the city has decreased its debt burden from \$105 million to an anticipated \$47.5 million by the end of Fiscal Year 2023-2024, representing a remarkable 55% reduction. This achievement has been instrumental in securing and retaining the city's Standard and Poor's AA+ rating. Looking ahead, the focus for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 is to further reduce the overall debt balance to \$45.96 million.

The City of Portage has also witnessed significant growth in its Total Taxable Value, reaching \$2.769 million, the highest in its history, marking a notable increase of 6.79% from the previous year. With this surge, Portage maintains its status as the municipality with the largest tax base in Kalamazoo County.

The Fiscal Year 2024-2025 budget upholds the city's commitment to prudent financial management, ensuring that General Fund revenue aligns with expenditures. Approved by the Council, this budget is a responsible and robust financial roadmap, addressing community needs while positioning Portage to navigate future financial challenges effectively.

New Budget Includes Utility Rate Increases

As outlined in the article to the left, the City Council approved water and sewer rate increases to take effect on July 1, 2024. Despite these adjustments, the cost remains low, with three gallons of water delivered to the customer's tap for just a penny and the removal of two gallons of wastewater costing slightly more than a penny.

These increases are necessary based on a combination of a mature water system with a low percentage of new customers, reduced demand due to existing customers installing low-flow devices, and the necessity to construct significant system improvements. Furthermore, continued double-digit increases in sewage treatment costs from the City of Kalamazoo and inflationary pressure also contribute.

Based on findings from the University of Michigan Statewide Water Affordability Assessment, the inflation-adjusted average water expenses in Michigan have soared by 188% since 1980, with certain cities witnessing increases of up to 320%. When we extend this analysis to Portage, the escalation in water costs has been a modest 107%.

According to the same study, "Between 6.59% and 10.75% of households across Michigan struggle with water bills." If you need assistance paying your water bill, visit portagemi.gov/195 to view assistance resources.

Water Saving Hints

- » Check your toilet twice a year for leaks, which can be almost undetectable to the naked eye and can add significantly to your utility bill. Check your toilets by adding 5 drops of dark food coloring to the tank. Wait 20 minutes and survey the bowl. If colored water appears, you have a leaky toilet.
- » Don't let your water run when you brush your teeth, wash dishes, or your car.
- » Water your lawn in the early morning or plant water-efficient landscaping. Ensure that your irrigation is watering your lawn and not the sidewalk, driveway, or street.
- » Take a shorter shower.
- » Run only full loads of dishes and clothes.
- » Install low-flow plumbing fixtures.

YOUR BACKYARD IS BIGGER THAN YOU THINK

Birding Workshop

Enjoy a presentation from Russ Schipper of the Audubon Society of Kalamazoo. Discover different types of birds and see taxidermy birds up close! This program is designed for students ages 8 to 12. Space is limited for this program with a maximum of 35 participants.

- » Wednesday, June 12, 10 - 11 AM
- » Schrier Park (850 West Osterhout Avenue)
- » \$10 per participant (Registration required)

Summer Concert Series: The Spazmatics

Make memories with your friends and family at the Summer Concert Series. Bring a chair or blanket with you for lawn seating and leave yourself a little room to dance and get your groove on! The Spazmatics brings all the awesome sounds, styles, and way cool dance steps from the 1980s decade we'd love to forget. Their musical talent combined with creative expression will bring you an unforgettable, purely energetic entertainment-filled evening. Remember to bring your Velcro wallet from the '80s for on-site food trucks.

- » Thursday, June 13, 7 PM
- » Overlander Bandshell (7810 Shaver Road)
- » FREE (No registration required)

Juneteenth Celebration

Celebrate the legacy and long-celebrated holiday of Juneteenth. Participate in self-led reflection, activities, and learning at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park. Honor Dr. Martin Luther King Junior's legacy, explore a "Garden of Hope," enjoy landscape corridors, reflect on meditative benches under young shade trees, and view the interpretive kiosk.

