

City of Columbus, WI Social Media Policy

Approved 4-15-2025

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This Social Media Policy ("Policy") establishes guidelines for the formation and use by the City of Columbus, WI ("City") of social media sites as a means of conveying information to the public about the City's mission, meetings, activities, and current issues. The City has an overriding interest and expectation in protecting the integrity of the information posted on its social media sites and the content that is attributed to the City and its officials.

The City recognizes that the internet provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions and share information on various topics using the ever-growing amount of social media sites including, but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest. Unfortunately, the use of sites like these can pose risks to the City. To reduce these risks, avert distraction and loss of productivity, and to ensure all IT resources are being used appropriately, the City expects and requires its employees to adhere to the following rules and guidelines regarding such social media use. This policy governs the use, administration, management, monitoring, and retention of social media and social media content, consistent with state, federal, and local laws and regulations, and in line with the City's mission, vision, and core values.

This policy is not intended or to be construed as to restrict communications or any protected activities as required by state and/or federal law.

Compliance with Related Policies and Agreements

All of the City's other policies that might apply to social media use remain in full force and effect. Employees should always adhere to them when using social media. Social media should never be used in a way that violates any other City policies or employee obligations. If your social media activity violates any of the City's policies in another forum, it will also violate them in an online forum. Employees who violate the City's policies may be subject to disciplinary action.

DEFINITIONS

Definitions related to this policy include:

Alternative Public User - Any person or entity utilizing a non-personal, alias, additional, or some other alternative social media account that is not acting in their capacity as the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee.

City-Related Content – Refers to content created and distributed on behalf of the City. Will be determined based on the substance of the information or materials posted rather than the identity of the poster, the equipment used, or the site on which it is posted.

City Social Media Sites - Refers to social media sites, pages, and /or accounts which the City establishes and maintains, by the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee and used for the purpose of posting City-Related Content, and over which it has control over all posting, except for advertisements or hyperlinks by the social media site's owners, vendors, or partners. City Social Media Sites shall supplement, and not replace, the City's required notices and standard methods of communication. All official City presence on social media sites is an extension of the City's existing information systems and networks.

Forum - An online discussion group where the public can post comments, information, images, or other electronic content, either anonymously or with personal identity.

Interactive Communication - A dynamic flow of information where users or participants can engage in two-way communication rather than simply passive observation of information.

Limited Public Forum - A public forum created by the government voluntarily for expressive activity that may be restricted as to subject matter or class of speaker.

Link or Hyperlink - A hypertext file or document which connects a user to another location or file, typically activated by clicking on a highlighted word or image on the screen.

Malware - Software that is intended to damage or disable computers and computer systems or electronic communication devices.

Personal Identification Information - Information and documents as defined under Wisconsin Statute Sections 943.201(1)(a) and(b).

Personal Social Media Accounts - Any blog, chat room, forum, social media site and/or website created or configured by an individual or entity for individual, social, or entertainment purposes. (Examples include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Foursquare, X, and YouTube).

Posts - Comments, information, images, or other electronic content left by a user/person on a blog, social media site, or other website.

Public User - Any person or entity utilizing a personal social media account that is not acting in their capacity as the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee.

Publish - Comments, information, images, or other electronic content that is made or disseminated via social media, websites, or other publicly open electronic forum.

Site Operator - The entities that manage or control each social media platform (e.g. Facebook, Google, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)

Social Media - Internet technologies that facilitate and promote interactive communication, participation, and collaboration. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, the web sites and applications Facebook, LinkedIn, X, Instagram, and YouTube, and the interactive tools and functions they provide to users.

Social Media Content - Any messages, materials, documents, photographs, videos, graphics, and other information that is created, posted, distributed, transmitted, or published using Social Media internet sites or Social Media tools.

Social Page Administrator - refers to the City employee designated with oversight of City social media sites with authority to create, use, publish, post, administer, manage, monitor, and/or retention of Social Media, Social Media tools or web sites, and/or Social Media Content, in the name of or on behalf of the City. Social Page Administrator has the authority to authorize a designee, who shall all have the same authority as the Social Page Administrator.

Visitor - Any person or entity who is not acting in the name of or on behalf of the City or any City officers, departments, boards, commissions, committees and authorities, volunteers and employees, that uses, posts, views, or otherwise utilizes a City Social Media Site.

Volunteer - A person recognized and authorized by the City to perform services for the City without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered. The receipt of reimbursement for authorized expenses does not constitute compensation as used herein.

