

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 19, 2025

Statement from the Office of the Borough Manager Regarding Portage Borough Legal Proceedings and Public Engagement

PORTAGE, PA – Since I was appointed Borough Manager on February 5th, I have been conducting a comprehensive review of all ongoing municipal operations, finances, and legal matters. My priority is to ensure that Portage Borough operates with the highest level of transparency and professional integrity.

Re-evaluation and Discontinuance of Litigation

In my first few days of reviewing the Borough's current caseload, I have evaluated the ongoing lawsuit initiated prior to my appointment, involving the Borough, Chief of Police, and a social media group. Following this assessment, the recommendation has been made to discontinue the case and work out what needs to be done to close this issue.

While the initial decision to pursue legal action was based on a strategy chosen prior to my appointment, a re-evaluation indicates a misalignment of litigation best practices. We have determined that a shift in strategy is necessary to better align with established First Amendment protections and to ensure the most effective use of taxpayer resources.

It is important to clarify that this discontinuance applies specifically to the Borough of Portage as a municipal entity. By withdrawing from this case, the Borough is officially concluding its involvement in the litigation. *This decision does not preclude the Chief of Police from pursuing the matter further as a private individual.* Should he feel personally wronged by the comments made, he maintains the right to seek legal recourse in his personal capacity, independent of his official role or the Borough's resources.

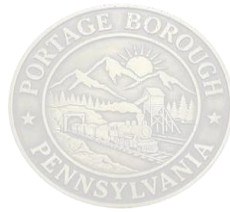
Update on Scheduled Proceedings

The discontinuance as to the named defendants has been filed, and opposing counsel has been notified of such filing. There is a hearing scheduled for Friday, February 20, 2026, at 9:00 am at the Cambria County Courthouse. We intend to move forward with whatever steps are necessary in order to conclude all Borough affiliation with this case.

Due Diligence and Personnel Review

Regarding a negative social media comment recently directed at the Chief of Police, specifically referring to an incident at a local Sheetz location, the Borough takes all public discourse involving our staff seriously. To ensure complete due diligence and a fact-based management process, I am working through the formal request process for the relevant reports from the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) regarding the incident. This step is taken to verify all facts and provide a clear, objective resolution to the matter for personnel and public safety.

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A New Standard of Professionalism and Service

As public officials, whether appointed or elected, my staff and I fully understand that we are subject to public scrutiny. I recognize that social media will naturally contain both critical and supportive content; indeed, I have personally been subject to both during my time in public service.

Regardless of the nature of the feedback, I strive to serve with excellence, a standard that I will pass on as a firm expectation for our entire team. It is our job as public servants to serve this community with excellence, regardless of the nature of social media comments.

Portage Borough is committed to a culture of professionalism. We recognize that social media is a vital tool for democracy, allowing your voice to be heard under the First Amendment. With that voice, however, we ask that our community join us in fostering an environment of mutual respect. We encourage everyone to engage in fact checks and to communicate with one another constructively.

By keeping incivility to a minimum and interacting professionally, we can build a community to be proud to live in, work in, raise a family in, and give back to.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MK Zonfrilli-Lang".

Dr. Makayla (MK) Zonfrilli-Lang
Borough Manager
Portage Borough