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Social Media Policy

Purpose

To identify responsibilities and standards for the establishment and administration of corporate social media sites.

To provide rules on the acceptable participation in social networks by Members of Council and municipal employees. This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Middlesex Centre Employee Code of Conduct, Council Code of Conduct, Acceptable Use of Technology, R-Zone, and Respect in the Workplace policies.

This policy serves to:

- Provide direction to those managing and administering corporate social media sites;
- Protect the municipality's reputation;
- Provide employees and Members of Council with clear usage guidelines; and
- Provide protocol around monitoring, administration, acceptable use and privacy.

Scope

This policy applies to all Members of Council and employees of the municipality (including part-time and volunteer positions). This policy applies to usage during and outside work hours.

Definitions

“Social Media” includes any forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, ideas, personal messages and other content. These include web-based sites that include blogging, micro blogging, photo sharing, video sharing, webcasting and networking.

“Social Media Manager” means the employee within Municipality of Middlesex Centre who has been delegated to establish and administer social media channels on behalf of the corporation, and to establish and enact social media strategies and reporting. The social media manager serves as a social media moderator.

“Social Media Moderators” means employees within Municipality of Middlesex Centre who have been delegated to speak on behalf of the municipality through updating the content on the municipality’s social media channels.

Roles & Responsibilities

This policy is presented as two procedures – one for social media administration and one for personal use of social media.

Under the social media administration procedure:

- Social Media Managers and Moderators are responsible for following this policy. The Director of Corporate Services is responsible for ensuring that staff delegated to these roles are aware of the policy and meet the standards set out in this policy.

Under the personal use of social media procedure:

- All municipal staff are the responsible for the following this policy. Department directors are responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of the policy and meet the standards set out in this policy.
- All Members of Council are responsible for following this policy. The Clerk is responsible for ensuring that Members of Council are aware of the policy. The CAO is responsible for ensuring members of council meet the standards set out in this policy.

Procedure A – Social Media Administration

Statement of Purpose

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre supports the open and transparent use of social media to further corporate goals and objectives where appropriate. This procedure establishes guidelines for those involved in using social media on the municipality’s behalf.

Administration and Management

The use of all social media sites by the municipality will adhere to:

- applicable provincial and federal laws, regulations;
- the terms of service of each social media site; and
- all applicable corporate policies, guidelines, and by-laws, including, but not limited to: applicable administrative, human resources policies, information technology polices and records management policies and by-laws.

All new and existing social media tools being used to conduct municipal business will be established and administered by the social media manager as designated by the Corporate Services Department.

The social media manager will provide oversight for the use of social media tools and sites for business of the Municipality of Middlesex Centre, as well as for the creation and maintenance of content on those sites.

The social media manager will establish a social media strategy for Middlesex Centre, to be reviewed on a biennial basis.

The social media manager will provide training, as required, to staff serving in the role of social media moderators.

The social media manager will be responsible for managing the passwords for the municipality's social media sites. The Director of Corporate Services will maintain back-up copies of these passwords.

The Director of Corporate Services will maintain a list of social media moderators, and will ensure a back-up is available should the social media manager or moderators be unavailable to post an urgent/emergency item to the municipal social media channels.

The decision to add or decommission a social media channel and/or account will be the responsibility of the Director of Corporate Services, to be made in consultation with the social media manager and the senior management team.

Approach to and Responsibilities for Social Media Management

In general, municipal social media communications will be conducted through a "one-window" approach, meaning that there will only be one municipal account per social media site. Department-specific or group-specific Middlesex Centre accounts will not be permitted without prior authorization.

Posting to and the use of municipal social media sites will only be conducted through designated municipal staff (social media moderators).

Municipal employees who participate in social media communication as social media moderators on behalf of the municipality must do so in accordance with the following employee expectations and responsibilities:

- Use of an employee's municipal email address, communicating in an official capacity, or discussing municipal business on corporate social media sites will constitute conducting municipal business;
- Social media moderators shall at all times conduct themselves in a positive, professional, honest, ethical, and fair manner in accordance with this policy and related policies;

- Social media moderators are expected, at all times, to conduct themselves in the best interest of the municipality; and
- Corporate responses to online postings, blogs, and discussion forums about municipal-related business will be coordinated by the social media manager, with input from the appropriate staff member or department.