Work Shift - The assigned or designated period of time that the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee engages in City employment-related activities for arranged or negotiated compensation.

Ownership of Social Media Accounts, Data, and Information

Any and all social media and other online accounts and profiles created or used on behalf of the City or otherwise for the purpose of promoting or marketing the City or similar business purposes, including such accounts and profiles featuring or displaying the City's name and trademarks ("City Social Media Site"), belong solely to the City. The City owns all City Social Media Sites regardless of the employee who opens the account or uses, manages, or accesses it. City Social Media Sites include any and all log-in information, data, passwords, trademarks, and content related to the profile or account, including all followers, subscribers, and contacts. City Social Media Sites do not include any social media accounts or profiles that are created or used by an employee exclusively for an employee's own personal use.

Individuals shall not create, develop, or maintain any City Social Media Sites without following this Policy's Authorization and Access process. All approved City Social Media Sites shall, where possible, be registered, in whole or in part, using the City's name and contact information. After registration, the log-in and password information for each of the City's Social Media Sites shall be kept by the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee and City Administration and any password changes must be recorded by the next business day with City Administration. The Social Page Administrator will ensure that a minimum of two administrators (including themselves) with full management rights and appointed by the City are in place on each City Social Media Site at all times for security and access purposes.

If you have any questions about creating or managing a social media account on behalf of the City, please review the City's Social Media Policy in its entirety for guidelines and restrictions related to the creation, development, and maintenance of any City Social Media Site and all business use of social media or contact the City Administrator.

Upon the City's request at any time during the course of employment or immediately upon and after a Social Page Administrator and/or their designee's separation of employment from the City for any reason, they agree to cease accessing, using, updating, and modifying the City Social Media Sites. The current Social Page Administrator shall change passwords or remove page access within 48 hours following termination of their predecessor or designee.

Upon the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee's separation of employment from

the City for any reason, the City will retain ownership and control of all City Social Media Sites created or used during the course of their employment, including all related data and information. Prior to their separation of employment, they agree to provide to the City the log-in information, including usernames and passwords when they exist, for each City Social Media Site that they created, used, or managed. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee also agree to assist the City, both prior to and after their employment (as may be necessary), with the transition and maintenance of each City Social Media Site created or used by them during the course of their employment, including providing all information that may be necessary to ensure that the City is able to access and control the City Social Media Sites. Administrative accounts shall be tied to a City email account where possible.

General Practices

City Social Media Sites shall contain the following information in a prominent place on the site:

1. Clearly state that such sites are maintained by the City and that the sites comply with the City's Social Media Policy. This will contain a link to the policy which will be on the City's website.
2. The comment policy for the site will be listed.
3. Stated purpose of the page/site.
4. Notification that violations of comment policy will result in blocking the user
5. Official Contact (i.e., the Social Media Coordinator)

City Social Media Sites shall link back to the City's official website for forms, documents, online services, and other information necessary to conduct business with the City.

City Social Media Sites are considered Limited Public Forums that the City may disable all comments if possible. If comments are allowed or unable to be disabled, the City may moderate comments according to this Policy's User Responsibilities.

The City's Social Media Policy shall be displayed to users and made available by hyperlink.

Authorization and Access

In order for any City department to establish a City Social Media Site, a request must first be provided to the City Administrator and approved by the City Council. Requests for City Social Media Sites must include a plan to utilize the site and assign a Social Page Administrator and their designees to regularly update and periodically monitor the sites.

To ensure consistency of City-related messages, the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee are the sole City employees authorized to post to their approve City Social Media Site(s). The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee must also ensure that any and all contractors, vendors, or agents of the City who may represent the City in postings to social media sites will comply with all policies, rules, and requirements regarding such actions.

The City reserves the right to deny access to post information on City's Social Media Sites to any employee or representative of the City who violates this Policy. Any reference in this document to "employee" or "City employee" shall be considered to include any contractor, vendor, or agent working for or representing the City but not in the City's employ.

Notwithstanding other provisions of this Policy, the Policy does not intend in any way to limit or restrict the ability of City employees to speak as private citizens on matters relating to City

business. City employees may post comments, questions, or opinions on social media sites, including any City Social Media Sites, so long as they make clear that they are acting as private citizens and that their statements in no way represent the official position of the City. Personal pages or posts must be made on personal accounts outside work hours.

