



Communication Plan

This communication plan should serve guidelines for all employees when dispersing information to the public. It is the goal of the City of Mt. Vernon staff to always provide accurate, appropriate and relevant information to our citizens and the public at large.

Section 1: Plan Purpose, Protocol, and Information Distributors

Section 1.1 Public Information Protocol

The City Secretary or their designee, as the Public Information Officer (PIO), coordinates all City of Mt. Vernon communications.

A copy of any mass communication (such as press releases, letters to large numbers of residents or businesses, etc.) from any Department to the public will be sent to the City Secretary at least 48 hours prior to its release.

Section 1.2 Content Authority

The City Secretary or their designee may remove any content that violates the Communications Plan or for any other reason. The City Secretary or designee has the authority to edit any communication submissions for the purposes of clarity, accuracy and professionalism.

Section 2: City of Mt. Vernon Content Guidelines

It is our goal to regularly generate useful, accessible, and transparent content for our residents, businesses, guests, and other stakeholders.

Section 2.1 Appropriate and Inappropriate Content

Content should promote and adhere to the City of Mt. Vernon core values.

Appropriate content includes:

- City of Mt. Vernon news, events, programs, services, and initiatives.
- Resources relevant to residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Policies, crises, social movements, and environmental factors that affect the

region. Inappropriate content includes, but is not limited to:

- Confidential or proprietary information, unless authorized for disclosure.
- Commentary or personal opinions.
- Language or material that may be considered profane, offensive or obscene.
- Content in support of or opposition to political campaigns.
- Content promoting goods or services not otherwise available to the public (i.e. promoting receipt of free food or services).
- Content that discriminates on the basis of race, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, military status, citizenship status, economic status, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation.
- Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems.

Section 2.2 Accessible and Transparent

Web accessibility means that websites, tools, and technologies are made so that people with disabilities can use them. They can also aid those that do not speak English fluently. Our website can be easily translated into various languages. PDFs cannot, so when possible write your content into the website.

- Links should go where intended and when possible open a new window instead of changing the page.
- The W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) develops technical specifications, guidelines, techniques, and supporting resources for accessibility solutions. These are considered international standards for web accessibility and we should strive to follow them. These standards work to make content screen reader accessible as well as other accessibility options. Screen readers are software that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display.
 - To help screen readers, hyperlinks must provide context of where the link is going. Instead of "Click here" or "Learn more" use "online payment" "meeting agenda" "building permit" or other descriptive language.
 - An image should have "alt text" saved to it. This text displays if an image is unable to load and is read aloud to those with visual impairments.
 - Using built in heading features in Microsoft Word or our website (H1, H2, H3 etc.) assists screen reader users to speed read through a page or document and helps the user focus on the information they want.
 - If generating a table without detailed supporting text, request IT assistance to make it screen reader accessible.
 - Content should have a visual contrast to allow for ease of viewing. This means white text should not be placed on a light beige background.

Content should be clear and concise. By being concise, content will resonate with more audiences. Avoid industry

jargon if simpler language is available. While our jargon may be more technically accurate, it will confuse the general public.

- Content should include contact information to allow for follow-up questions.

Section 2.3 Templates

In order to maintain a unified and professional look, templates for letterheads and press releases should be used. Such templates should be submitted for approval before a change is put into place. Any change to the official logo, or otherwise throughout the year will be sent to department heads as applicable, by the City Secretary or their designee.

Section 2.4 Logo and Mark Use

The Official City of Mt. Vernon logo should be used on official communications such as resident mailings, letterhead, envelopes, business cards, press releases, etc. Approved department logos may be used in addition to the City of Mt. Vernon's logo.

Administration may grant use of our logos to community-based or recognized non-profit organizations. The City of Mt. Vernon's logo may not be used on personal documents/materials, to promote a private business (unless used to promote a co-sponsored community event).

Section 2.5 Department Content

Occasionally, departments may be asked to create content for use in City of Mt. Vernon publications. Such content should include fully written and proofed articles; as well as photos or images that meet platform standards as outlined in the City of Mt. Vernon's Communication Plan.

Section 3: Website

The City of Mt. Vernon website is the core of our communication outreach. As much as possible, all other communication avenues should direct back to the website.

