



Town of Whitby Policy

Policy Title:	Corporate Social Media Policy
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Date Approved:	June 21, 2021
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Approval:	Council
Point of Contact:	Digital Media Lead

Policy Statement

The Corporation of the Town of Whitby (hereinafter the “Town”) recognizes the significant role Social media can play when it comes to inspiring conversations, creating authentic two-way dialogues, developing awareness of Town programs, projects, services, and successes, communicating emergency messaging, promoting and profiling Council activities, priorities, supporting different businesses and community associations, and facilitating community engagement, in a timely and relevant manner.

The Town’s Corporate Communications and Creative Services Division (hereinafter “Communications”) serves as the Town’s social media expert. Communications is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Town’s corporate social media accounts. Communications also provides counsel to other departments who manage their own social media accounts.

All parties identified under Scope are expected to follow this Policy and all related Town policies and applicable legislation.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide direction for how the Town will utilize and leverage its social media channels to create authentic two-way dialogues and facilitate community engagement. Specifically, this Policy:

- Governs the use of social media platforms by the Town of Whitby;
- Provides guidelines for the establishment and administration of corporate social media accounts;

- Establishes procedures for authorized corporate social media content providers to ensure all communications through the Town's social media accounts are accurate, consistent, and professional; and,
- Facilitates staff members' understanding of their roles and responsibilities associated with the corporate and personal use of social media.

Scope

The Corporate Social Media Policy applies to appointed members of all Town committees, all Town staff, and those working on behalf of the Town or deemed to be representatives of the Town.

Social media profiles representing the Mayor and Council members are exempt from this Policy; however, the Town encourages Council to use their own social media accounts to amplify information that has been officially released by the Town.

This policy does not apply to personal or private use of social media that does not involve posts related to the Town, or, when employee affiliation or connection to the Town is not known or made evident from the post or profile information or other communication.

Communications through social media and the use of associated technology must comply with all other relevant Town policies, procedures and guidelines.

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1. Definitions

- 1.1. **Handle** is the term used to define a user's account (example: @TownofWhitby). It can refer to the name used in chat rooms, web forums, and social media services like Twitter and Facebook.
- 1.2. **Hashtag** are words/phrases used to track and index social media content allowing it to be searched (example: #WhitbyProud, #55Plus, #ExploreWhitby, #COVID19).
- 1.3. **Social media** are online interactive technologies that enable users to create and share content, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression to online communities and networks.
 - 1.3.1. **Tags** allow social media users to include/notify an individual, business or any entity with a social profile when they mention them in a post or comment. On social media, tagging notifies the recipient and hyperlinks to the tagged profile (example: Hey @TownofWhitby...).
- 1.4. **Social Media Management Platform** is the online platform that is used to schedule social media content.

2. Procedure

2.1. Governing Guidelines

- The Town's websites whitby.ca and connectwhitby.ca remain the primary online source for information. Corporate social media accounts should be primarily used to complement and drive users back to the Town's website for more information.
- Town's social media accounts are to:
 - Increase awareness of municipal services, programs, initiatives, events, and projects;
 - Broaden the reach of corporate messages;
 - Provide customer service and build trust with the community;
 - Increase engagement and collaboration with the public and stakeholders; and,
 - Disseminate time-sensitive or emergency information, and/or correct erroneous information.
- Corporate social media accounts will clearly indicate that they are maintained by the Town and contain appropriate contact information

and hours of operation. In addition, each account will link to a terms of use disclaimer.

- Communications is responsible for reviewing social media platforms on an ongoing basis and making suggestions of new Social media platforms to the Town.

3. Responsibilities

3.1. Mayor and Members of Council are encouraged to consider the following when using social media:

- Assist in identifying proactive social media opportunities and potentially contentious issues that may attract attention on social media;
- Confirm factual details from relevant Department Head or Communications prior to using personal social media channels to respond to Town-related resident inquiries on social media;
- Refer customer service questions to the Town's official channels by acknowledging the question and referring to the Town's official customer service channels on Facebook, Twitter, Whitby.ca, phone or email;
- Follow Town guidelines when supporting the Town's social media activities when supporting the Town's social media activities on their own social media channels, ensuring alignment to the Town's code of conduct and core values;

3.2. Communications to:

- Serve as the Town expert in social media;
- Partner with Council, the Town's Senior Leadership Team, and Town staff to leverage social media channels to communicate with the community;
- Manage the day-to-day administration of, and activities on, the Town's official corporate social media accounts, including ensuring guidelines are met and carried out consistently, proactive planning and outreach, responding to inquiries and monitoring issues;
- Provide counsel to departments who manage their own Social media accounts, like Economic Development, Whitby Fire and Emergency Services and Youth Services;

- Conduct regular reviews, ensure corporate social media channels comply with applicable policies, like the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, Ontario Regulation 191/1 for example, and best practices; and;
- Promote the Town's Social media channels to build the Town's social media following.

