

# Social Media Policy

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## I. Overview

The City of Windsor Heights's official website, located at [www.windsorheights.org](http://www.windsorheights.org), will remain the City's primary online source for communicating information to the public, however the City sees a business need to use social media websites as additional communication channels to help promote its programs, events, services, and to represent itself appropriately and consistently on the Internet. Social media technology allows news of an event to spread quickly and is a good forum to facilitate public discussion.

A social media presence is yet another way government can communicate to the broadest possible audience of those it serves and also provide its residents the ability to communicate with their government pursuant to the terms of this policy.

## II. General Procedures

1. The City of Windsor Heights intends to use social media as follows:
  - To supplement information from other City communication sources, such as the website and draw more eyes back to those communication sources;
  - To disseminate time sensitive information as quickly as possible (i.e. emergency information);
  - To facilitate two-way communication, promote transparency and social engagement in government; and
  - To broadcast the City's messages to the widest possible audience.
2. The communications/recreation coordinator shall be responsible for the City's primary social media pages.
3. Any department requiring consistent and frequent social communications may be asked to start its own site(s) and to provide staff to maintain it. Each department will be responsible for the content and upkeep of any social media sites the department may create.
4. Elected officials; appointed members of City Boards, Commissions and Committees, Volunteers; and employees must comply with the guidelines outlined in this document.
5. Employees representing the City of Windsor Heights on the City's social media sites must conduct themselves professionally and in accordance with this policy at all times as representatives of the City.

### **III. Standards for Operating and Maintaining a Social Media Presence**

The City of Windsor Heights' social media accounts and their associated content should focus on significant City interest areas and be organized in a manner that avoids ambiguities and/or conflicting information across the City's various communication mediums, including other City social media websites. Departments' administration and use of City social media websites must comply with applicable laws, regulations and policies, as well as proper business etiquette. The City's social media sites are subject to the Iowa open records laws, and any articles or content posted on such sites are subject to public disclosure.

All City of Windsor Heights social media pages will adhere to the content standards below:

- Social media websites are to be consistently branded in order to communicate a clear association with the City, and must contain a Disclaimer and Comments Policy as set forth below. Branding should include, but is not limited to, the inclusion of the City logo excluding Police and Fire, city department information (address, phone number, and hours of operation) and any other aesthetic "look and feel" defined by the Communications/Recreation Coordinator now or in the future.
- The City has a "page" in Facebook, not a "group." Facebook pages offer distinct advantages, including greater visibility, customization, and measurability.
- The City's communication/recreation coordinator will standardize and provide all City Facebook page displays to include the City logo and other pertinent information.
- Any City Facebook page will be based on a template that includes consistent City branding and style. The communication/recreation coordinator will provide departments/divisions with the template.
- Facebook is more casual than most other communication tools but still represents the City at all times. Utilize jargon, abbreviations, hashtags and social media tags in an appropriate manner.
- A social media app or platform shall not be used unless it serves a business purpose, adds to the user experience, comes from a trusted source and is approved by the communications/recreation coordinator.
- All City sponsored social media sites shall prominently post the Disclaimer and Comments Policy found in Appendix A. In situations where a social media site does not allow for prominent posting of the Disclaimer and Comments Policy, a link to a PDF copy of the Disclaimer and Comments Policy shall be posted instead.
- Posts and monitoring shall be done during office hours, with the exception of emergency situations and all comments or questions shall be responded to in a timely manner within those parameters.
- **AFTER HOURS:** In the event of an emergency need for an after hours

posting, communications staff shall be contacted to post information on the City's website followed by social media.

- The City's official website shall remain the City's primary online medium for communicating information to the public such as press releases, documents with the exception of emergency communication efforts, events, postings about City functions and other social media engagement posts must be related back to information first posted on the website. While no City information shall be posted exclusively to social media websites, simple "reminders" and "shares" are appropriate and encouraged. Content posted to social media sites if necessary must contain links directing users back to the City's official website for in depth information, forms, documents, or online services necessary to conduct business with the City of Windsor Heights.

#### **IV. Interacting on Social Media**

The City of Windsor Heights social media sites may "like" or "follow" government entities; nonprofit and nonpartisan organizations related to City functions; local media sites; and elected officials. Posts or comments related to the City and the community at large may be shared to the extent that they correspond with the City's social media goals.

#### **V. Accuracy and Timeliness**

The City of Windsor Heights will make every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information provided on its social media pages. However, several factors that are beyond the City's control (including unauthorized modification of electronic data, transmission errors, browser incompatibilities, information that has been cached on the local computer or storage device, or other aspects of electronic communication in an evolving and time sensitive environment) can affect the quality of the information displayed on the site. For that reason, the City does not guarantee the accuracy of the information provided on its social media page and is not liable for reliance on this information.

