

City of Sarnia

Department: City Clerk	Effective Date:
Section: Clerk's	Revision Date:
Subject: Social Media Policy	

I. Purpose

Citizens are increasingly utilizing social media as a preferred method of learning about City information. The City of Sarnia must respond to the growing demand for up-to-date information via social media by developing an online presence that is relevant, consistent, and reliable.

Social media also has the potential to deepen engagement with citizens and to allow citizens to provide the City with feedback. In turn, the City can gain invaluable information through analysis of social media data.

In order to utilize social media to its greatest potential, the City must cultivate trust with its residents.

The City's social media platforms are not intended to be a mechanism for political advocacy or the unqualified promotion of third party organizations, including other government organizations.

II. Procedures

1. Authorized Social Media Users on Behalf of City of Sarnia

The following staff persons are Authorized Users of social media accounts:

- a) CAO
- b) Communications Coordinator
- c) Executive Assistant to the CAO
- d) Corporate Services Assistant
- e) Department Heads
- f) IT Manager
- g) City Clerk
- h) HR Manager

Department heads are responsible for authorizing additional social media users on behalf of the City. These Authorized Users must obtain approval from Department Heads in order to post content for initiatives and/or

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programs.

2. Posts

Social media posts should be made up of concise sentences and when possible should be accompanied by further information such as a photograph or link.

Posts should be media-rich; plain text posts should be avoided. Posts should incorporate photos, videos, graphic, and other techniques to make posts more engaging. The Communications Coordinator will use analytics to monitor the effectiveness of various media and will provide Department Heads with guidelines.

All content uploaded to any City social media platform shall at all times be consistent with the City's mission, values, and corporate brand identity.

3. Privacy

Staff must consider that communication on social media platforms is public and permanent. Staff shall refrain from publishing personal information on social media pertaining to themselves or others. However, it is acceptable to publish names and contact information for members of Council, senior City staff, or contact information for general administration.

4. Engaging with Partners

Authorized Users may utilize the "tagging" function on social media platforms to tag partners or events within the text of a post.

The Communications Coordinator or Departments may post content recognizing partners. This may include a project partner or an organization that regularly leases City space. The CAO must approve posts recognizing other organizations if there is no formal partnership or if it is unclear whether there is a partnership.

5. Scheduled Posts

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Posts are to be scheduled a minimum of 3 days in advance of the publish date to allow for approval by the Communications Coordinator. Service disruption or emergency notifications may be posted immediately.

Authorized Users should avoid scheduling multiple posts on the same day. In addition, no more than three posts should be made leading up to an event.

6. No Business Transactions over Messaging Technology

Staff can post about goods and services but must be cautious when using direct messaging. Direct messages shall be compliant with Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation, and staff should consult with the Communications Coordinator or City Solicitor if in doubt about whether the legislation might apply.

7. Link Headers/Descriptions

Authorized Users should examine the Facebook link header or description when posting a link and alter the text as required. Ensure the header is a short, clear overview.

Authorized Users should check their posts regularly to monitor comments and questions related to their post. Authorized Users shall advise the Communications Coordinator if their post requires a reply, and the Authorized User can work with the Communications Coordinator to draft a reply.

Where possible posts should provide links to official City webpages or pages otherwise controlled by the City. It is the poster's responsibility to ensure that any linked external websites belong to a reputable organization in positive operational status.

8. Voice

All posts shall adhere to a consistent voice as much as possible. All posts shall be written at an accessible level using standards from Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style Fourth Edition*. Posts should avoid technical jargon.

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III. Categories of Social Media Posts

City posts to social media will generally fall into one of three categories: Celebrating successes, citizen engagement, and service disruptions/emergencies

9. Celebrating Successes

The goal of celebrating successes is to build interest in the City's social media pages so that they can more effectively reach citizens. Staff across the organization should be encouraged to notify the Communications Coordinator of successes that can be showcased on social media. Staff should be encouraged to document successes using interviews, photography, video, and sound when possible. Staff shall notify the Communications Coordinator of events that showcase success prior to event so that the Communications Coordinator can attend.

The Communications Coordinator will use media tools at his or her disposal, including photography and video, in order to compile content for social media.