3.3. Town staff and committee members to:

- Assist in identifying proactive social media opportunities and potentially contentious issues that may attract attention on social media;
- Work in partnership with Communications to draft effective and timely social media posts, ensure all information is factual;
- Work with Communications to ensure the Town has a strategic and consistent presence on social media;
- Follow Town guidelines about responding from personal social media channels to resident inquiries, leveraging information and guidance about appropriate department contacts and tagging the Town's social media channels;
- Follow Town guidelines when supporting the Town's social media activities on their own social media channels, ensuring alignment to the Town's code of conduct and core values;
- Use clear images and align hashtags with the Town's official accounts and campaigns when responding from Town-related social media accounts, like Economic Development or Whitby Fire and Emergency Services.

4. Response on Social Media

4.1. Response time:

- The Town will respond to online inquiries during regular business hours; Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Questions or comments will be acknowledged or answered within one business day.
- The Town may pre-schedule messages promoting events or Town initiatives to be released after business hours or on weekends.
- During exceptional situations, (for example, significant weather-related events) steps will be taken to determine appropriate monitoring and response plans outside of regular business hours (evenings/weekends), as required.
- The Town may respond to questions or comments on social media if:
 - It is an inquiry about a service, program, event, or policy; and/or,
 - The information in the post is inaccurate.
- The Town may not reply to online questions or comments if:
 - The post includes respectful statements of opinion – people are welcome to express their views even if they disagree with Town policies, programs, or decisions; and/or,
 - The post is respectful, and directed at other participants in the conversation.
- Posts that include profane or disrespectful language, especially those directed at Town employees, are not appropriate and will not be tolerated. If a post violates the Town's social media Policy, the Town:
 - Will hide or delete the post where possible; and
 - May: report, request removal of, ignore, mute, and/or block the user.
- As an active participant in online conversations, the Town may follow partners, community groups, organizations or individuals, and may share content from other users if the material is aligned with Whitby's CARE Core Values, programs, services or initiatives.

Appendices

Appendix 1 [Social Media Channel Overview](#)

Appendix 2 [Social Media Guidelines for Elected Officials](#)

Appendix 3 [Social Media Guidelines for Staff](#)

Appendix 4 [Social Media Commenting Guidelines](#)

This Policy is hereby approved by Council Resolution # 202-21 on this 21st day of June, 2021.

Appendix 1: Social Media Channel Overview

The Town uses Social media channels to inform, engage and actively listen to residents. The Town also recognizes Social media as a useful tool for promoting and protecting the Town by inspiring conversations, creating authentic two-way dialogues and facilitating community engagement.

Social media Management Platform

The Town's social media Management Platform has been customized to allow authorized content providers to directly schedule messages on a weekly basis to (currently) Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Messages should not be scheduled for multiple weeks for quality assurance purposes. Posts to all other corporate social media accounts (outside of the Communications social media accounts) must be conducted by Communications.

The Town of Whitby's official social media channels include:

Twitter:

[@TownofWhitby](#)

- Managed by Communications, the Town's Twitter feed is used to inform on a broad scope of Town activities, act as the main up-to-the-minute information hub, and serve as the primary customer service channel.

[@WhitbyEcDev](#)

- The Town's Economic Development Division uses their Twitter account to generate more leads in key target sectors and attract more quality jobs. The feed is meant to be an informative resource for the organization that will help the Division raise the profile of Whitby and generate leads. The account shares information on new developments, funding and investment opportunities, and local successes. It allows the Town to make connections with organizations and influencers not currently captured by other communication methods.

[@WhitbyFire](#)

- Managed by Whitby Fire and Emergency Services (WFES), this social media channel is used to inform on training exercises and activities that WFES staff are participating in, as well as a platform to share fire safety messaging and important safety reminders with Whitby residents.

Facebook:

[Town of Whitby](#)

- Managed by Communications, the Town's Facebook page is used to increase awareness of Town information and initiatives, while encouraging comments and interaction with the target audience. Facebook posts are of high value and relevant for all residents. The page also serves as a primary customer service channel.

YouTube:

[Town of Whitby, ON](#)

- Managed by Communications, the Town's YouTube channel offers residents information on a variety of topics that can be communicated more simply through video.