The City's timeliness about posts and responses to comments may also vary based on staff availability. Therefore, a disclaimer shall be posted on any social media site, stating:

*This social media page is intended to get information out to a wide number of people quickly, not as an in depth or complete source of information, but as an evolving supplement to the City of Windsor Heights's website ([www.windsorheights.org](http://www.windsorheights.org)), newsletter, press releases, and in person communications. Staff will post or respond to comments within office hours and within the varying perimeters of staff availability. For these reasons, staff may not respond to every comment or question posted on the social media site.*

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*THEORY OF LIABILITY, ARISING OUT OF OR IN CONNECTION WITH THE USE OF THIS INFORMATION. THIS PUBLICATION COULD INCLUDE TECHNICAL OR OTHER INACCURACIES OR TYPOGRAPHICAL ERRORS. CHANGES ARE PERIODICALLY ADDED TO THE INFORMATION HEREIN; THESE CHANGES WILL BE INCORPORATED IN NEW EDITIONS. THE CITY OF WINDSOR HEIGHTS MAY MAKE IMPROVEMENTS AND/OR CHANGES IN THE INFORMATION AND/OR THE DOCUMENT(S) DESCRIBED ON THIS WEBSITE AT ANY TIME.*

## **VI. Responding to Comments**

In cases where comments are accepted, the staff member responsible for the page **MUST** monitor the site regularly and respond in a timely manner.

Guidance on When/How to Respond to Comments:

- If the person has a question – Respond with information or point them back to the City’s website or other resource. You may ask them to contact you offline when appropriate (when it is a private issue, when the issue is one in which there is little or no interest by others, etc.)
- If the person has a complaint – If inaccurate, politely correct inaccuracies. When a general complaint, thank them for sharing feedback and give any other direction that may be needed. If it is regarding a personal matter, reply that you would like to address the issue offline and provide contact information.
- If the person leaves a general comment, like “Wow, this is cool” or “Can’t wait,” no response is required.
- If the person wants to start debating with a City employee – Take the conversation offline. Do not debate them on the site. It is ok to correct inaccuracies and to provide evidence to support information, but avoid debates.
- Staff discretion on responding to post that may be considered passive aggressive, antagonistic, posts previously answered or posts that have multiple comments that needs addressed. You may choose to respond or no response required depending the nature of the post.

When in doubt on how to respond to a comment, please contact the communications/recreation coordinator for guidance.

## **VII. Removing Comments**

Comments violating the City’s Disclaimer and Comments Policy shall be removed promptly. When a person’s comment is removed, the City should try to post a reason for removing the post (i.e. “A comment to this post was removed because it endorsed a political candidate. This is in violation of the City’s comment policy (link to policy)”). Removed comments should be archived for our records by completing the tracking form found in Appendix B and submitting it to the Communications/Recreation Coordinator. The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content deemed in violation of this social media policy or any applicable law. Repeat individual violators may be removed or blocked from commenting on City social

media sites.

### **VIII. Correcting Mistakes**

If an employee makes a factual mistake on a City social media site, he/she should correct it as soon as possible. Corrections should be upfront and timely. If modifying an earlier post, make it clear that the post has been corrected. Designate corrections with “Fixed Link” or “Fact Correction” prior to the correction. Do not try to “hide” corrections, as someone may have seen the incorrect information and may be acting upon it.

### **IX. Review Procedures**

The communications/recreation coordinator will have access to all City sponsored social media sites, including rights to edit a site. Each site will be monitored weekly to ensure the site is meeting its intended purpose, that it is being updated regularly, that the content is appropriate and to look for any possible problem that would reflect negatively on the City.

### **X. Employee Conduct**

All City employees have a responsibility to help communicate accurate and timely information to the public in a professional manner. When using social media, City employees must follow all policies outlined here and in the Employee Handbook.

Employees designated to participate in social media are expected to follow these principles:

- Postings shall be related to that department’s specific function and subject matter expertise.
- Postings shall be factual, respectful, and on-point. They should not be off topic, or offensive.
- Employees must notify the City Communications Department of any media contacts received related to their posts. Further, under no circumstances shall non-department head personnel comment to reporters regarding matters of City policy, opinion, or interpretation.
- City social media sites or equipment may not be used by staff as a platform to share personal opinions or for political purposes, private business or charitable activities, commercial or personal transactions, or for any other purpose prohibited by law.
- City Staff may acknowledge sponsorships, partnerships or thank you’s to organizations, businesses or residents.
- Replies to individual constituent inquiries received via social media sites must be retained per the City’s record retention schedule.

### **XI. Employees’ Personal Social Media Pages**

The line between personal and professional, public and private can be easily blurred in social media. The following guidelines, in addition to those guidelines in the Employee Handbook, must be followed when using a personal social media account:

- Personal social media account names by employees should not be tied to the City except for page management of the City site. Additionally, staff should not use their personal social media accounts to speak on behalf of the City.
- Employees with personal social media accounts never have the right to post non-public and confidential information such as information related to co-workers, personnel data, medical information, and claims or lawsuits against the City.
- When responding to an item on the City’s page or on any other page, ask yourself if you or your department would be embarrassed to see the comment appear in the news. If so, don’t post it.

Employees must take great care to make it clear that their personal opinions are their own and do not represent the official policy position of the City. It is important for employees to remember that their personal communications may reflect on the City, especially if they are commenting on City business, supervisors, or policies. The following guidelines apply to personal communications including various forms of social media, letters to the editor of newspapers, personal endorsements, email, City correspondence, newsletters, and cable television.

