



Policy Number:	CO-018
Effective On:	May 23, 2023
Approval History:	
Review Frequency:	Every 1 year
Responsibility:	Council
Cross-Reference:	Council Code of Conduct City of Wetaskiwin Crisis Communications Plan

1 Policy Statement

The City of Wetaskiwin recognizes that online communication and engagement platforms are valuable mediums for municipal organizations and their elected representatives to connect with the public and share information. This policy offers guidance for communication via social media channels for Councillors.

It is a Councillor's personal decision whether they choose to create or participate in social media activities such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, wikis, or any other form of online publishing or discussion. Council online communications and engagement may include but are not limited to:

- Council decisions and direction.
- City progress on initiatives.
- Community events and personal participation in them.
- Soliciting public opinions and comments.
- Correcting misinformation using official statements and/or links from guaranteed sources, such as the Mayor, as Council's Official Spokesperson, or the City Administration.
- Controversial or emerging issues.

The *Council Code of Conduct Bylaw* applies to online activities, including social media channels and other forms of online publishing. Failure to comply with this policy could result in sanctions as per the Council Code of Conduct. The City fully respects the rights of Councillors to engage in constructive online dialogue and debate about issues involving Wetaskiwin. Conduct that may affect the City's credibility, reputation, performance, or organizational interests are considered in the scope of this policy.

2 Policy Objectives

This policy is intended to:

- Establish directives for Councillors as they conduct constructive social media engagement in both official and unofficial capacities.
- Align Administration and Councillors to common expectations for using social media channels to support each other and the community while conducting

- everyday business, and during a controversial issue, crisis, disaster, or emergency.
- Uphold the City’s values and protect the credibility and interests of the City, Council, and the Wetaskiwin community.

3 Definitions

“City” refers to the City of Wetaskiwin as an organization.

“Copyrights” protect the right of an author to control the reproduction and use of any creative expression that has been fixed in tangible form, such as literary works, graphical works, photographic works, audiovisual works, electronic works, and musical works. It is illegal to reproduce and use copyrighted material through social media channels without the permission of the copyright owner.

“Councillor” refers to officials elected during the Municipal Election, including the Chief Elected Official (Mayor).

“Deputy Mayor” refers to the Councillor nominated at the Organizational Meeting to act as the Mayor’s designate when the Mayor is unavailable.

“Hosted content” means text, pictures, audio, video, or other information in digital form that is uploaded and resides on the social media account of the creator of that content. If you download content off the internet, and then upload it to your social media account, you are hosting that content. Copyright regulations apply.

“Official City content” means publicly available online content created and made public by the City of Wetaskiwin, accessible through its City of Wetaskiwin website or official social media platforms.

“Post” means to display, publish, or place content in a social media channel.

“Private message (PM)” means a personal message or private chat. A private form of communication between different members on a platform. It is only seen and accessible by the users participating in the message, though it should be noted that the content of private messages can be shared.

“Social media” means the collective of social media channels that enable users to create and share content or to participate in online discussions.

“Social media account” means a personalized presence inside a social networking channel, initiated at will by an individual. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking channels allow users to sign-up for their own social media account, which they can use to collaborate, interact, and share content and status updates.

“Social media channels” means blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, social bookmarking services, user rating services, and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, email, or any other existing or emerging communications platform.

- Organizational - Social media channels that reside on a City-owned domain and are managed by Administration.
- Personal - Social media channels that are not located on a City-owned domain and are fully managed by an individual (e.g. Councillor).

“Social media content” means blog posts, blog comments, status updates, text messages, posts via email, images, audio recordings, video recordings, or any other information made available through a social media channel. The actual communications a user distributes through a social media channel.

“Tweets” are a 280-character max social media disclosure distributed on the Twitter micro-blogging service. “Retweets” are Tweets from one Twitter user that are redistributed by another Twitter user.

“User profile” refers to a social media account attributed to a specific account holder, who can customize their user profile on a social media platform with specific information about themselves which can be made available to other users.

4 General Standards

4.1 Councillors may use social media to speak for themselves individually or to exercise their duties as per the *Municipal Government Act (MGA)*.

4.2 Councillors are expected to exercise personal responsibility whenever they use social media. Regardless of whether online comments are personal or City-related, Councillor posts and private messages may reflect on the reputation of the individual, Council, and the City.

4.3 Councillors can create and manage their own social media accounts. Councillor accounts are not bound by the City’s branding guidelines and the City will not monitor nor oversee these accounts. City logos and other written or visual assets shall not be used on Councillor’s social media accounts unless they are sharing official City content as provided by the City.

4.4 Once posted on social media, any material or comment is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Furthermore, the content can never be effectively removed. Social media content, including private messages, live online indefinitely and may be visible to a broad audience, and may possibly be referenced or re-posted out of context. As public figures and representatives of the City, Councillors should act with discretion and be judicious in what material they post on social media. As with any other communications, Councillors are accountable for content and confidentiality.

Care should be exercised in debates or comments on contentious matters, as feelings and emotions can become enflamed very quickly.