LinkedIn:

[Town of Whitby](#)

- The Town's LinkedIn page is used as a recruitment tool for Human Resources to seek candidates for professional level jobs. The page also reaches the local or prospective business community by sharing content that highlights Whitby as a great place to live, work, and do business.

Instagram:

@whitbyyouth

Town of Whitby's Youth Division uses its Instagram account as its primary online platform. The account is used to promote play activities, events, programs, and services pertaining to youth.

Appendix 2: Social Media Guidelines for Elected Officials

These guidelines are meant to empower and engage Council to utilize social media in the most effective way. The Council Code of Conduct is the foundation for these guidelines.

- Use your best judgement before sharing.
 - Does your content align with the Town of Whitby's CARE Core Values?
 - Is your content supportive of residents, businesses, community partners, etc.?
- Share Town content & initiatives to amplify the message.
 - The Town encourages Council members to follow the Town of Whitby's official social media accounts to amplify corporate messaging by liking, sharing, or commenting on posts as they see fit.
- Be authentic.
 - Help build trust with your followers by being yourself and showing your personality in your posts.
- Do not share confidential information.
 - Respect and maintain the privacy of fellow Councillors, Town of Whitby employees, or constituents by avoiding discussions on social media involving named, photographed, or identifiable individuals without their permission.
- Direct residents to official Town channels and contacts when answering questions on social media.
 - Town staff monitor and respond to social media inquiries directed at the Town's official social media channels.
 - If you are asked a question about Town operations or services, reach out to the appropriate contact at the Town to ensure that you are providing residents with the most up-to-date and accurate information. For example, below are some common customer service emails:
 - Animal Services – paw@whitby.ca
 - Bylaw – bylaw@whitby.ca
 - Building – building@whitby.ca
 - Clerks – clerk@whitby.ca
 - Construction – internetpwcons@whitby.ca
 - Economic Development – ecdev@whitby.ca
 - Engineering – engineering@whitby.ca
 - Events – events@whitby.ca
 - Fire - fire@whitby.ca
 - Operations - operations@whitby.ca
 - Parking – parking@whitby.ca
 - Parks – parks.rec@whitby.ca

- Planning – planning@whitby.ca
 - Treasury and Revenue – treasury@whitby.ca
- In a leadership position, it's important to help build trust and position yourself on social media as a resource for accurate Town information. You may be doing a disservice to your followers by sharing incorrect information.
- Do not share personal or direct phone numbers, or emails of Town employees, unless they've given you permission to do so.
- Council members are encouraged to tag the Town of Whitby's official social media channels in their responses to customer service inquiries. This helps staff monitoring the account to see the concerns raised and also follow-up as required. For example:
 - Q: When will my street be plowed?
A: Staff @TownofWhitby are working hard to keep us moving. You can learn more about how the town determines its snow clearing here: Whitby.ca/snow (post a fact sheet).
- If you're having doubts, do not post.
 - Do not post content that is not accurate, is misleading, or reveals confidential information.
- Do not overshare.
 - Less is more. Present information in a clear and concise way.
- Give credit.
 - If you re-post something written by someone else, first ensure you have the proper permissions to do so. Clearly state the material, letter, response, etc. has been authored by someone else. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without the necessary permissions of the rightsholder(s).
- Accessible content.
 - Review the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#) to meet [accessibility requirements](#) (i.e. font sizing, colour contrast, etc.).
- What happens on the Internet stays on the Internet – permanently.
 - Information that is published on the internet is not always removable.
 - Assume direct or private messages will be viewed publicly – private messages can be made public with a simple copy and paste.
- Make a commitment to your social presence.
 - If you've chosen to be active on social media, be sure to keep your feeds up to date by sharing content as frequently as possible. This could be as simple as sharing or re-tweeting posts from the Town's official accounts, local businesses, or stakeholders. Be sure to use clear images and align Hashtags with the Town's official accounts and campaigns.

Appendix 3: Social Media Guidelines for Staff Using Personal Social Media Channels

While there is no requirement to talk about the work you do, many employees are proud of the projects and initiatives they have helped develop and many have an interest in sharing their achievements including their job title and place of work online.

The Town of Whitby encourages employees to support the Town's official social media activities. Many public servants use a disclaimer like, Opinions are my own, which can help clarify that the social account does not speak on behalf of the municipality. However, this does not remove an employee's obligations as a public servant and employees may face employment-related consequences if their behaviour violates applicable legislation, directives or policy.

