

## City of St. Louis Park Social Media Policy and Guidelines

**Section I: Purpose and policies**

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### Section I: Purpose and policies

#### Purpose

The City of St. Louis Park encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the city and the missions of its departments where appropriate.

The city council and the city manager have an overriding interest and expectation in deciding who may “speak” and what is “spoken” on behalf of City of St. Louis Park on social media sites. This policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media.

The City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager and Social Media Specialist will approve what social media outlets may be suitable for use by the city and its departments. The city’s communications division will post to and monitor city social media outlets, and serve to educate departments on how to best use various outlets to achieve their goals.

#### Social media policy

- A. All official City of St. Louis Park presences on social media sites or services are considered an extension of the city’s information networks and are governed by the Computer, Communications and Equipment Policy contained in the City of St. Louis Park Employee Handbook.
- B. The city’s Communications Manager and Social Media Specialist will review department requests to use social media sites.
- C. The communications division will advocate using social media to help departments reach their stated goals by assisting departments in developing appropriate uses for social media, assisting in the selection of appropriate social media outlets and helping departments define a strategy for engagement using social media.
- D. Departments that use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and city laws, regulations, and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act and Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, First Amendment, privacy laws and information security policies established by City of St. Louis Park.
- E. Wherever possible, links to more information should direct users back to the city’s official website for more information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the City of St. Louis Park.
- F. Employees representing the city government via social media outlets must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City of St. Louis Park. Employees who fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner shall be subject to the Disciplinary Procedures outlined in the City of St. Louis Park Personnel Manual.
- G. The communications division will monitor content on each of the department social media sites to ensure adherence to the Social Media Policy for appropriate use, messaging and branding consistent with the goals of the City of St. Louis Park.
- H. Violation of these standards may result in the removal of department pages from social media outlets. The Communications Manager and Social Media Specialist retain the authority to remove information.

## **Section II: Guidelines for City of St. Louis Park departments**

### ***Authorization to use social media***

The City of St. Louis Park's administrative policy regarding social media delegates the review and approval of social media usage to the Communications Manager and the Social Media Specialist, who may then authorize individuals to represent the City of St. Louis Park departments on social media to support the mission and overall goals of the city.

### ***Notice regarding use***

This policy regarding social media specifically points out that the city council and the city manager have an overriding interest and expectation in deciding who may "speak" and what is "spoken" on behalf of City of St. Louis Park through social media sites.

- All official City of St. Louis Park presences on social media sites or services are considered an extension of the city's information networks and are governed by the computer, communications and equipment policy contained in the City of St. Louis Park Personnel Manual.
- Employees representing the city government via social media outlets must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City of St. Louis Park.
- The communications division will monitor content on each of the department social media sites to ensure adherence to the social media policy for appropriate use, messaging and branding consistent with the goals of City of St. Louis Park.

### ***Elected officials' social media accounts***

The city does not provide links to elected officials' social media accounts on the city website or through other official city communication channels. While there is no specific authority on this issue, the city attorney in July 2021 raised concerns in the following areas:

- *Data practices and record retention:* Adding elected officials' social media account links to the city website makes it more likely that elected officials' social media page postings would be considered government records subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, and thus subject to the city's record retention schedule. Out of an abundance of caution, the city would likely need to capture those records using its archiving tool, ArchiveSocial, so the records could be provided in case of a public records request. This would require city staff to access those individual social media accounts in order to link them to the archiving tool.
- *First Amendment:* Adding elected officials' social media account links to the city website makes it more likely that those social media pages would be considered a public forum. Even if the social media page is considered a limited public forum, the elected official whose account is linked to the city website would need to practice viewpoint neutrality and would not be able to ban users with whom they disagree.
- *Elections:* Providing links to incumbent elected officials' social media accounts on the city website provides an advantage to those officials during elections, which other candidates for the incumbent's office wouldn't have.

Constituents can easily find elected officials' social media accounts on the various platforms should they choose to look, and if elected officials have their social media accounts set to be publicly visible. Elected officials may choose to provide links to their social media accounts in the signature line of their official city email accounts.

The above also applies to providing links on the city website to newsletters or other communications produced and distributed by elected officials for their constituents.

### ***Commenting policy***

The City of St. Louis Park social media comment policy is below, and is posted on its social media sites:

#### **City of St. Louis Park Social Media Comment Policy**

The City of St. Louis Park uses social media sites to provide two-way communication with the public about matters of public interest identified and raised by the city for discussion.

The City of St. Louis Park welcomes participation and comments that are on topic from the public on its social media sites. However, these sites are limited public forums limited to specific topics identified and raised by the city. City staff monitors these social media sites and the city reserves the right to hide posted content on St. Louis Park social media sites, including but not limited to the following:

- Posts and comments that contain obscene, indecent or profane language or pornographic images or links to obscene or pornographic content
- Direct threats
- Prejudiced or harmful comments that encourage discrimination or discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, age, religion, gender identity, ethnicity, marital status, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation
- Solicitation, promotion or endorsement of specific commercial services, products or entities
- Links to any site or content posted by automatic software programs (i.e. "bots")
- Posts and comments that advocate illegal activity
- Personally identifiable information or sensitive personal information that if released violates federal or state law
- Political statements that endorse or oppose political campaigns or candidates
- Information that could compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems
- Information that directly interferes or compromises ongoing investigations, public safety tactics or the safety of public safety officers
- Confidential or private information or data in violation of state or federal law
- Information that appears to violate the intellectual property right of the city or a third party under federal or state law
- Comments that are not directly related to the topic of the social media post to which the comment is responding.