The Communications Coordinator will monitor analytics to analyze the effectiveness of various forms of communication. This will be combined with industry best practices to provide guidance on the most effective forms of communication, and issues such as frequency, timing, format of photo uploads, number of text characters, etc.

The Communications Coordinator will also, from time to time, browse mentions and hashtags of Sarnia and ongoing Sarnia initiatives. The Communications Coordinator may occasionally share or respond to public posts that mention Sarnia when there is an opportunity to increase the page's audience and engagement. The City's response must avoid the perception of endorsing a business or political campaign.

Departments can post scheduled Celebrating Successes posts without the approval of the Communications Coordinator or City Clerk as long as the post is scheduled to appear after at least 72 hours.

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The Communications Coordinator will produce a set of guidelines for Celebrating Successes based on research and best practices.

10. Citizen Engagement

Department Heads are responsible for identifying initiatives that could benefit from exposure and discussion on social media.

Department Heads will have access to City of Sarnia social media platforms, and can designate access to staff.

Departments will utilize best practices for Celebrating Successes as much as possible so that Citizen Engagement posts appear seamless with general content. This may include posting photos, videos, links, etc., with the aim of generating response.

Departments can post scheduled Citizen Engagement posts without the approval of the Communications Coordinator or the City Clerk as long as the post is scheduled to appear after 72 hours or longer. The Communications Coordinator, or staff designate, will monitor scheduled posts on a daily basis and screen them based on content and guidelines.

Citizen Engagement posts should be limited to, at most, three posts per initiative per month. Citizen Engagement posts should, whenever possible, refer the user to information and engagement tools found on the website.

11. Service Disruptions/Emergencies/Time-sensitive Events

Departments will be responsible for posting information about service disruptions, emergencies, and time-sensitive events.

Department Heads or designates can make unscheduled posts about service disruptions when the service disruption is unplanned or is the result of an emergency.

Department Heads should take care to ensure that they are do not duplicate

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information being shared by other departments.

If multiple inquiries are made through social media about a perceived emergency, than the Communications Coordinator or appropriate Department Head may respond as information becomes available. The staff responding should be careful to verify their response with the appropriate department, ministry, etc., and should cite the source of their information in their post.

The Emergency Management Plan supersedes this policy in the event that either the Emergency Control Group is called or an Emergency is declared.

12. Other Social Media Posts

Social media posts falling outside of the above three categories should be used sparingly.

The HR Department may wish to schedule general posts about job postings with links to the City webpage. These posts should include positive marketing consistent with the City's brand image with the aim of recruitment and resourcing.

The Communications Coordinator and HR Department shall collaborate on other posts with the aim of recruitment and resourcing. These may include notices of new hires in management positions, news of an external award provided to a City department or more than one City employee, or other news stories that the Communications Coordinator and HR Manager deem appropriate for the purposes of the City's recruitment and resourcing strategy.

IV. Managing and Responding to Public Comments

13. Monitoring

The Communications Coordinator will monitor new posts, messages, and comments on all social media pages at least once per business day. On days that the Communications Coordinator is unavailable, Corporate Services

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Assistant and/or the Executive Assistant to the CAO will monitor social media pages.

14. Responding to Questions

Responses to all inquiries that are administrative in nature should be made within 24 hours (one business day).

Department staff may respond to questions inquiring about basic information that is readily available elsewhere (staff point of contact, hours of operation, event date, etc). Responses should be brief and courteous.

Questions requiring more detail shall be the responsibility of the Communications Coordinator or designate. The Communications Coordinator or staff person monitoring the page shall respond to administrative questions using the following procedures:

- a) Contact the responsible department and ask that a brief response be made in writing (memo, email, or text);
- b) Edit the response to conform to general guidelines;
- c) Seek review and approval from the following departments if the response is sensitive in the following areas:

Issue is:	Requires review by:
Personnel-related	Human Resources
Legal, legislative, or procedural	Clerk's and/or Legal
Technical or security	IT

- d) Evaluate the audience for the response
 - a. If the response is general in nature and may answer several social media users' questions, than the response should appear in the main thread of the post.
 - b. If the response is more specific to the social media user, than the answer should appear in a reply or a private message.

