

Appendix A - Social Media Guidelines for Members of Council, Local Boards and Committees

Purpose:

These guidelines identify appropriate Social Media practices and management for Town of Kingsville elected officials, local boards and Committee Members. The guidelines specified herein enable Members to use Social Media to engage with constituents in a way that protects the integrity of the Council and its decisions, and preserves the reputations of staff. These directives apply to all aspects of an Elected Official / Committee Member's Social Media use, including personal accounts and personal posts on third-party accounts, pages and groups. The guidelines apply to posting photographs and other types of pictures in addition to written text on Social Media. Social Media posts and interactions shall be consistent with the Code of Conduct.

These "Social Media Guidelines" form part of Council's Code of Conduct for Members of Council, Local Boards, and Committees Policy ("Code of Conduct") and this document shall be Appendix "A" to Council's Code of Conduct. The Integrity Commissioner shall have jurisdiction over enforcement of these guidelines.

Definition:

'Social Media' refers to any public communication channel that draws users together to share content and participate in social networking. These channels can include but are not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, as well as blogs, websites, online discussion boards, mobile applications, or any digital-based platforms where comments are public and attributable to an identified individual.

In this guideline, **'Councillors'** means any member of Council including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or a Member of Council.

'Members' means Members of Council, Local Boards and Committees.

Benefits of Social Media

Social Media gives Councillors a direct connection to citizens and allows for the timely sharing of information. Elected officials can use these platforms to ascertain public opinion, answer questions, and demonstrate their commitment to serving the community. Members who choose to communicate through these channels must recognize their comments are public and subject to the Code of Conduct, Town policies, and corporate values. At the same time, Members must be mindful of and consistent with the Code of Conduct, Municipal Conflict of Interest Act and Town of Kingsville policies.

Principles

1. **Be authentic**

Building public trust requires sincerity. Councillors should write in their own voice and avoid posting content authored by others without obtaining permission or crediting the source. Social Media is a useful platform for discussion and debate when used properly, but there are also significant risks of misuse that all users must keep in mind.

2. **Be aware**

Members should understand the Social Media platform they use and workaround limitations to avoid having posts misconstrued by the public. For example, a social site that limits message size (such as Twitter) is excellent for reaching a broad audience, but character restrictions could require edits that change the context of what they are trying to express. In this case, Councillors and Committee Members would be wise to include a link within the tweet where their complete statement is available. Members should not post copyright or trademark protected content (such as images found online) unless the rights-holder has granted permission.

3. **Be timely and stay active**

Using social sites to engage in real-time dialogue with citizens is an opportunity to connect with the public personally. However, there is an expectation of timeliness in Social Media. Councillors should only manage Social Media accounts if they can commit to provide topical information, respond to requests promptly and monitor their profile regularly for any public commentary that would contravene Code of Conduct guidelines. Social Media accounts that sit inactive for long periods, or lack a response to comments posted by the public, risk losing public interest and online credibility.

4. **Maintain confidentiality**

All guidelines for maintaining confidentiality identified in section 6.0 (c) of the Code of Conduct extend to an elected official's Social Media use. Comments made on Social Media are public, and Members cannot divulge information which is confidential, including but not limited to matters dealt with "in camera". This applies regardless of whether the elected official posts on a social media account that identifies them as a member of council or not.

5. **Protect privacy**

Councillors and Committee Members should avoid posting private information about other Members, staff, or the general public without express permission, ideally in writing. The *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy*

Act (MFIPPA) applies to social media. Nor should Members engage in dialogue on third-party groups or pages where identifiable individuals are being discussed or disparaged. Confidential information acquired by virtue of a Member of Council's office and information obtained at closed session meetings cannot be disclosed on Social Media, and Members should avoid using Social Media during Council or Committee meetings to best ensure such information is not mistakenly released.

6. Respect fellow elected officials and the public

The decorum expected in Council Chambers applies to Councillor and Committee Member's Social Media accounts. Members should only ever respectfully use their Social Media platforms. Disagreements and debates are normal and a sign of a healthy democracy, but harassment, bullying, or belittling of other Social Media users, fellow Members, staff, or members of the public contravenes the Code of Conduct. Members should never make posts or comments (or support posts or comments) that go against the Ontario Human Rights Code or the Code of Conduct. Councillors and Committee Members should avoid participating in Social Media discussions where users are harassing, bullying, or belittling other Social Media users, fellow Members, staff, or members of the public.

7. Respect Federal and Provincial Partnerships

Members shall not post negative commentary about federal or provincial public figures, particularly from accounts that identify them as Councillors, as such comments could negatively impact the Town's federal and provincial partnerships, lobbying efforts and grant proposals. Councillors must also avoid using their Councillor profile to support or challenge provincial and federal candidates.

8. Respect Council decisions

Elected officials must never use their Social Media accounts to undermine Council decisions or to criticize other Members of Council. After a decision is made by Council, Councillors may use Social Media to explain their vote or position on a matter, but should clearly convey that they are posting their personal views and that their views are not necessarily representative of Council or the Town/Administration. Regarding media outreach, Councillors should remember they do not speak for Council or for the Administration. The Mayor and Chief Administrative Officer are the official spokespeople for the municipality, and the Mayor or a delegate should convey council decisions.

9. Avoid Pre-Judging Recommendations and Decisions

Councillors may use Social Media to solicit public input and help inform Councillors' decision making. However, Councillors should avoid indicating their final decision on specific recommendations until they vote at a Council meeting. This avoids Councillors being accused of pre-judging a matter before the matter

is presented to Council for a decision at which time Council will hear all questions and answers, presentations, delegations and other relevant information that will inform its decision.

10. Avoid Conflicts (or Perceived Conflicts)

Along with the Code of Conduct, Councillors should always be cognizant of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act. Councillors who operate private business ventures should ensure clear separation between their Councillor profile and business profile to avoid the optics of using their influence to forward personal business interests.

11. Respect staff

Maintaining respectful Council-Staff relations is critical in any municipality and is a requirement of the Code of Conduct. Staff are required to convey respect toward Councillors and Committee Members when making posts on Social Media. Councillors and Committee Members are also required to convey respect to staff when making posts on Social Media. Councillors and Committee Members should avoid direct or indirect statements or actions (for example, “liking” comments) which can impact public trust in Administration or in the Council. Staff are responsible for providing professional, politically neutral recommendations and advice to Council and making decisions under delegated authority which may be unpopular with the general public from time to time. The nature of Social Media increases the risk of harming the professional and ethical reputation of staff as well as other Members of Council.

12. When uncertain, do not post

Councillors are held to a higher standard than members of the general public. Elected officials must avoid posting, sharing, or supporting statements that contain false, misleading, or confidential information. If uncertain, Members are encouraged to confirm details with Administration in advance of publicizing potentially incorrect material.

13. Social Media during election campaigns

During the statutory election campaign period (described in section 88.24 of the *Municipal Elections Act 1996*), Councillors must separate their campaign efforts from their official duties. Municipal property should not be used for campaigning, such as a municipal computer, municipally-owned email account, Social Media account(s) used for municipal business, or cell phone in any communications that are, or could be viewed as, intended to solicit votes. New Social Media accounts should be used for the campaign period and campaign accounts cannot reference a member’s title as an elected official.

14. Failure to adhere to guidelines

Members who fail to follow the Town of Kingsville's Social Media guidelines may be investigated by the Integrity Commissioner and found in breach of the Code of Conduct. Elected officials may contact the Integrity Commissioner for confidential advice about the guidelines or to seek advice if uncertain about potential contraventions of the Social Media guidelines.