

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

Policies & Procedures

Social Media Management Policy

Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media, created to address the ever-changing landscape of social media in the Town of Ellington (the “Town”). Social media has emerged as an effective platform for reaching citizens in meaningful and engaging ways, keeping them informed about news and events in their community. To minimize liability to the Town, it is important that the Town clearly defines the official social media platforms over which it has control and specifies standards, guidelines and protocols for their use. The Town has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is “spoken” on behalf of the Town on its social media sites. The Town encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the Town, the missions of its departments and public bodies, and to contribute to the overall vibrancy of its community and degree of participation of its citizenry, where appropriate.

Definitions

1. **Social Media:** content created by individuals using accessible technologies through the internet for two-way communication, as well as internet-based resources that promote user participation. Examples of social media include but are not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, RSS feeds, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.
2. **Town of Ellington Author/Publisher:** an authorized Town employee authorized to create and be responsible for posted articles and information on social media sites.
3. **Post:** content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Policy

1. All Town social media sites or accounts will require approval of the First Selectman and the requesting Department Head prior to their creation.
2. All Town social media sites shall be published using approved Town social networking platforms and tools.
3. All Town social networking sites shall adhere to applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations and policies including all applicable Information

- Technology and retention schedule/Freedom of Information management policies and other applicable Town policies.
4. The Town reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of the Town's social media policy or any applicable law. Any content that is removed, including the time, date and identity of the poster, when available, shall be retained in accordance with the State of Connecticut Records Retention Schedule and any other applicable laws (if so required).
 5. Freedom of Information Act laws and policies may apply to certain social media content and therefore content must be able to be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with these laws.
 6. All social network sites and entries shall clearly indicate that any articles and any other content posted may be subject to public disclosure.
 7. At no time will any on-duty employee engage in any internet based social media activity either for the Town or for personal use unless authorized.
 8. The Town's social media policy may be revised at any time, as may be reasonable or necessary under the circumstances.
 9. The Town's social media policy will be displayed to online users or made available through hyperlink.
 10. Nothing in this policy shall be applied to prohibit or infringe upon any communication, speech or expression that is protected or privileged under state or federal law. This shall include speech and expression protected under the state and federal constitution, as well as state and federal labor laws or other applicable laws.

Professional Use:

1. All official Town related communication through social media sites should remain professional in nature and should always be conducted in accordance with the Town's communication policy, practices and expectations. Employees must not use official Town social media networking sites for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions or to engage in private business activities.
2. Town employees should be mindful that inappropriate use of official Town social media can be grounds for disciplinary action and may result in personal liability or other penalties.
3. The objectives of the Town social media sites are to:
 - Publish, engage and provide customer service with relevant, timely and actionable information, while promoting services and key events;
 - Establish confidence that the Town's social media sites are trusted sources of information, especially during emergencies; and
 - Integrate social media with other ways to deliver and share content.
4. Users and visitors to social media sites shall be notified that the intended purpose of the site(s) is to serve as a mechanism for communication between Town departments and members of the public. Town social

media site articles and comments containing any of the following forms of content shall not be allowed and are subject to removal:

- a) comments not topically related to the particular social medium article being commented upon;
- b) comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
- c) profane, vulgar, and obscene language or content;
- d) content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination of the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- e) solicitations of commerce;
- f) conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- g) information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
- h) comments or content that incite violence;
- i) content that violates a legal ownership interest of another party;
- j) potentially libelous statements; or
- k) commercial promotions or spam.

Posting Guidelines

Social media content is fleeting because updates compete for attention in personal social media news streams. Official Town social media sites need to be clear, precise and follow industry best practices for posting updates. Three tenets Town social media publishers must follow regarding the types of content to share are:

- **Relevant:** Information that helps residents and pertains to their daily lives;
- **Timely:** Information about deadlines, upcoming events or related to current events;
- **Actionable:** Information to register, attend, go or do.

What not to post:

- Information about items in litigation or about claims that could be brought against the Town
- Nonpublic information of any kind
- Personnel, sensitive or confidential information of any kind
- Medical information that violates a person's Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protections.

Links

Wherever possible, as an extension of the Town's communications platform, social media sites should include links that direct users back to the Town's website for more information, forms, documents or online services as necessary.

Comments

Comments from members of our community are welcome on social media sites, but comments must be monitored daily during work hours, as well as off hours by those assigned to do so. Town social media sites must be structured to focus discussions on a particular interest of the Town rather than creating a public forum. Town publishers may only remove postings based on the guidelines below, or those set forth in paragraph 4 under “Professional Use” above, not because a comment disagrees with Town policy.

All Town social media sites shall contain the following statement:

“The purpose of this site is to present matters of public interest in Ellington, including its many residents, businesses and visitors. The Town encourages you to submit your questions, comments and concerns, but please note this is a moderated online discussion site and not a public forum.

Once posted, the Town reserves the right to delete these kinds of submissions:

- *Vulgar, profane, and obscene language*
- *Pornographic content and language*
- *Personal attacks of any kind*
- *Comments or content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, genetics, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or intellectual disability or sexual orientation*
- *Comments or content that incites violence*
- *Spam or unrelated links to other sites*
- *Comments that are clearly off topic*
- *Comments that advocate illegal activity*
- *Comments that promote particular services, products or political organizations*
- *Comments that may infringe on copyrights or trademarks*
- *Personally identifiable medical information*
- *Information that may compromise the safety, security or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.*

If there are repeated violations, the Town will ban participation on platforms that permit organizations to ban users. Please note that the comments expressed on this site do not imply endorsement of, or agreement by, the Town, nor do such comments reflect the opinions and position of the Town or its officers and employees. If you have any

questions concerning this social media platform, or comments posted hereon, please contact the First Selectman's Office at 860-870-3100 or info@ellington-ct.gov."

Comments that do not meet the criteria in this policy should be retained, as may be required, and then deleted. Publishers should take screenshots of the original post and the comment that will be deleted. A description detailing why content was removed or deemed not suitable should be maintained.

Publishers may choose to reply to comments and engage residents in the same way that phone and email inquiries are responded to; however, business decorum must prevail and factual responses – not opinion – must be the content of what is shared.

BOS APPROVED: 01/11/2021