Section 3.1 Department Content Responsibility

Each department that is responsible for a page on the City website will keep their website content updated, relevant, and stylistically consistent. Pages will have seasonally appropriate information. Each department should have at least one web content editor and should strive for two.

Section 3.2 Legal Notices

The City of Mt. Vernon staff liaisons or City Secretary, or their designee, will ensure that the required meeting notices and agendas for City of Mt. Vernon Board/Commission Meetings are posted to the website in accordance with the Open Meetings Act and any subsequent legislation regulating internet notice posting. Agendas for any advisory board must be sent to the City Secretary for posting, the required 72 hours before the start of the meeting.

Section 4: Digital Billboards

The City of Mt. Vernon partners with owners of digital billboards to announce important community information as approved by the City Secretary. These rules and guidelines are to ensure proper and best use of the signs. All departments interested in using billboards should contact the City Secretary or their designee.

Section 5: Social Media

Official City of Mt. Vernon social media accounts are an extension of all City of Mt. Vernon communications. Social networking sites should always link back to the official city website for forms, documents and other information. Social media pages and accounts on behalf of the City or a department should not be created without the approval of the City Secretary or their designee. All social media pages must be in the City of Mt. Vernon's name. The City Secretary will have final determination of who can post on each account. Each account should have a primary and secondary administrator who are familiar with the Communications Plan and IT Technology Use Policy.

Section 5.1 Facebook & Instagram

Be timely, concise and conscientious in response to comments. Information should direct back to primary City of Mt. Vernon resources such as Department contacts or the website when possible. Remember that a response to every comment is not necessary and the social media sites should be a mechanism to relate relevant or pressing information; not to spark debate or invite conversation to the site. Again, whenever possible and appropriate, citizens should be directed to the City website or appropriate personnel.

Do not alter previous posts. Posts on a city's social media pages may be considered a record and subject to retention as such. All posts should be reviewed by one other person before sharing.

Posts will be shared regularly and pre-scheduled when possible to allow for consistent, reliable posting. Seasonal items and holidays are examples of posts that can be pre-scheduled. Regularly check scheduled items to make sure content is still relevant and appropriate. Disable scheduled posts when they may be distracting such as during an emergency.

Hashtags will be investigated for appropriate content history before use.

All posts should have image or video content and, when possible, link back to the City website. All images shall have "Alt Tags" to improve accessibility as discussed in the Content Quick Guide.

When sharing posts on behalf of another agency or non-profit, the City of Mt. Vernon will share their post and will not create the post for them. This protects the City from responsibility if the information in the post becomes

inaccurate.

Comments from the public should never be deleted unless they violate our social media policy by the use of:

- Profane, obscene, violent, sexual, or pornographic content and/or language;
- Personally identifiable information, such as Social Security Numbers;
- Content that violates federal, state or local law.

Comments made by the public are also considered records and must be maintained by the City. If such comments are found, the City Secretary or their designee should be notified. The comment may be "hidden", until such time as verification of archiving has occurred.

Section 5.2 YouTube

This channel posts public meetings. Public comments will be disabled, comments regarding public meetings can be submitted by email or our electronic public comment form.

Section 5.3 New Platform Evaluation

No social media page will be created without approval from the City Secretary or their designee. Consideration will include:

- **Viability of Platform:** Is the platform offering content in a new or more successful way than existing platforms? Is it expected to be stable for an extended period of time? Will residents use this platform?
- **Resources:** Does the platform take too much additional staff time? Does the platform have an additional cost?
- **Tone:** Is the platform's tone and intent consistent with City of Mt. Vernon's values?

Section 6: Press Releases/Media Interviews, Water bills and Misc.

Section 6.1 Press Release and Media Engagement

Press releases and media interviews must be pre-approved by the City Administrator or City Secretary

Press Releases will include a staff contact name, phone number, and email address as a designated spokesperson or subject matter expert. Media interviews should not be conducted without the express approval of the City Administrator or City Secretary.

Section 6.2 Water Bills and Miscellaneous

Water Bill inserts require approval from the City Secretary and must be requested 21 days before the water bills are printed.

Email signatures noting name and title at the bottom of the email should be used and include a contact phone number.