Training

The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee will receive training that, at a minimum, addresses legal issues concerning the appropriate use of social media sites, as well as privacy, civil rights, dissemination and retention of information posted.

Official and Acceptable Use

Only information that pertains to City business or operations shall be posted to City Social Media Sites for informational use only. Such examples include but are not limited to:

- a. Announcements.
- b. Tips and information related to safety and crime prevention.
- c. Investigative requests for information.
- d. Requests that ask the community to engage in projects that are relevant to the City's mission.
- e. Real-time safety information related to in-progress crimes, geographical warnings or disaster information.
- f. Traffic information.
- g. Press releases.
- h. Recruitment of personnel.
- i. Information shared for educational purposes surrounding local government.

The City will not allow 3rd party content on any City Social Media Site unless it pertains to City business or operations.

Information posted, when possible and appropriate, should include a link to the City of Columbus website or a subdomain thereof. When appropriate, posts may include relevant contact information.

City Social Media Sites are not constantly monitored. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee may monitor sites when they are posting or updating information. The City may take action if it's made aware of posts, comments, and other content that violate this Policy, in accordance with this Policy's User Responsibilities.

The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee, must never post personal information to a City's Social Media Site. Instead, the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee, or any City employee who wishes to post personal information on social media sites must maintain separate personal pages on sites such as Facebook or X. Personal messages and the like received on an "official" page must be referred to the owner's personal page. Messages relating to City business sent to a personal page must be forwarded to an official City page.

The same principles and policies that govern interactions with the public generally apply also to social media. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee must, at all times, conduct themselves in accordance with all state and local laws and all existing City policies. The City requires the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee to adhere to and follow all existing work rules, the City's Code of Ethics, and local, state, and federal laws.

Elected officials, however, hold unique positions in the operations of City government. They must respond to the needs of and answer directly to the constituents who elected them. This requires elected officials to become knowledgeable about all aspects of City government. It also creates expectations that they have the ability to speak on a wide range of City issues and operations, across any and all functional and departmental boundaries. For these reasons, if elected officials and their representatives desire to maintain their own separate social media sites, they must be clearly identified as the elected official's personal social media site and not that of the City. The elected official shall be solely responsible for the content posted and record retention and shall adhere to all local, state, and federal laws.

The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee representing the City on social media sites must act responsibly in the posting of material and in their online demeanor. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee must respond honestly to appropriate queries and should not become hostile or argumentative. They should always exercise good judgment regarding the content and potential need for confidentiality (omitting addresses, phone numbers, and other personal data) or posted information.

The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee may never use their access as City representatives to social media sites for personal gain or to promote endeavors of relatives, friends, or associates. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee may not post information on City-sponsored social media sites that is protected under copyright, trade secret, or is proprietary in nature without the express written permission from the lawful holder of the information, prior to posting on a City-sponsored site. This applies to elected officials as well.

Many social networking sites allow the installation of extra applications, programs, and skins to enhance the experience. Many of these extra applications contain Trojans, viruses, and other malware. Never install any extra applications on any social networking site.

If content is posted to someone else's social media website using an associated City identity, the content is considered a public record. City-hosted social media pages/websites and all content on those pages are public records. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee must develop a method to record this public record information in a way that allows them to respond legally to public record requests.

The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee may spend monies on advertisements or features designed to increase the reach of a Social Media Site or post from funds budgeted for marketing or advertising.

User Responsibilities

The City participates in and provides information through social media sites as a public service. The City anticipates that Visitors may use such sites as a means of conveying useful information to the City.

The City expects that all participants on City's Social Media Sites, including the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee, and users will display respect and civility when posting comments or information. The City reserves the right to remove comments and/or materials solely at its discretion if the City deems those comments and/or materials:

- a. Are abusive, discriminatory, inflammatory or sexually explicit. This includes content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status in regard to public assistance, national origin, mental

