



City of Hartford * County of Van Buren * State of Michigan

TO: Mayor Hall and the Hartford Commission

FROM: Nicol Brown, City Manager *NB*

DATE: January 27, 2025

RE: AMENDMENT TO THE CITY OF HARTFORD EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK "SOCIAL MEDIA"

ITEM BEFORE THE COMMISSION:

The City Commission approves the amendment to the City's employee handbook under "Social Media."

DISCUSSION:

The current City of Hartford employee handbook has a section that addresses social media. The amended policy gives employees guidelines regarding social media that are precise and clear regarding the city's expectations.

Current Policy:

City of Hartford employees, interns, and volunteers may responsibly publish or comment via social media but are discouraged from identifying themselves as connected to the City of Hartford when responding to or commenting on blogs/social media posts regarding personal opinions or views. Employee communications should not compromise the integrity of City of Hartford or convey any message that is inconsistent with City of Hartford's mission and code of ethics. Employees are ultimately responsible for the content of their communications and conveying that the expressed views are those of the employee and do not reflect the views of the City. It is important that employees abide by laws governing copyright and fair use or fair dealing of copyrighted material owned by others, including the Institute's own copyrights and brands.

Social media policy violations will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination for cause.

Draft Policy:

The City of Hartford understands that social media can be a fun and rewarding way for employees to share their lives and opinions with family, friends, and co-workers. However, using social media also presents certain risks and carries with it specific responsibilities. To assist employees in making responsible decisions about using social media, the City has established these guidelines for appropriate use of social media.

The City encourages all employees to remember how information posted on a blog, web page, and/or social networking site is received and often misunderstood by readers. Employees must use their best judgment, including thinking before posting, being civil to others, respecting others' opinions, and not posting personal information about others unless they have received their permission. Employees with any questions should review the guidelines in this policy and/or consult with their manager. Failure to follow these guidelines may result in discipline, up to and including discharge.

Guidelines

Social media includes all means of communicating, posting information, and content of any sort on the Internet, including an individual's or someone else's weblog or blog, journal or diary, personal website, social networking or affinity website, web bulletin board, or chat room, whether or not associated or affiliated with the City, as well as any other form of electronic communication.

Ultimately, employees are responsible for what they post online. Employees may be personally responsible for any litigation that may arise should they make unlawful defamatory, slanderous, or libelous statements against the City, the City Commission, employees of the City, members of the community, suppliers, and vendors. Before creating online content, employees may want to consider some of the risks involved.

The City urges all employees not to post information on social media, which could lead to morale issues in the workplace or detrimentally affect the City's business. To preserve the City's goodwill, employees who post a political opinion or an opinion regarding City actions that could pose a threat or actual conflict of interest with the City must include a disclaimer stating **that the opinions expressed are the employee's personal opinion and not the City's position.**

Any conduct that is impermissible under the law, if expressed in any other form or forum, is impermissible if expressed through a blog, web page, or social networking, such as Instagram, X, Facebook, or similar sites. Social media postings that include malicious, discriminatory, threatening, intimidating, obscene, defamatory, libelous, or violent statements will not be tolerated. Social media posts that contribute to a hostile work environment or contain discriminatory or harassing content regarding any status protected by law or City policy are also prohibited. City policies apply equally to employee social media usage. Employees who violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary actions up to and including termination.

Posting Information

Guidelines for posting information:

- Employees should never represent themselves as a spokesperson for the City.
- Maintain the confidentiality of the City's confidential information.
 - Do not create a link for a blog, website, or other social networking site to a City website that identifies an employee as speaking on behalf of the City.
- Respect copyright, trademark, and similar laws and use such protected information in compliance with applicable legal standards.

Using Social Media at Work

Employees should keep from using social media during working hours unless they are on nonworking time, such as lunch or break, unless it is work-related as authorized by

management or consistent with the employee's job duties (i.e., marketing). Additionally, employees should not use City-owned equipment to access social media unless authorized by management or consistent with the employee's job duties.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Hartford City Commission approves the proposed amendment to the city's employee handbook under "Social Media". The amendment will take effect immediately.