As ambassadors of the Town, below are guidelines for employees to follow when using personal social media channels:

- Share Town content & initiatives to amplify the message
 - The Town encourages employees to follow the Town's official accounts and amplify the message by liking, sharing, or commenting on posts as they see fit.
 - Employees who do participate in online conversations on social media content that the Town has posted are personally responsible for ensuring that their comments, usernames and information posted align to the Town's CARE Core Values.
- Employees are encouraged to use their personal social media accounts to share experiences living the Town's CARE Core Values for example: "Receiving an award..., Giving back in the community..., Having a great day..., etc.";
- Use your Best Judgement when posting content.
 - Does this align with the Town's CARE Core Values? (Collaborative, Accountable, Respectful, Engaged)
 - Does the content you are sharing support the Town's vision?
 - *Inspiring excellence through a culture where everyone is valued and respected*
- Remember, what happens on the Internet stays on the Internet – permanently.
 - Information that is published on the internet is not always removable.
- If you're having doubts, do not post.
 - Do not post content that is not accurate, is misleading, or reveals confidential information.
 - Do not share personal or direct phone numbers, or emails of Town employees unless they've given you permission to do so.

- Avoid copying and pasting emails from staff or residents into posts without clear context and permissions.
- Be sure to use clear images and align Hashtags with the Town's official accounts and campaigns.

Here are some scenarios that may help guide the use of a personal account:

Sharing job-related content

When sharing and publishing content on your personal channels, consider the Town's Code of Conduct, Core CARE values and your responsibilities as a public servant.

Examples of use that may be appropriate include:

- posting a link to an official announcement on the launch day of a project or program
- sharing a job posting
- reposting stakeholder or third-party content or information on a personal channel
- Direct customer service questions to the appropriate contact(s). Tag the Town of Whitby's official social media channels in your response.
 - If you come across a question or are directly asked a question about Town operations or services, direct the inquiry to the appropriate contact at the Town by tagging @TownofWhitby and offering an appropriate email. For example, below are some common customer service emails:
 - Animal Services – paw@whitby.ca
 - Bylaw – bylaw@whitby.ca
 - Building – building@whitby.ca
 - Clerks – clerk@whitby.ca
 - Construction – internetpwcons@whitby.ca
 - Economic Development – ecdev@whitby.ca
 - Engineering – engineering@whitby.ca
 - Events – events@whitby.ca
 - Fire - fire@whitby.ca
 - Operations - operations@whitby.ca
 - Parking – parking@whitby.ca
 - Parks – parks.rec@whitby.ca
 - Planning – planning@whitby.ca
 - Treasury and Revenue – treasury@whitby.ca

Examples of use that may be inappropriate include:

- posting details about an upcoming campaign that has not been released to the public

- re-tweeting a critical comment about a colleague's personal life
- making false or inaccurate statements about a government policy

Talking about the workplace

Examples of use that may be appropriate include:

- sharing a group photo of your team attending a public event*
- sharing a photo or information about giving back in the community*
- tagging colleagues on an article you think they'd find interesting*
- attending a conference and using the conference hashtag in a post that highlights interesting learnings

Examples of use that may be inappropriate include:

- sharing a photo from a brainstorming session that includes images of documents that could be enlarged to view personal or confidential information
- writing a personal blog or social media post criticizing a stakeholder involved in a workplace project
- posting a status that makes light of inappropriate workplace behaviour

Collecting personal information, privacy and permissions

*In regard to work-related activities, it's important that you do not collect, post or share private or personal information about others without proper permissions and approvals. It is also advisable that you obtain the consent of any individual before you post his or her image.

For photos or videos of individuals, proper permissions and approvals could include consent forms or posting a notice of collection at a work-related event.

If you are unsure about what permissions are required or whether something is deemed private/personal, please speak to Communications or refer to the [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#).

- Failure to adhere to this Policy may lead to disciplinary action, with such penalty to be determined at the Company's discretion in accordance with the circumstances involved.

Appendix 4: Social Media Commenting Guidelines for Followers

The Town invites community members to post, share, discuss, and debate while treating each other with respect. The Town will not tolerate posts or comments that include:

- Profane or inappropriate language;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation;
- Content considered to be defamatory, disrespectful, or insulting to Town staff or representatives;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Comments/posts not related to a posted article/topic/information;
- Business solicitation;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Information about any identifiable individual (including photographs of, or information about that individual, as well as views or opinions about that individual), unless the identifiable individual provided specific, written consent to the Town in advance; and,
- Any content deemed inappropriate by the Town of Whitby.

The Town may ask users to refrain from posting inappropriate comments, or mute, block, and/or ban users for violating these social media commenting guidelines.

Third-party events: The Town of Whitby may promote events on its social media sites if the Town is involved as a participant, host, or partner. Otherwise, the Town does not permit members of the public to promote events on its social media sites.