Social media moderators who fail to comply with this Policy may be subject to corrective action or disciplinary action.

Any content that is deemed inappropriate or does not adhere to the social media policy must be immediately brought to the attention of the Director of Corporate Services or their delegate.

General Guidelines

Content Management Principles

Social media moderators must ensure social media content:

1. Is implemented in a manner that positively enhances the municipality's reputation and reflects the values of the corporation.
2. Provides a consistent and professional voice so that residents can be assured that the information they are receiving is official information from the Municipality of Middlesex Centre.
3. Is effectively managed to ensure that they provide timely and accurate/truthful information and responses.
4. Reflects the municipality's position and factual information and not based on personal opinion.
5. Does not compromise public safety.
6. Does not personally attack, harass, discriminate or display any cultural insensitivity.
7. Does not violate trademark or copyright laws.
8. Does not blatantly or inadvertently make a public declaration or statement without prior approval of the organization.
9. Respects the confidentiality of municipal information, individual privacy, and any related municipal policies and by-laws

Social media moderators are encouraged to discuss post and/or response content with the social media manager, appropriate staff member and/or Director of Corporate Service if they are unsure of the content's appropriateness.

Availability

As time permits, the Social Media Moderator or delegate will update and monitor the social networking platforms it deems active during regular office hours, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday.

Social media platforms may occasionally be unavailable and the municipality accepts no responsibility for lack of service due to the downtime of any service.

Privacy

Unless obligated by applicable law, by-law, legislation, or to demonstrate negative behaviour from a user, Middlesex Centre does not capture or record the contact details of parties interacting with its social media accounts. Any information identified and deemed confidential or private is treated in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA).

The municipality does not collect information for commercial or marketing purposes, nor does it sell, exchange, or otherwise distribute information collected through its use of social networking sites for commercial or marketing purposes. The municipality will not, under any circumstances, use any information provided by users for any purpose that is inconsistent with the purpose for which the information was provided, as stated on the social networking site.

Replies/Comments/Messages

Posting on a social media site is not considered official notice or an official complaint submission to the Municipality of Middlesex Centre. Unless otherwise noted in applicable policies, contact through a social media platform does not constitute formal feedback or consultation.

As time permits, the social media moderators will read the comments and private messages to 1) ensure they are appropriate as per the comment policy, 2) that any emerging themes or helpful suggestions are forwarded to the relevant departments, and 3) that any factual errors (misinformation) is corrected.

Social media moderators will respond to private messages sent via social media in a fashion similar to that of general calls to the office. Timelines for response will align with Middlesex Centre customer service expectations. Social media moderators will respond to simple information requests, but complicated or “hot-button” issues will be escalated to the appropriate staff member as the issue dictates.

When a response is required to an appropriate question or comment posed through social media, staff aim to address them within 8 business hours. Response time may be limited by staff availability and resources across the corporation; there will be instances when a response may take more time.

Content Standards – Post and Comment Policy

Comments made by the public on municipal social media sites will be monitored by municipal staff. Middlesex Centre reserves the right to remove inappropriate posts and comments from its social media platforms. Inappropriate posts and comments can consist of spam, vulgar language, solicitations and other inappropriate content as decided by the municipality. Comments will be deleted if any of the following occurs:

1. Comments should relate to the posted topic; off-topic posts or comments may be deleted.
2. Comments must not contain any personal information about another individual. Comments that disclose confidential information, or compromise the impartiality or integrity of staff or Council; Defamatory statements, allegations, inferences, impertinent, disrespectful or improper matter will be deleted.
3. Users may only post their own, original content. Reproduced or borrowed content that appears to violate trademark or copyright laws will be deleted.
4. Threatening, offensive or harassing language is not permitted.
5. Comments that constitute discrimination or harassment under the Ontario Human Rights Code are not permitted. This may include, but is not limited to 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.
6. Comments that promote illegal or dangerous activities are not permitted.
7. Comments that contain information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems are not permitted.
8. Comments that present demeaning or derogatory portrayals of individuals or groups or contain any message that is likely to cause deep or widespread offence are not permitted.
9. Comments that promote religious or political messages that might be deemed prejudicial to other religious or political groups are not permitted.
10. Comments promoting or endorsing any business for commercial gain are not permitted.