- or physical disability, or sexual orientation, or any other legally protected status
- b. Any information that violates individual rights, including confidentiality and/or privacy rights and those provided under state, federal or local laws.
 - c. Any information that could tend to compromise or damage the mission, function, reputation or professionalism of the City, its members, affiliates, and agents.
 - d. Any information that could compromise the safety and security of City operations, members of the City, victims, suspects, or the public.
 - e. Any content posted for personal use or a private business or endeavor.
 - f. Promote or endorse a specific financial or commercial entity.
 - g. Contains language or content that is threatening, obscene, violent, abusive, pornographic in language or content, profane, or otherwise disorderly.
 - h. Includes materials that are harassing or contains threats, defamatory, fraudulent, or discriminatory content and/or the post contains a violation of federal or state laws, local ordinances, or regulations.
 - i. Contains information or materials that are not releasable under public records laws or that may tend to compromise the security of the City, its investigations, networks, or information systems.
 - j. Unlawfully defame or attack an individual or group.
 - k. Support or oppose a political campaign.
 - l. Violate any existing copyrights, trade secrets, or legal ownerships.
 - m. Contains links to websites that are intended to defraud, defame, or victimize the public or any financial, commercial, or non-governmental agency.
 - n. Comments that are repetitive or off-topic to the scope of the original post. Comments must be relevant to the topic of the original post created by the City.

Any content removed based on these guidelines must be retained - including the time, date, identity of the poster, identity of the staff who removed it, and the reason for the removal.

Legal Requirements

Public records laws of the State of Wisconsin and local ordinances may require retention of any information, materials, and/or discussions on social media sites that involve City employees and relate to official City business. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee will be responsible for ensuring proper retention of content posted to social media sites.

For purposes of complying fully with existing laws, retention of social media content as public records would likely include any comments, queries, information, or materials submitted by end users, including under certain circumstances, personal information submitted voluntarily such as the user's name and/or address. The Social Page Administrator and/or their designee will retain these records in an accessible and usable format that preserves the integrity of the original records for the period designated by appropriate records retention schedules.

The City shall utilize a third-party archiving service to comply with applicable public records law and fulfill record retention requirements.

Communication among members of governmental bodies using social media may constitute a “meeting” under the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law. For this reason, members of these bodies are strongly discouraged from interactions with other members on social media sites.

Various social media sites adhere to their own policies regarding the privacy of site users. The City makes no claim to protect or preserve the privacy of users who interact with employees or representatives of the City via these sites beyond those protections which the site owner provides. Further, the City retains the right to review all information or materials written or contributed by users on City Social Media Sites, therefore, users should have no expectation of privacy when posting to City Social Media Sites.

The content of all communications posted by the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee on City Social Media Sites is the sole property of the City. Unless prohibited or otherwise provided for by the terms of service enforced by social media sites used by the City, postings made by other users may also be considered City property.

Violation of this policy by any City employee may result in discipline up to and including discharge. Visitors should be aware that the information made available by the City on social media sites may not be timely, accurate or complete. Any communication from or to the City through these sites will not be considered legal or official notice for any purpose. The City reserves the right to revise or modify this Policy at any time, without prior notice.

PUBLIC USERS

City Social Media Sites will be considered “limited public forums” under the First Amendment on accounts that allow visitors to post comments, publish content, or otherwise allow public electronic communication.

- a. If interactive communications are permitted on City Social Media Sites, the terms of use for visitors to the social media page will be posted prominently on the City Social Media Site page, unless prohibited by the terms of use governing the social media account and the site operator.
- b. Each discussion or thread with interactive communication capabilities must have a specific and declared topic or description of the topic which may be addressed by users in the comments or discussion section. Posts may be removed if they are not directly related to those topics or are determined to be an unacceptable use. See User Responsibilities of this policy.
- c. Visitors to the City’s Social Media Sites must comply with the terms of use and privacy policies of the site operator and are subject to the site operator’s practices regarding the collection and retention of passive information (e.g. cookies) and other information from and about visitors.
- d. All postings or publications on the City’s Social Media Sites will be retained by the City, regardless of whether the content is posted by a visitor, public user, or Social Page Administrator, as required by applicable law, Policy and/or procedure.
- e. All postings may be subject to public records and disclosure laws, as well as discovery in litigation.

- f. Visitors to any of the City's Social Media Site pages should have no expectation of privacy or confidentiality with respect to any content they post or publish to the site, and the City has no responsibility for maintaining any such privacy or confidentiality.
- g. A comment posted or information published by a member of the public on any City Social Media Site is the opinion of the commenter or poster only, and publication of a comment does not imply any endorsement or agreement by the City, nor do such comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City.
- h. Communications or publications that are unacceptable uses, as defined in User Responsibilities Section of this policy, may be removed by the Social Page Administrator and/or their designee and documented by them of why the post was removed. Any content removed based on these guidelines must be retained - including the time, date, identity of the poster, identity of the staff who removed it, and the reason for the removal.