

Town of Loxahatchee Groves Social Media Policy for Elected Officials

This Social Media Policy for Elected Officials (the “Policy”) governs the use of all social media by elected officials of the Town of Loxahatchee Groves (the “Town”).

Purpose

The purposes and intent of this Policy is to promote appropriate, professional, and legally and ethically compliant communications when elected officials use social media or other internet-based platforms.

Policy

It is the policy of the Town Council that each member of the Town Council will abide by the guidelines and procedures herein at all times when using social media whether for personal use or in his or her official capacity as an elected official of the Town.

I. Definitions

- A. Offensive post or comment means any post or comment that:
 - 1. Uses profanity, racist, sexist, offensive, sexual, obscene, or derogatory language;
 - 2. Uses language that targets protected classes of persons; or
 - 3. Uses language that is threatening, harassing or discriminatory; incites, promotes, or glorifies violence; or otherwise encourages or promotes illegal activities.
- B. Protected classes of persons means a group of people who have a common characteristic that is protected by federal and/or state law, including, but not limited to, a person’s race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, or disability.
- C. Social Media means any and all internet-based platforms used for interactive sharing and aggregation of content, ideas, interests, and other forms of expression, such as but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly known as Twitter).
- D. Town business means any matter that may foreseeably come before the Town Council for discussion or action.
- E. Unlawful or threatening post or comment means any post or comment that:
 - 1. Includes illegal content, for example, content that would constitute a copyright violation; or
 - 2. Includes information that reasonably could compromise individual or public safety.

II. General Principles

- A. Whether an elected official is using a personal social media account or official Town account, elected officials should be mindful of the impact their social media use may have on the public’s perception of the Town. Elected officials should also ensure any posted content complies with applicable federal, state, and local laws.

- B. Accordingly, elected officials should comply with the Town’s Code of Ethics (Chapter 2, Article III, Division 2 of the Town’s Code of Ordinances) and other best practices, as indicated below, when using social media or other internet-based platforms. Elected officials should follow these guidelines whether they are using their personal or official Town accounts and whether or not they are discussing official Town business.
1. Refrain from using social media or other internet-based platforms to communicate with other elected officials in a manner that would violate the Florida Sunshine Law. This includes commenting or replying to posts of another elected official that discusses official Town business.
 2. Conduct oneself in a manner which maintains and promotes public confidence in Town government.
 3. Refrain from and avoid conduct unbefitting a public officer, including, but not limited to, making false accusations, frivolous claims, or personal attacks or behaving in a rancorous or contentious manner.
 4. Be respectful.
 5. Promote specific avenues by which citizen input is gathered and information is disseminated by the Town, such as directing citizens to the Town website.
 6. Do not publish/post any confidential Town information.
 7. Do not make, provide links to, or “like” offensive posts or comments.
 8. Do not make, provide links to or “like” unlawful or threatening posts or comments.

III. Personal Use

- A. There are no limitations on the creation and upkeep of personal social media accounts for elected officials. When creating personal accounts, elected officials should comply with the following additional guidelines:
1. Do not use Town staff to make a post on a personal social media account under any circumstances.
 2. Do not use Town email or password(s) in connection with a personal social media account.
 3. Ensure it is clear the account is personal and not an official Town account.
 4. Do not reference your position with the Town as an elected official.
 5. When commenting on Town business using a personal account, include a disclaimer such as: “The postings on this site are my own and do NOT reflect or represent the opinions of the Town of Loxahatchee Groves,” or “The views expressed herein are strictly my own.”
- B. Failure to follow these guidelines increases the likelihood that a court would find an elected official’s account constitutes an “official” rather than “personal” account, thereby exposing the elected official to greater potential liability.
- C. In order to comply with Florida’s public record laws, follow the procedures in Section V., below, before deleting any posts, including comments, that discuss Town business.

IV. Official Use

When elected officials communicate using an official Town account, elected officials should comply with the following additional guidelines to ensure compliance with Sunshine, Public Records and Ethics laws.

- A. Ensure the account is viewable by all members of the public.
- B. Do not block specific individuals from commenting on or viewing your posts.
- C. Do not express partisan political views.
- D. Do not promote or endorse political candidates.
- E. Do not advertise or promote a commercial product or service, or any entity or individual.
- F. Do not post, link to, or like any content that is off-topic or promotes any personal business, interest, service, or product.
- G. Do not delete any post or comment regardless of content or who made it, except for unlawful or threatening posts and comments which must be handled in accordance with the procedures in Section V, below.

V. Procedures

The following procedures must be followed when deleting any posts, including comments, that discuss Town business from a personal account and any unlawful or threatening post or comments from a Town account:

- A. Screenshot the post or comment;
- B. Ensure the screenshot includes all comments responsive to the post or comment;
- C. Email the screenshot(s) to your Town email account (preferably also from your Town email account);
- D. Delete the post or comment from the social media account.

If you have any questions or need further guidance regarding this Policy, please contact the Town Manager or Town Attorney.