- » Monday, June 17 - Friday, June 21, during normal park hours
- » Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Park (1000 MLK Drive)
- » FREE (No registration required)

IdeaWorx: Start Your Business

Transform your business dream into reality! Ready to launch your business, but not sure how to get started? Experts from the Small Business Development Center are ready to help. This workshop offers a setting to explore topics such as writing an impactful business plan, how to evaluate market potential, and exploring ways to finance your dream. Learn about research



YOU HAVE MORE FRIENDS THAN YOU KNOW

Memory Café presented by MEMORY CARE LEARNING CENTER

The memory cafe is designed to bring together individuals with memory loss and their care partners to socialize, share experiences, and engage in activities that promote cognitive function. Experience a safe and supportive environment where participants can connect with others facing similar challenges. Activities may include arts and crafts, music and singing, games, and storytelling. The goal of the memory cafe is to improve socialization, reduce isolation, and promote overall well-being for individuals with memory loss and their caregivers. Space is limited.

- » June 12, 10 - 11:30 AM
- » FREE and open to the public (Registration required)

Frauds and Scams 2024

Presented by Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office



This session educates people about fraudulent activities and scams prevalent in Kalamazoo

Portage Parks & Recreation Events, Camps & Classes

1,000 Acres. 20 Parks. One City.

To find out more and register online, visit [www.mypark.portagemi.gov](http://mypark.portagemi.gov) and click the REGISTER NOW! button.

REGISTER NOW!

strategies to help your business grow and thrive. This class is designed for entrepreneurs looking to write a business plan, or who want to fine-tune and improve an already existing plan.

- » Thursday, June 20, 6 - 8:30 PM
- » Portage Parks & Recreation (320 Library Lane)
- » \$40 per person (Registration required)

Wellness Workshop: Sound 'Scapes with Wind Willow Consortium



Experience a community-based, sound immersion journey with Wind Willow Consortium to learn about the positive benefits of sound therapy. Enjoy a relaxing time away from everyday stressors and an informational and melodic journey using a variety of instruments. This harmonic experience promotes relaxation and well-being and can be a powerful way to release stress. A question-and-answer session will take place after the program for participants. Water, yoga mats, and chairs will be provided for this workshop. Participants may bring a blanket, pillow, or cushion if they desire. This program is designed for ages 12+; participants between the ages of 12 and 15 must be accompanied by an adult or chaperone. Maximum of 40 participants.

- » Friday, June 21, 6:30 - 8:30 PM
- » Portage Parks & Recreation (320 Library Lane)
- » \$10 per participant (Registration required. Ages 12 and up)

Adult Softball Slow-Pitch League: Session II

Catering to both co-ed teams on Mondays and Tuesdays and men's teams on Wednesdays and Thursdays, our league provides a fantastic opportunity for players of all skill levels to engage in friendly competition. Whether you are a seasoned softball enthusiast or a newcomer looking for a fun way to stay active, our league offers a welcoming and inclusive environment. Experience the joy of softball in the heart of our city. Sign up today at www.CityBallPortage.com and be part of the excitement!



- » June 24 - August 30 (Registration required by June 14)

Friday at the Flats

Join us on the fourth Friday of every month, May through August, for dinner and experience a range of food trucks and live, local musicians. Seating is limited, but lawn space is plentiful, so bring a blanket or chair. Connect with your family and friends at Celery Flats through food, live music, and fun.



Portage Farmers Market: Fresh Fun for Everyone!

Summer is here, bringing delicious food and fun at the Portage Farmers Market. June is the prime time for locally grown strawberries, salad greens, cherries, peas, and garlic scapes! Enjoy artisan bakery items, locally produced eggs, meats, cheeses, syrups, jams, honey, gourmet mushrooms, and beautifully handcrafted works from local artists and crafters.

Experience live music from different local artists each week in June, including Dennis Martin, Mike Talbot, Dana Scott, Fireglow, and Charlie Mench. Grab a cup of coffee and savor a bite to eat from one of our hot food vendors while enjoying the live music. Whether you're craving a pastry or a freshly prepared taco, we have something for everyone.

Portage Farmers Market accepts SNAP/EBT, Double Up Food Bucks, Senior Project Fresh, and WIC. Visit the Market Manager booth for more information.

The Portage Farmers Market is *Fresh. Rain or Shine.* every Sunday from 9 AM to 1 PM, now through October 13, at City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue. Make the market part of your Sunday routine!

Follow us on Facebook @PortageMarketMI or Instagram @PortageMarket, visit www.farmersmarket.portagemi.gov, email farmmkt@portagemi.gov, or call 329-4421.