A response should include the following components:

- a) Thank the person for their question;
- b) One to three sentences summarizing the response; and

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c) A link to a City webpage with more information.

The response should use plain language, avoid jargon, and avoid lengthy sentences.

15. Frequently Asked Questions (internal)

The Communications Coordinator will compile a list of questions that have been asked on social media multiple times along with approved responses. These questions and responses will be archived in a word-searchable document accessible by the Communications Coordinator, Executive Assistant to the CAO, and Corporate Services Assistant.

16. Frequently Asked Questions (external)

The Communications Coordinator will compile and analyze questions in order to identify frequent inquiries.

The City website will contain one or more pages with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). This may include more general FAQs for items like Council procedures, or more specific FAQs for various City initiatives.

When a topic is receiving notable attention, measured by three or more individuals asking at least three distinct questions on social media, the Communications Coordinator will collaborate with a Department Head or designate to draft a FAQ.

The Communications Coordinator will respond to questions addressed in an FAQ with a message such as the following:

"Thank you for your question. We have created an FAQ to answer questions you may have regarding _____. [provide link]"

17. Profanity

Comments with profanity should be removed immediately. Authorized Users other than the Communications Coordinator shall take a screenshot or otherwise record the profane comment and send it to the Communications

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Coordinator before deleting the comment.

18. Terms of Use Violations

Comments or posts that violate the City's posted social media Terms of Use shall be hidden or removed by the Communications Coordinator or hidden by another Authorized User. Any staff observing a violation should report it to their Department Head and/or the Communications Coordinator. The Communications Coordinator will keep a record of deleted comments. If the user asks why their comment has been hidden or deleted, an Authorized User should respond, in a private message when possible, by outlining how their post violated the Terms of Use.

19. Repeat Violations

The Communications Coordinator, after consulting with the City Clerk or a Department Head involved in the matter, may report or ban a profile that repeatedly violated the Terms of Use.

20. Negative Comments

Negative comments will be ignored, and not deleted, unless they violate the Terms of Use.

21. Arguments

The Communications Coordinator and other Authorized Users shall avoid the perception of engaging in arguments.

If a social media user challenges a response by the City, an Authorized User may respond again with a short and as simple of a reply as possible. Answers shall be brief, informative, friendly, and firm. Authorized Users shall refrain from making more than two replies to a question.

22. Complaints

If a social media user makes a statement implying that a complaint has been

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ignored, the City should reply by referencing the Complaint Policy in the following way:

"I apologize that your issue has not yet been resolved. Please contact us directly and provide your contact information so that we can work towards a resolution."

Automatic Reply

Direct and/or private messages received by social media accounts should be set up to automatically reply with the following message:

"This account is not monitored 24/7, if you request is urgent, please call 519-332-0330. In the event of an emergency please call 911."

V. Roles and Responsibilities

23. Department Heads

- a) Designate staff within their departments as Authorized Users.
- b) Responsible for ensuring that all scheduled posts from department staff are accurate and appropriate.
- c) Responsible for implementing this policy within their department.

24. Clerk's Department

- a) Reviews policy on an annual basis at the direction of the CAO.
- b) Approves and oversees social media sites and tools for official corporate use.
- c) Provides access to Authorized Social Media Users on behalf of the City of Sarnia.

25. Communications Coordinator

- a) Monitors policy compliance, provides training and ongoing guidance to City departments.

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- b) Approves social media posts curated by other departments prior to publishing to ensure consistent messaging and imaging.
- c) Responds to requests for new social media platforms and/or administrative changes to existing platforms.
- d) Generates, monitors, updates, edits, responds to and/or removes content within corporate social media platforms to ensure accuracy and adherence to this policy.
- e) Oversees all City social media accounts including their creation and termination.
- f) Maintains a list of website domain names and social media accounts, including login and password information.
- g) Ensures corporate social media platforms comply with applicable policies.
- h) When the Communications Coordinator is not available, the Corporate Services Assistant or the Executive Assistant to the CAO shall assume these duties.