Social media moderators will not engage in debate or arguments on social media channels, but will provide factual information, provide departmental contact and, if deemed necessary, the appropriate contact for municipal council will be provided.

All comments that are deemed to be abusive or harassing in nature will be reviewed and processed through the municipality's R-Zone policies.

If a submission violates the above guidelines, or in any other way is deemed as inappropriate at the discretion of the moderator(s), the submission will be removed in its entirety from the site.

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre reserves the right to block/ban specific users from the municipality's official social media channels whose activities do not comply with the above criteria.

Sharing/Following Guidelines

Information on the following will be permitted (this is not an exhaustive list of permitted topics):

- Municipal sponsored events and activities;
- Municipal services;
- Public health and safety (e.g., road closures, inclement weather, etc.);
- Emergency services;
- Community events and/or community group events, which are open to the public and where membership is not required to participate in the event;
- Programs and initiatives that support regional and municipal economic development and tourism (while this content may feature or highlight specific businesses, the intent is to frame the information as it relates to the benefit for all residents/businesses);
- Public service announcements from other government agencies; and
- Recognition of local achievements (e.g., citizen awards).

The municipality will not share/promote fundraising events, sales, calls for online donations, or similar efforts made by an individual or group of individuals that is not linked to a community organization or recognized charity. While there are many worthwhile efforts by individuals to raise funds for local residents and causes, the municipality is not in a position to vet these efforts to ensure the proceeds are used as advertised, nor does the municipality wish to arbitrate which fundraisers are worthy of support.

The municipality does not have the capacity to review and track all social media posts from all possible community groups and organizations. As such, sharing of information may be limited to what the social media manager or moderators happen to come across as they post and review the municipality's social media channels.

- Organizations wishing to have their information considered for sharing by the municipality are encouraged to tag the municipality in their posts.
- Organizations without their own social media accounts may email information to the municipality to be considered for sharing on Middlesex Centre accounts. Information should be sent to the customer service email address and must be received by the municipality a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the event.

It should be noted that in relation to the list in the content standards above, Middlesex Centre may at its discretion share posts or other content that is of a factual and non-political nature. The purpose of these posts must be to communicate one or more of the following:

- Information exclusively related to the municipality, related agencies, or other level of governments;
- Information that poses an immediate threat to the safety of the community;
- Information regarding positive community engagement of Council members that do not constitute or could be perceived as an endorsement of a private corporation or business entity.

In these cases, correspondence shall come from designated staff using official Municipal social media accounts, and not through staff/volunteer/council personal pages.

Disclaimer

Each social media account maintained by the municipality shall contain a link to the municipal website, and, if permitted, a statement of the hours which the account is monitored and that the Municipality of Middlesex Centre is not responsible for content posted by other users.

As each social media platform has different limitations, a Social Media Disclaimer section will be added to the “Disclaimer and Privacy” page on the municipal website and will include a link to this policy.

Decommissioning

When a social media channel is deemed to no longer meet the needs of the municipality, it shall be decommissioned.

Records Management and Retention

Social media posts on sites moderated by the municipality may only be destroyed in accordance with the Records Retention By-law.

- Posts are considered to be transitory records of the municipality and may be deleted/purged from the social media site as soon as they are no longer needed.
- Messages sent/received through social media platforms are considered to be transitory records. Messages of a nature that would cause them to become permanent records should be moved from the social media platform to email, phone or meeting format, as appropriate.

NOTE: Third party social media sites are private businesses with their own terms of service and privacy policies. The municipality does not accept any responsibility for the operation of third-party social media sites and is unable to guarantee the privacy of individuals who access content provided to such sites by the municipality.

