

Portland Township Purchases Property for New Township Hall

by Sue Vanlente, Township Trustee

For many years, our Portland Township Board has known that we are outgrowing our current location. COVID-19 and new regulations from the State of Michigan have finally pushed us over the line—a new hall is no longer a want, it has become a need. Surprisingly, many of our residents don't even know where our current hall is located, nor have they been inside it within the past decade. Many also ask, how it is that the Township Hall is located within the City of Portland instead of in our own township.

In 1984 when the Emergency Services Building was built on the site of the old Portland Bayou, the Portland Area Municipal Authority (PAMA) was formed. PAMA is made up of the City of Portland, Portland Township, and Danby Township. All three entities contributed to the construction and maintenance of the building.

At that time, as part of the financial agreement, Portland Township moved into the 24' X 26' room in the southwest corner of the building, which also contains a 5' x 6' bathroom and an 8' x 16' storage room. Prior to 1984, Township meetings were held in board members' homes, so this was a step up for the Township. Now, 37 years later, it no longer fills our needs.

A new hall will allow us to:

Be more responsible to our residents

- The existing building is not **ADA compliant**.
- We need a **larger meeting space**. Most of the time we have very few residents who attend our meetings, but when we hold Public Hearings or Special Assessment District hearings, 624 square feet isn't enough space.
- Our current hall doesn't allow for **social distancing** during cold/flu seasons.
- We need **more parking**. There are just 11 parking spots at our current hall, barely enough to accommodate personal vehicles for our larger boards.
- Our current building was built in 1984 and is not **energy efficient**.
- A new hall, built on our own property, will give us **more control in the future**.
- The building we now use is in need of major repairs and renovation. It would be better to **spend our money on a building that we own**.

Better serve the needs of our community

- The new hall will allow us to **hold elections in our own building**. Right now, elections are held at Westwood School, requiring the entire school district to close down each time we have an election.
- The Emergency Services Building where our current hall is located no longer has enough space for all of the entities that are using it. Both the **police and ambulance departments need more space**. Vacating our corner of the building would help alleviate those shortages.
- A new Portland Township Hall could provide **meeting space for Portland's senior citizens**.
- It would also be an option for **other non-profit organizations** that don't have their own buildings.

Better serve the needs of the Township Board

- The current building **no longer suits the State-mandated rules for Election Day protocol**. Now that citizens can register to vote on election day, the Clerk needs to be in her office that day. The clerk also oversees the election and does troubleshooting. She can't be in two locations at once.

- We have 128 square feet of **storage space** at our current location, not nearly enough to store records, election machines and other election equipment. Westwood School has been generous over the years and allowed us to store many of these things at the school, but certainly the school will have a use for that space when we no longer need it.
- The new location will allow us to **relocate the monthly recycling to our own property**. Brian Wohlschied, from Municipal Supply, has let us use his property for the past three years, but we would much prefer to move this operation to our own land.
- The latest census shows that Portland Township grew by 14% over the past ten years. There will undoubtedly be a time in the not-so-distant future where we will need to provide the Township Board with **office space**.

On October 9, 2021, the Township Board purchased 31 acres of land adjacent to the westernmost border of the City. The land fronts on Grand River Avenue, next to Tri County Collision/Glassmasters, and also fronts on Knox Road. The parcel is larger than is needed, and plans are underway to make the best usage of it, which could include selling off some parcels to other entities. The four-acre parcel on Barnes Road that the Township purchased in the spring will also be sold.

Everything is in the very early stages of planning. Township Board members have visited several existing halls to help us decide what we need for Portland Township. It should also be noted that this new hall will not compete with existing Portland-area event centers. It will be large enough to accommodate all of the needs of Portland Township, any rental fees will cover the annual costs of the building; it will not be a for-profit venture.

Your thoughts and opinions are very important to us. Please call any of the Board members if you have questions or concerns. Or better yet, please attend any of our meetings and talk to us there. We will be forthcoming with all information and will communicate with all of you through our website, Facebook page, and newsletter as our plans fall into place.

We will set aside time at our December 8 meeting, specifically for public comment. We invite you to attend. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m.

If anyone would like to tour our existing hall, please attend any of our meetings. Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month, and begin at 6:30 p.m.

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