VI. Employee Use of Social Media

26. Individual Professional Accounts

The City welcomes staff members to create and manage individual professional social media accounts. These accounts are intended to promote innovation, celebrate successes, and to communicate administrative information that is factual such as upcoming events, consultation processes, deadlines, etc.

Twitter, LinkedIn and other platforms, as approved by the Chief Administrative Officer can be used as individual professional accounts. Staff members are encouraged to retweet or share information from the City's official social media accounts.

Individual staff members are responsible for activity on their professional accounts. Activity shall adhere to the Employee Code of Conduct and any other City policy. Activity shall align with the values of the Corporate Strategic Plan.

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Training should be made available for department heads, managers, and other staff who wish to use individual professional social media accounts.

Online resources are not private; information posted on such resources is public. Accordingly, employees with individual professional accounts shall not at any time:

- a) reveal any sensitive, confidential or unauthorized content;
- b) reveal personal information;
- c) reveal any matters concerning employees, employee relations or labour relations;
- d) use profane language;
- e) enter into an argumentative dialogue with any member of the public;
- f) post content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination, stereotypes or prejudice 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;
- g) post sexual content or links to sexual content;
- h) post comments or updates not topically related to the site or topic currently being discussed on the site;
- i) conduct or encourage illegal activity;
- j) promote a candidate for municipal, provincial or federal election or make otherwise blatantly political remarks;
- k) violate copyright, trademarks or other legal ownerships of intellectual property;
- l) make commentary that they know or ought to know will damage the reputation of the City;
- m) post information that they know or ought to know will compromise the safety or security of the City, themselves or any member of the public;
- n) advertise or promote any private, for-profit enterprise;
- o) modify or delete authorized approved posted content; or
- p) comment on behalf of the Corporation or its elected officials unless designated by the CAO to do so.

27. Personal Use of Social Media

When commenting on City-related matters using personal social media

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accounts, identifiable City of Sarnia employees must clarify that they are voicing only their personal opinion and not an official position. Employees should avoid the appearance of officially representing the City by refraining from the use of City logos, photographs, graphics, or other official media without the City's approval.

Employees are prohibited from disseminating any private City information on social media platforms, such as internal deliberations regarding how policies or decisions are made, or any negative comments about the City of Sarnia. Posts involving, but not limited to the following will not be tolerated and will be subject to discipline:

- a) Content which violates the *Criminal Code of Canada* or the *Ontario Human Rights Code*;
- b) Discriminatory statements or sexual innuendos involving City of Sarnia or any of its employees, managers, customers, or vendors;
- c) Threatening, derogatory, or defamatory statements regarding the City, its employees customers, competitors, or vendors;
- d) Identify or make commentary upon other City employees without the consent of that other City employee;
- e) Content which violates any of the City's policies.

VII. City of Sarnia Facebook Terms of Use

The following text will be posted in the City of Sarnia Facebook page's "About" section:

The City welcomes citizens to engage with its Facebook page.

To ensure that the conversation remains in good taste and a positive experience for everyone involved, comments, replies and all other content posted should be clean and respectful, in addition to being relevant and related to the posted topic on the City's Facebook page.

By posting on the City of Sarnia's Facebook page, you agree to comply with these Terms of Use.

Any content including but not limited to the following nature may be deleted and/or result in a ban of the account which posted:

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- a) *Offensive, profane, hateful, insulting, rude, abusive, aggressive, violent, obscene, explicit, pornographic or sexual content;*
- b) *Content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, age, creed, gender, marital status, socio-economic status, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation;*
- c) *Provides the personal information of individuals;*
- d) *Is for the purposes of promoting a candidate for municipal, provincial or federal election;*
- e) *Personal attacks and/or defamatory statements;*
- f) *Inflammatory statements;*
- g) *Serious, unproven, unsupported, or inaccurate accusations;*
- h) *Content for advertising/marketing purposes;*
- i) *Content that conducts or encourages illegal activity;*
- j) *Content that could compromise public safety, security or operations;*
- k) *Content that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;*
- l) *Content that impersonates or misrepresents someone else;*
- m) *Content containing spam or posted by anonymous or robot accounts;*
and,
- n) *Unintelligible messages.*

The City of Sarnia reserves the right to remove all comments, including comments that violate these Terms of Use.