Procedure B – Personal Use of Social Media

Employees of Middlesex Centre

While the municipality recognizes the popularity of social media, certain guidelines must be observed to protect the municipality, its ratepayers and staff. All municipal employees must ensure the following:

1. You are only permitted to access social networking sites on municipal computers and equipment during working hours as necessary to carry out your job duties.
2. Your participation in any social networking site must not conflict with your role at the municipality and must in no way harm the municipality's reputation.
3. The use of social media devices including personal cameras, cell phones, audio recording devices, etc. shall not be permitted to be used by municipal staff at emergency scenes. Confidential sensitive information that is intended to be kept private shall not be posted to any website.
4. You may not use municipal logos, slogans or intellectual property without prior written authorization. Employees with permission to use municipal logos, slogans, or intellectual property shall cease to do so if they are no longer employed with Middlesex Centre.
5. Employees must ensure that privacy, confidentiality, copyright and data protection laws are adhered to, and must not make comments that are considered defamatory or libelous. Employees will be held accountable for what they write or post on social media or Internet pages. Inflammatory comments, unprofessional remarks or disparaging remarks made about the municipality, its employees, ratepayers, or vendors may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Even postings that are not directly related to the municipality may result in disciplinary action if they might threaten the municipality's reputation or business. Even though you are acting on your own time, you are still connected with the organization and can affect Middlesex Centre's reputation.
6. The municipality's policies with regard to the Employee Code of Conduct, Council Code of Conduct and Respect in the Workplace apply to the use of social media regardless of whether you are on or off duty or access social media at home or at work (i.e., derogatory or offensive comments about your co-workers on social media may be considered a form of harassment).
7. Employees should be aware that many suppliers, ratepayers and other persons present on municipal property frequently use mobile phones and other devices to take photographs or recordings. Employees should always represent the municipality in a positive and professional manner so negative images are not posted on social media sites of ratepayers and suppliers. Employees who are photographed or recorded acting inappropriately or unprofessionally may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

8. Employee issues and discontent should be raised through supervisors, managers, directors, human resources staff or the Chief Administrative Officer, and not through social media networks.
9. Employees who cease to work for the municipality should promptly update their employment status on business networking sites.

Members of Council

Members of Council are welcomed and encouraged to participate in social media, through their own accounts, while respecting the Conduct of Members of Council, as outlined in the Council Code of Conduct Policy. Members of Council are encouraged to follow the official municipal sites and to share content.

Council and committee/board members must ensure that privacy, confidentiality, copyright and data protection laws are adhered to, and must not make comments that are considered defamatory or libelous.

Council and committee/board members may not use municipal logos, slogans or intellectual property on their own accounts without prior written authorization. While Members of Council are welcomed to share the issues before and decisions of Council, there is an expectation that should they choose to use of social media during a council meeting, their use will not interfere with their active engagement with and participation in the meeting.

Middlesex Centre will not intercede on behalf of Members of Council for items members post on their own social media accounts. In the case where a member shares erroneous information about municipal decisions, services, etc., the Clerk or their designate will bring their matter to the attention of the member directly, with the expectation the member will correct the error as soon as possible.

During nomination period of a municipal election candidates or people acting on their behalf, are not permitted to post on Middlesex Centre social media sites In addition, incumbent members of municipal Council who may seek re-election in a forthcoming term, may not utilize the Middlesex Centre social media sites to post individual campaign related information.

Any violations of the Conduct of Members of Council, as outlined in the Council Code of Conduct Policy, will be dealt with according to the resolution process outlined in the Code.

Acknowledgement of Policy – Social Media

I have reviewed this policy and have had an opportunity to ask any questions regarding the requirements. If I have further questions I will bring them to the attention of my supervisor (for employees) and/or the Clerk (for Members of Council).

The Municipality of Middlesex Centre takes the above-mentioned policies, the Municipal Act and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) requirements with utmost seriousness, and may discipline any employee that does not comply strictly with them, up to and including employment termination.

Name (print): _____

Position: _____

Department: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____