Portage Zhang Senior Center Events, Activities & Classes

Explore More. Have Fun. Live Well.

Find us at 203 East Centre Avenue | www.mypzsc.portagemi.gov | To find out more or to register, call 329-4555

Experience a vital, vibrant community offering a wide variety of services and activities that match the needs of active older adults. Membership at the PZSC is open to anyone over the age of 50. Portage residency is not required. All events are held at the Portage Zhang Senior Center unless otherwise noted.

County. Lieutenant Baker will discuss online scams, phishing attacks, identity theft, and fraudulent investment schemes and how these activities have directly impacted victims in Kalamazoo County. Learn about the latest tactics used by fraudsters and how to protect yourself from falling prey. Gain a better understanding of the risks associated with fraudulent activities and learn how to avoid becoming a victim.

- » Wednesday, June 26, 2 - 4 PM
- » FREE and open to the public (Registration required)

Travel Presentation – Premier World Discovery

Join Tracey Schenk of Premier World Discovery to learn about the fun and exciting trips offered through Premier World Discovery for 2024 & 2025. Learn about Great Trains & Grand Canyons, New Orleans Holiday, and Music Cities Christmas, Costa Rica, Puerto Vallarta, Sunny San Diego & So Cal Highlights, England, Scotland & Wales, and National Parks & Canyons of the Southwest! Space is limited.

- » Thursday, June 27, 3 - 5 PM
- » FREE (Registration required)

Blood Pressure Clinic

Absolute Home Care and Medical Staffing generously offers Blood Pressure Clinics in the Wellness Room at the PZSC. Anyone is welcome!

- » June 11 & 25, 10 AM – 12 PM
- » FREE (Registration available | Drop-ins welcome)

Exploring Grief Through Books & Movies

The Collected Regrets of Clover by Mikki Brammer

This quarterly workshop explores themes of grief, loss, and resilience through books and movies. Each four-week session will focus on a specific book or movie. Participants will watch portions of the selected movie as a group and then engage in a group discussion led by a Centrica Care Navigators grief counselor.



- » Mondays, July 8, 15, 22, 29, 11 AM - 12 PM
- » FREE and open to the public (Registration required)

PORTAGER

United in Recovery After the Storm

It's been just over a month since an EF-2 tornado struck Portage on May 7, 2024. Living in the Midwest, we understand the risks of tornadoes, but experiencing one in our city was a shock. The memories of that Tuesday evening will stay with us for a long time.

#ForwardTogether and #PortageCares are more than just hashtags. They represent our community's resilience and collective effort to recover and heal. The overwhelming support from near and far has been heartening. Neighbors helping neighbors, volunteers from across the country barking in Portage, and generous donations of supplies and funds have made a significant impact (see the list to the right). Our community's response has been nothing short of extraordinary and the outpouring of support has been a testament to our strength and unity.

Despite this, the journey to recovery and normalcy will be long and challenging for some. If you need assistance, the City of Portage is here to help. If we can't provide the help you need, we will connect you with agencies that can.

Visit our Tornado Recovery Resources web page at [www.portagemi.gov/927](http://portagemi.gov/927) or scan the QR code below. There, you can find FAQs, community resources, and the latest city announcements. If you can't find the answer to your question, please call the Office of the City Manager at 329-4400.



TORNADO RECOVERY RESOURCES



7900 South Westnedge Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002-5160
[www.portagemi.gov](http://portagemi.gov) | (269) 329-4400

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Thank You!

In the aftermath of the devastating tornado that struck our city, we have been deeply moved by the outpouring of support from countless organizations and individuals. Your swift and selfless actions have been instrumental in our recovery, providing not only physical aid but also the strength and hope we needed to rebuild.