Section 7: Mass Public and Crisis Communication

Section 7.1 Crisis Communication and Emergency Operations

Follow the Emergency Operations Plan, as administered by the County Emergency Management Coordinator.

Section 7.2 Mass General Public Notifications

The City of Mt. Vernon uses Thrillshare as a mass notification system. The use of this system will be reserved for notifications and notification areas will be reviewed by the City Administrator's Office before release. Preapproved topics include:

- Road Closures
- Flooding and Severe Weather
- Public Safety Emergency Response
- Missing Person
- Reports of Police or Criminal Activity
- Boil Order

Mass notifications can be released by the City Administrator's Office, City Secretary or the Police Department. Additional access may be provided at the City Administrator's discretion.

When releasing a message, be aware of the time of day. Also be brief with text message content due to character limitations by cellphone providers (Less than 320 characters).

Section 8: Strategic Communication

Strategic Communication is aligning internal and external communication with our mission, core values, financial plan, and general strategic goals.

Section 8.1 Keeping Colleagues Informed

Copies of mass notifications that may generate questions will be shared with staff who field general inquiries as well as all Department Heads. The content creator should also include where to direct inquiries. This includes social media posts that could reasonably be expected to generate questions. Content creators will also evaluate if a partner agency should be informed of the notification.

Section 8.2 Keeping Consistency in Platform Usage

Specific outlets should be used for certain content. Social media accounts may be used to announce a wide variety of information including events, closures, job openings and the like. Facebook and Twitter may also be appropriate outlets in certain emergency situations to give general information to the public. However, outlets, such as Instagram, may not be considered appropriate for such information.

The "Live Feed" section of the website is appropriate for most press releases and event notifications. Additionally, all public notices in the Live Feed section.

Textmygov app will be used for citizen complaints as well as pressing notifications, emergencies, boil water notices and the like.

All notification access points can/may be reached by appropriate staff off site. There should be not limitations to spreading mass notifications.

2.18 SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

employee

Introduction

Given the multitude of concerns (legal, political, and ethical) raised by social networking this Social Media Policy establishes prudent and acceptable practices regarding City officials and employees use of the internet.

Purpose

The City has a legitimate government interest in effective, efficient, and consistent communications with the public. The City also strives to have a productive workplace. Certain activities on the part of its personnel may become a problem if such activities could:

- (a) Impair the work of any City Official or employee; create a harassing, demeaning, or hostile work environments; or
- (b) Disrupt the smooth and orderly flow of work; or harm the goodwill and reputation of the City among its citizens or in the community.

For these reasons, the City reminds its personnel that the following guidelines apply in their use of social media, while both on and off duty.

Disclaimer

- (a) Under this Policy, the representatives of the City for social media are the City Administrator, City Secretary, EDC Director and Public Works Director.
- (b) Under this Policy, the City disavows, and is not responsible for any sites, posts, opinions, or content not coordinated through and approved by the City Administrator.
- (c) If City personnel posts data purporting to be on behalf of the City while using a social media site without the prior approval of the City Administrator, the City is not responsible for said posted content, such content is not to be construed as reflecting the views or opinions of the Mayor, City Council or City Staff, and such action may be grounds for disciplinary action.
- (d) The absence of explicit reference herein to a particular site does not limit the extent of the application of this Policy. If any City personnel is uncertain, he/she must consult their supervisor before proceeding.

General Guidelines

- (a) While on duty, the use of City equipment or internet service by personnel must be limited to work-related tasks. Social media activities shall never interfere with work commitments.

- (b) It shall be a Policy, violation for any City personnel to post online content as a representative of the City, or on the City's behalf without the City Administrator's prior approval.
- (c) All City personnel posting City-related issues online, but not as an approved representative of the City or on the City's behalf, shall explicitly clarify they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the City by displaying the following disclaimer: "This is my own opinion and not necessarily the opinion or position held by the City or City Council."