- All City employees are expected to actively protect any information considered private or protected under Data Privacy and HIPPA Compliance laws. (Questions should be directed to the Windsor Heights City Clerk.)
- Employees shall not comment on social media postings unless it’s in a positive statement. Employees can like and share events and postings to promote the City.
- Employees shall be truthful, courteous and respectful toward supervisors, coworkers, citizens, customers and other persons associated with the City. Employees shall not engage in name-calling or personal attacks.
- Employees shall not post anything with content that violates the City’s Disclaimer and Comment Policy.

**XII. Elected officials and Officials Appointed to City Boards, Commissions and Committees:**

- Elected officials shall not use official City social media sites for campaigning purposes.
- Elected officials shall not post comments or links to any content that endorses or opposes political candidates or ballot propositions, including links to an elected official’s campaign site.
- All comments posted during an election season by anyone who has filed for office will be removed.
- Elected officials should be mindful of the risks of electronic communication in relation to the Open Meeting Law; two way communications between elected officials should be strictly avoided. Adding to a post or comment that would

create a quorum of the group you represent should also be strictly avoided. (If the comment or posting requires official review it should be handled before the group during a public meeting.)

- Elected officials should not use social media as a mechanism for conducting official City business other than to informally communicate with the public.
- Elected officials should reveal that they are elected officials for the City if/when making a post and be honest, straightforward, and respectful.
- Elected officials should be sure that efforts to be honest do not result in sharing non-public information related to coworkers, personnel data, medical information, claims or lawsuits, or other non-public or confidential information.
- Elected officials should add value to any social media discussion by staying focused on the issue.
- To help prevent errors and liability issues, officials are encouraged to ask the appropriate staff person or department to post official City documents (i.e., an ordinance recently passed by the City Council), rather than summarizing them from memory.
- If an elected official makes a mistake, it should be corrected as soon as the official is made aware of the error. Corrections should be upfront and as timely as possible. If you modify an earlier post, make it clear the posting has been corrected. Consider designating corrections with “Fixed link” or “Fact correction” or “\*this post has been updated with the correct date” at the end of the post.
- Elected officials who are contacted by the media on a topic of official City business should contact the communications/recreation coordinator for direction.
- Elected officials shall not post anything with content that violates the City’s Disclaimer and Comment Policy.

## APPENDIX A

### **DISCLAIMER & COMMENT POLICY**

**(To be prominently posted on every social media page)**

The purpose of this and other City sponsored social media sites is to communicate between the City, its individual departments and members of the public. The City reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to change, modify, add or delete comments or posts, photos and videos in accordance with this policy.

The City will remove comments that:

1. Contain obscenities;
2. Demean specific individuals or groups of people;
3. Promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination of protected classes;
4. Promotes, fosters or perpetuates harassment of any kind;
5. Contain content intended to defame any person, group or organization;
6. Contain factual inaccuracies;
7. Qualify as SPAM;
8. Are not topically related to the particular social medium article being commented upon;
9. Express support for or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
10. Contain sexual content or links to sexual content;
11. Solicit commerce or advertisements including promotions or endorsements;
12. Conduct or encourage illegal activity;
13. Contain violent or threatening language;
14. Disclose confidential, sensitive, or proprietary information;
15. Compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
16. Violate a legal ownership interest of any other party, such as trademark or copyright infringement; or
17. Any content that the City believes does not foster the intent of its social media policy.

Additionally, ALL comments posted during an election season by anyone who has filed for office will be removed.

The City of Windsor Heights has the right to remove a comment from and/or block a user who is not using their legal name or otherwise appropriately identifying themselves.

The City of Windsor Heights has the right to reproduce any pictures or videos posted to this site in any of its publications or websites or any other media outlets. The City of Windsor Heights has the right to quote any comments or suggestions left by users.

The views, postings, positions or opinions expressed on this site do not necessarily reflect those of the City of Windsor Heights.

All content posted on this site is subject to disclosure under the Iowa open records laws.

#### **Advertising**

The City of Windsor Heights does not endorse any product, service, company or organization advertising on its social media pages. The ads that appear on social media pages are sold,



posted and maintained by those social media sites.

**Privacy policy**

Please note that the City of Windsor of Heights does not share information gathered through its social media sites with third parties for promotional purposes. However, any information you provide to the City is subject to the open records law.

APPENDIX B

REMOVED COMMENTS TRACKING FORM

All comments removed from a City sponsored social media site should be documented with this form or submit a screen shot of the posting to the communications/recreation coordinator. Please deliver or email to Whitney Tucker, Communications/Recreation Coordinator, at wtucker@windsorheights.org.

1. City of Windsor Heights social media site affected: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Date of original post: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Screen name of poster: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Entire comment that was removed (attach separate page if more room is needed:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Reason for removal of comment:

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Date comment was removed and explanation for removal was posted to social media site:

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Comment removed from City of Windsor Heights social media site by:

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Other pertinent information (if applicable):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Date this report was received by the communications/recreation coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_

This form will be retained by the communications/recreation coordinator for a period of 1 year.