- 4.5 Councillors must not use any harassing, offensive, discriminatory, disrespectful, or unparliamentary language about Council, Councillors, City employees, Councillor employees or the community.
- 4.6 No Member shall use social media to publish anything that is dishonest, untrue, unsubstantiated, offensive, disrespectful, constitutes harassment, is defamatory, or misleading in any way.
- 4.7 Councillors may create separate social media accounts for personal and professional use should they choose to do so. Personal accounts, however, must still comply with this policy.
- 4.8 Councillors must comply with this policy for the duration of their council term.

5 Official Content and Spokespeople

- 5.1 Online reporters (e.g., media bloggers) will be treated the same as any other journalist who requests information from the City.
- 5.2 As per section 5 of the *Council Code of Conduct Bylaw*, the Mayor is the de facto official spokesperson for the City, including on social media platforms. The Deputy Mayor may act as spokesperson when the Mayor is unavailable. The City and Mayor may also designate specific Councillors as spokespeople in certain situations.
- 5.3 During an emergency or crisis, Councillors must adhere to the City's process for emergency and crisis management communications.
- 5.4 No member shall attempt to disguise or mislead as to their identity or status as an elected representative of the City when using social media. If Councillors use social media to communicate Council or City related information, they must clearly identify themselves as a Councillor on both personal and professional social media accounts.
- 5.5 When Councillors see misrepresentations about the City, they may use social media channels to correct misinformation by directing community members to official content, providing links to factual information, or reinforcing key messages.

6 Privacy, Disclosure, and Legal

6.1 As per section 10 of the *Council Code of Conduct Bylaw*, Councillors may use social media to engage the public about City-related matters but may not disclose information about:

- Active investigations (criminal, regulatory or otherwise).
- Emergency situations (unless supporting City-approved messages).
- Private, confidential, or legal matters (as per to the *FOIP Act*).
- Closed session items.
- Decisions before they are officially announced.
- Any police matter.
- Private sales/development.

6.2 Individuals, including City employees, have a right to their personal privacy. Councillors shall not share anything via social media channels that could violate another person's privacy, including pictures, video, or audio without the written permission of the individual.

6.3 If publishing an image of an individual for City-related purposes (if it was not obtained at a public event), Councillors must obtain the individual's written consent prior to posting it.

6.4 Opinions of Councillors are their own. However, opinions Councillors make public about other individuals become the property of those individuals (as per the *FOIP Act*). Private messages between Councillors and the public should maintain the same standards as public posts.

6.5 Councillors using social media channels are expected to do so without infringing on the copyrights of others. As per the *Copyright Act*, it may be permissible to share copyrighted work or an excerpt of it through social media if that copyrighted work is publicly available on the internet, adheres to copyright laws, and acknowledges the source.

7 Compensation and Incentives

7.1 Councillors must never pay bloggers or anyone external to the City to write endorsements for the City, products, or services, or to create false social media accounts or posts.

7.2 Councillors are restricted from offering or distributing rewards, incentives, promotional items, gifts, samples, or any other items on behalf of the City through social media channels.

7.3 Personal gain (e.g., business interests/sales) must not be pursued through City-related social media content or channels.

8 Respectfulness

- 8.1 The City and Councillors respect every individual's right to express their opinions, whether those opinions are complimentary or critical. However, Councillors should not allow their social media pages or profiles to be used in such a way that allows people to post or share personal rants.
- 8.2 Councillors are encouraged to add value to online conversations by advancing the dialogue in a constructive, meaningful way.
- 8.3 For matters that cannot be rectified by sharing public City resources, Councillors are encouraged to direct those with concerns to contact Administration instead of trying to rectify the issue themselves.
- 8.4 Harassment, bullying, threats, intimidation, ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, racial or religious intolerance and any other form of negative/derogatory behaviour will not be tolerated via social media channels.
- 8.5 Councillors are encouraged to keep opposing comments on their personal and/or professional social media channels but shall remove posts that contain negative behaviours and/or personal attacks.
- 8.6 Social media should not be used to participate in unhealthy debate or arguments. When appropriate, Councillors are encouraged to offer in-person, phone, or private message conversations to address community concerns or questions. Private messages should adhere to the terms of this policy.

9 Election Campaigns

- 9.1 Councillors shall not use municipal resources, including property, equipment, services, supplies and employee time, for any election-related activities, whether local, provincial, or federal. This includes online resources hosted, supplied, or funded by the City, including but not limited to Councillor electronic newsletters.
- 9.2 Councillor websites and social media accounts linked through the City's website and/or social media accounts shall not be used for any election campaign or campaign-related activities.
- 9.3 No Councillor shall use the City logo for campaign purposes.
- 9.4 To avoid confusion with any website or social media account used for the Councillor's duties, Councillors seeking re-election who choose to create or use websites or social media accounts for campaign communications must include, for the duration of the campaign, a clear statement on each campaign website or social media account's home page indicating the website or account is being used for election campaign purposes.