We also reserve the right to delete spam, posts that advocate illegal activity and posts that infringe on copyright.

**Please note:** Comments expressed on the city’s social networking sites do not reflect the opinions or positions of the City of St. Louis Park, its employees or elected officials. The city’s following of a particular social networking user does not equal endorsement or support.

**In the event of an emergency, call 911 for a police, fire or EMS response.** The City of St. Louis Park cannot guarantee a timely emergency response to comments posted on social media sites.

### ***Uses for social media***

Uses for social media includes:

1. Sharing news from the City of St. Louis Park, including services, holiday closings and other information normally found on the city website.
2. Publicizing events and programs sponsored by the City of St. Louis Park or by other government entities, local utilities necessary for St. Louis Park residents, or nonprofit agencies or organizations that receive funding from the City of St. Louis Park.
3. Issuing emergency alerts, road closures or weather alerts affecting large numbers of residents.
4. Engaging with residents, local businesses and other relevant local groups and organizations, and responding to questions and inquiries.

### ***Social media as public record***

Social media is a public record and the city’s social media accounts are subject the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. The City of St. Louis Park uses a standalone software program for backup of social media. Responses to data practices requests received for social media posts or comments should be coordinated with the city clerk’s office, which is responsible for responding to data practices requests.

### ***Guidelines for following others on social media***

1. City of St. Louis Park departments using social media should follow other City of St. Louis Park departments using social media.
2. City of St. Louis Park departments using social media may follow other groups and organizations of local relevance, including local businesses, area nonprofits, other government entities and news media.
3. In order to limit the appearance of favoritism or bias, the city’s social media accounts include a statement that following a particular social networking user does not equal endorsement or support. See the *City of St. Louis Park Social Media Comment Policy* referenced earlier in this section.

### ***Naming conventions***

City of St. Louis Park departments should use account names that maintain the city’s branding and consistent identification with City of St. Louis Park. Account names should also include “Minnesota” after City of St. Louis Park wherever possible to differentiate the city from similarly named cities.

### ***Legal considerations***

The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act guarantees citizens of the state and representatives of the media access to public records held by public bodies, public officials, and public employees. *A public record is any writing or recording - regardless of whether it is a paper record, an electronic file, an audio or video recording, or any other format - that is prepared or owned by, or in the possession of a public body or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business. All public records are presumed to be open, and may only be withheld if a specific, statutory exemption*

applies. In consideration of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, see *Social media as public record* earlier in this document.

**Note on tone and presentation**

The City of St. Louis Park should be as personable and approachable as possible when using social media, as this registers best with users. Messages should generally be conversational and concise. City of St. Louis Park social media pages should also have brief descriptions that include details on the city and are consistent with the city’s brand. These descriptions should include comment policies. They should also explain the city’s policy on following or otherwise engaging with other entities on the social media site, when applicable. See *Guidelines for following others on social media* above for more details.

**Appeal**

City of St. Louis Park social media sites are not intended to operate as traditional open public forums. When the city opens a site for public comment it does not intend to open the site for all purposes, but to open the site for limited discussion of only those topics specified by the city on that site. In some cases sites may be non-public forums, that is, not open to public comment at all, and in other instances, sites may be designated limited public forums.

When the City of St. Louis Park’s social media administrators determine to remove content of a person who is not an employee and who was not acting on behalf of the city, the person may appeal the decision. When a post or comment has been removed, anyone aggrieved other than a city employee may seek reconsideration of the decision to remove a comment by providing the City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager with a written request stating the reason or reasons why the comments do not fall within those limitations established in this policy or offer other bases to establish a right to publish the comments or other communications on the city social media site. The City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager must render a written decision on the request within one business day (excluding official city holidays) of receipt of the request noting the basis for the decision. The decision of the communications and marketing manager will be the final administrative decision of the city.

When a person other than an employee believes this policy violates their rights in ways other than removal of personally posted content from the city’s social media sites, that person may seek to have the City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager review all or part of the policy as applicable to that person by providing the City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager with a written request stating the reason or reasons why the policy violates the persons rights. The City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager must render a written decision on the request within five (5) business days (excluding official city holidays) and give the bases for the decision. For good cause, the City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager may extend the time for rendering a decision by five (5) additional days. The decision of the City of St. Louis Park’s Communications Manager will be the final administrative decision by the city.

In the absence or unavailability of the communications manager, the City of St. Louis Park Communications and Technology Director will take on the communications manager responsibilities in the appeal process.

The rights to appeal created in this section do not apply to an employee when the employee is acting in an official capacity or as a representative of the city and may only apply when the employee is acting in the employee’s personal capacity as a private party and when exercising rights accorded a person under the Constitution and the laws of the United States. An employee who feels aggrieved

by any action under this policy not covered by this section should seek review through established grievance procedures, if applicable, or through the employee's chain of command.

Approved by: Jacqueline Smith, APR  
Communications and technology director

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