Guidelines for Official City Sites

- (a) All City-sanctioned social media sites shall be maintained by the City Administrator. Any content to be posted on City-sanctioned social media sites must meet the approval of the City Administrator before it is posted.
- (b) All personnel that engage in social media activities and/or visit any City-sanctioned social media site on the City's behalf shall adhere to applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies, including the Texas Public Information Act and the records retention schedule. All content must be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with these laws.
- (c) Any personnel that posts online content as a representative of the City, or on the City's behalf shall clearly state within said post that said content is subject to all applicable records retention and public disclosure laws. All City-sanctioned social media sites shall clearly indicate that any articles and any other content posted or submitted for posting are subject to records retention and public disclosure.
- (d) Any content posted as representative of the City, or content posted to a City-sanctioned social media site containing any of the follow is prohibited:
 - (1) Comments not topically related to the particular site or blog article being commented upon;
 - (2) Profane language or content;
 - (3) 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;
 - (4) Sexual content or links to sexual content;
 - (5) Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
 - (6) Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
 - (7) Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party;
 - (8) Information that is incorrect or misleading;

(9) Information that is in conflict with an approved City policy, ordinance, directive, or plan; and/or

(10) Anything else that creates a disruption in the workplace.

- (e) Content submitted for posting on a City-sanctioned social media site that is deemed unsuitable for posting by the City Administrator because it violates criteria in the preceding item (Item4, immediately above) of this Policy, shall be retained pursuant to the records retention schedule along with a description of the reason for specific content is deemed unsuitable for posting.
- (f) Any hyperlinks posted on a City-sanctioned social media site shall be accompanied by the following disclaimer: "The City guarantees neither the authenticity, accuracy, appropriateness nor security of the link, website, or content linked thereto."
- (g) Personnel found in violation of this Policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.
- (h) Any content posted as representative of the City, or content posted to a City-sanctioned social media site is owned by the City and is subject to the Public Information Act and the record retention schedule.

Social Media Policy for Council and Board Members

With the ever-growing use of Social Media, the Council, City officials and Board Members should be aware that comments, statements, opinions, etc. are still subject to the same restrictions located in the Texas Government Code Chapter 551, commonly referred to as the Texas Open Meetings Act. While the City of Mount Vernon strives to maintain community involvement and transparency in its government functions, certain State Laws must be considered and kept in mind while using such mediums. Social mediums such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others can be seen by other people including other Council/Board Members. Council/Board Members are encouraged to check the information they provide for accuracy.

Multiple Council/Board Members cannot comment on the same conversation, as that can create a "walking quorum" of the Council/Board Members and is a direct violation of the Texas Open Meetings Act.

Council/Board Members should refrain from stating personal opinions on matters being brought before the Council/Board including but not limited to: personal opinions on topics, declarations on how an official intends to vote for an item, debating with citizens on items, or presentation of the Council/Board Members argument for or against an item, as these could be considered violations of the Texas Open Meetings Act which can result in criminal and civil liabilities for the Council/Board Member under Texas Government Code Chapter 551.

No Council/Board Member other than the Mayor, Mayor Pro-Tem, City Administrator, or City Attorney may make official statements on behalf of the City. Council/Board Members, outside of regular Council/Board meetings do not have authority to make official statements or make the claim that they are going to fix, resolve, or have an item fixed, or resolved. Official Statements on City issues will come directly from the Mayor, Mayor Pro-Tem, City Administrator, or City Attorney only.

If Council/Board Members wish to discuss public business but want to keep their private Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram page private, they are encouraged to consider maintaining a separate social media page to allow for separation of personal and official correspondence and presence within the social media community. Private social media accounts used to discuss public topics may be subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act. The Social Media accounts maintained by the City shall not be available to individual Council/Board Members for posting or comments. Further, the City Social Media Accounts shall not be open for public comments.

Council/Board Members should always maintain professionalism and common courtesy in posts and comments when commenting in their official capacity and should remain neutral in postings to prevent the interpretation that a decision has already been made outside of an Open Meeting, in violation of the Texas Open Meetings Act. Council/Board Members should also be aware that there is potential

personal civil liability risk on all comments they make outside of official meetings. Council/Board Members should not use their official positions to make negative posts, voice personal opinions, etc. against any individual, business, entity, etc. as that could create negative feedback for the official and the city and could potentially subject the official to personal civil liability for slander, defamation of character, or other civil remedies.

Council /Board Members and City staff shall not use any official City media site, including but not limited to the City Facebook page, the City's Twitter accounts, the City's Instagram accounts, or any other City media outlet for personal reasons or personal gain.