- » Abonmarche
- » Avidia Credit Union
- » After the Storm
- » American Arbor
- » American Red Cross
- » Bare Beauty Salon & Spa
- » BSA Troop 211 - Portage
- » BSA Troop 161 - Mattawan
- » Carleton Equipment
- » Charles and Lynn Zhang
- » Charles River Labs
- » Chick-Fil-A
- » City BBQ
- » City of Battle Creek
- » City of Kalamazoo
- » Clark Logic
- » College H.U.N.K.S.
- » Community Action
- » Community Healing Centers
- » Consumers Energy
- » CT Electric Services
- » Cummins Sales and Service
- » Disability Network
- » Gibson Insurance Agency
- » Gilbert and Ivy Bookshop
- » Girl Scout Troop 80396
- » Goodwill
- » Green Bay Packaging
- » Gryphon Place 211
- » Gull Lake Sewer Authority
- » H&H Property Management
- » Hadaway Cleaning & Restoration
- » Harding's Friendly Market
- » Healthy Babies Healthy Start
- » Home Depot
- » Hope Animal Assisted Crisis Response
- » Housing Resources, Inc.
- » Integrated Services of Kalamazoo
- » Jimmy Johns
- » Kalamazoo Community Foundation
- » Kalamazoo County and Board of Commissioners
- » Kalamazoo County Area Agency on Aging
- » Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services
- » Kalamazoo County ID Program
- » Kalamazoo County McKinney Vento
- » Kalamazoo Excavating
- » Kalamazoo First Assembly of God
- » Kalamazoo Humane Society
- » Kalamazoo Landscape Supplies
- » Kalamazoo Neighborhood Housing Services
- » Katie Weyenberg
- » Loaves and Fishes
- » Lutheran Disaster Relief Services
- » McAllisters
- » McDonald's
- » Meijer
- » Michigan Department of Health & Human Services
- » Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services
- » Michigan Department of Transportation
- » Michigan State Police
- » Michigan Top Producers Real Estate Group
- » Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency
- » Michigan Works
- » Mulder's Moving
- » OsborneKlein
- » Parker Fluid System Connectors
- » Parker Hannifin
- » Perceptive Controls
- » Perrigo
- » Plastics by Design, Inc.
- » Portage Community Center
- » Portage Lions Club
- » Portage Rotary Club
- » Preservation Tree Care
- » Radiant Church
- » RBI Business Group
- » Ridderman Oil
- » Road Commission of Kalamazoo County
- » Roe-Comm
- » Ron's Beans
- » S&T Landscape Services
- » Salvation Army
- » ServPro
- » Severence Electric
- » Skinny Kenny's BBQ & Ice Cream
- » St. Vincent de Paul
- » Steensma Lawn & Power Equipment
- » Stryker
- » Team Rubicon
- » Tractor Supply
- » Translation Services
- » Tropical Smoothie Café
- » Two Men and a Truck
- » United Way
- » Upsilon Epsilon Chapter of Sigma Nursing Honor Society
- » Valley Family Church
- » Veolia
- » Village of Vicksburg
- » Visiting Angels
- » Walmart
- » Wedel's
- » World Renew Disaster Response Services
- » YMCA
- » Zoetis

To the local and national organizations, first responders, volunteers, and every individual who lent a hand, offered a kind word, or donated resources – thank you. Your dedication and compassion have shown us the true meaning of community and resilience.

We are profoundly grateful for your efforts and the lasting impact you have made. Together, we are stronger, and together, we will continue to rebuild and thrive.



City Closing Notices

Non-emergency city offices will be closed on the following dates:

Juneteenth

» Wednesday, June 19

Independence Day

» Thursday, July 4

Portage City Council

Portage City Council meetings are held twice a month on Tuesdays at 6 PM at Portage City Hall (7900 South Westnedge Avenue) in Council Chambers and are always open to the public.

The City Manager

The City Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. Citizens are encouraged to contact the City Manager with concerns or complaints about city services by visiting [www.reportit.portagemi.gov](http://reportit.portagemi.gov) or by calling Complaint Resolution at 329-4404.

Televised City Meetings

City Council, Planning Commission, and Zoning Board of Appeals meetings can be viewed live on Spectrum channel 995 and AT&T channel 99. All meetings can be viewed via live streaming at [www.portagemi.gov/205](http://portagemi.gov/205).

JUNE 2024

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|----|---------|---------------------------------|
| 10 | 7:00 PM | Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting |
| 11 | 6:00 PM | City Council Meeting |
| 20 | 7:00 PM | Planning Commission Meeting |
| 25 | 6:00 PM | City Council Meeting |

The Portager

The *Portager* is the official publication of the City of Portage, used to inform residents of city services and events, as well as city projects that have significance to Portage citizens. The newsletter is published monthly and delivered to every mailbox in the 49002 and 49024 zip codes.

This month's front and back cover photo features Stuart Manor in the Celery Flats Historical Area.