

Title: Social Media Policy

Resolution: 2024-0168

Revised:

June 10/24

Special Notes/Cross Reference:

Next Review Date:

POLICY STATEMENT: The Town of Westlock is committed to responsible and effective social media use. Our key commitments are:

Transparency: We ensure all social media communication is open, honest, and ethical.

Professionalism: We uphold the highest standards of conduct across all interactions—online and offline. Our platforms promote a respectful and safe community environment free from harassment or hate speech.

Legal Compliance: We adhere to all applicable local, provincial, and federal laws.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this policy is to establish and outline the principles of use when engaging and posting on the Town of Westlock's social media accounts.

1. Definitions

- 1.1. **CAO** – means the Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Westlock as appointed by Council or the CAO's designate.
- 1.2. **Contractor** – self employed individuals or companies operating under a contractual agreement that outlines scope of work.
- 1.3. **Council** – means the Council of the Town of Westlock, including Councillors and Mayor.
- 1.4. **Disclosable** – refers to information, including electronic information, which is eligible for access by the public in response to a request for information under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP).
- 1.5. **Intellectual Property** – describes ownership of an intellectual product which may have commercial value. It encompasses areas including copyright, trademarks, patents, and design.
- 1.6. **Employees** – under this policy, means any person (full-time, part-time, casual, temporary) employed for wages or salary by the Town of Westlock.
- 1.7. **Official Record** – means a record of information in any form and may include notes, images, audiovisual recordings, books, documents, maps, drawings, illustrations, photographs, letters, vouchers and papers and any other information that is written, photographed, recorded or stored in any manner.

- 1.8. *Posting* – means any written comment, content or image including but not limited to photographs, video, clip art, scanned images, documents, or emoticons.
- 1.9. *Personal Information* – means information about an identifiable individual.
- 1.10. *Public* – means residents, ratepayers, partners, business owners, visitors, and community members of the Town of Westlock.
- 1.11. *Regular Business Hours* – means Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding Statutory Holidays or closures designated by the CAO.
- 1.12. *Screenshot* – refers to an image that shows the contents of an electronic device, computer, or mobile phone display.
- 1.13. *Sharing* – means re-posting of any written comment, content, or image, including but not limited to photographs, video, clip art, scanned images, documents, or emoticons.
- 1.14. *Social Media or Social Media Sites* – refers to the use of third-party hosted web-based and mobile technologies that turn communication into an interactive dialogue and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content to share opinions, and information, promote discussion and build relationships.
- 1.15. *Social Media Moderator* – means a person appointed to manage the content and activity on a social media platform.
- 1.16. *Town* – means the Town of Westlock.
- 1.17. *Volunteers* – individuals who offer their time and skills without receiving financial compensation. Typically, engaging in tasks, projects, and events to support the community and the Town's mission and goals
- 1.18. *Website* – means the Town of Westlock's official website of www.westlock.ca.

2. Scope of the Policy

- 2.1. *Applicability*: This policy applies to all current and future social media used for official and authorized Town purposes, including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, X, Snapchat, Google+, Pinterest, Tumblr, blogs, and wikis.
 - 2.1.1. Exemptions: Personal use of social media conducted on personal equipment or accounts is not covered by this policy.
 - 2.1.2. Personal social media profiles and websites of the Mayor and Members of Town Council are exempt, as these do not fall under the Town employee mandate or this policy.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- 3.1. *Council*: Social media profiles and websites representing Members of Council will not serve as official information platforms on behalf of the Town. Authorized Town employees will provide any official communications to the Town's followers via the Town authorized social media accounts.
- 3.2. *CAO*: The posting of content on behalf of the Town will be delegated by the CAO to authorized employees, social media moderators, of the Town of Westlock. These individuals will be tasked with utilizing social media in an official capacity to ensure that, as with all communications activities, communications through social media channels are accurate, consistent, and professional.
- 3.3. *Social Media Moderators*: Appointed social media moderators are tasked with monitoring and responding to posts in a professional and timely manner on behalf of the Town.
 - 3.3.1. These moderators will receive training regarding the posting, moderating, and retention of online postings and discussions. Moderators shall not be added to social media sites without the CAO or designate(s) approval(s).
 - 3.3.2. Moderators will receive training to manage social platforms effectively, ensuring all communications align with municipal standards and legal requirements. This training ensures that moderators are equipped to maintain a safe, respectful, and informative online presence. Key areas include:
 - 3.3.2.1. *Policy Compliance*: Understanding relevant laws and municipal social media guidelines.
 - 3.3.2.2. *Communication Skills*: Developing proficiency in clear, respectful, and engaging communication, including crisis response.
 - 3.3.2.3. *Technical Proficiency*: Effectively using and managing social media tools and platforms.
 - 3.3.2.4. *Community Engagement*: Employing strategies to foster positive interactions and promote civic participation.
 - 3.3.2.5. *Cultural Sensitivity*: Ensuring content is inclusive and respects community diversity.
 - 3.3.2.6. *Handling Harassment*: Implementing strategies to manage and prevent online harassment and hate speech.

3.3.2.7. *Ethical Conduct:* Maintaining high standards of ethics and confidentiality in all online interactions.

3.3.3. Moderators are required to bring issues, potential crisis points, and concerning posts to the attention of the CAO or designate(s) for evaluation and management of the potential crisis. The CAO or designate(s) will record and review the information and any supplemental pieces to formulate the response to mitigate or action the event.

3.4. *Employees:* Employees who are not designated social media moderators are expected to refrain from engaging in comments, discussions, or message boards on social media platforms on behalf of the Town. This measure ensures a consistent representation of the Town and avoids potential miscommunication. Employees are encouraged to direct any inquiries or comments they encounter to the designated social media moderators or the appropriate department.

3.5. *Contractors and Volunteers:* Contractors and volunteers associated with the Town must ensure their social media conduct aligns with the Town's social media policy. This includes adhering to guidelines on appropriate content, maintaining confidentiality, and representing the Town in a respectful and professional manner. Any social media activity that could be perceived as reflecting the Town's views or operations must be handled with the same level of responsibility as employees. Non-compliance with this policy may lead to a review of the contract or volunteer agreement and possible corrective actions.

4. Guidelines

The following standards outline the Town of Westlock requirements for social media interactions and use of social media. All social media platforms will be reviewed and audited and any non-compliance will be brought to the CAO or designate(s) for consideration that may include loss of access to social media, further training, or disciplinary action.

4.1. Representing the Municipality

When representing the Town on social media, social media moderators are required to communicate respectfully, professionally, and in accordance with all Town policies.

4.1.1. Social media moderators are not permitted to discuss personal or confidential information on social media sites, whether through public posts or private messages.

4.1.2. Online interactions through public posts, sharing, screenshots, messaging are held to a high standard of conduct to maintain the Town's integrity and position as a trusted information source.

- 4.2. Employees, Contractors, and Volunteers Expectations and Responsibility
When discussing, sharing, or commenting on Town business using personal social media accounts, sites, networks and personal websites, employees, contractors, and volunteers should consider the following:
 - 4.2.1. Communicating in an official capacity or discussing Town of Westlock business on personal or corporate social media sites/or personal website can be considered conducting Town of Westlock business.
 - 4.2.2. Those who choose to discuss Town business within their posts or various groups to personal social media sites and personal websites must conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Town and in accordance with this policy and all human resource and administrative policies.
 - 4.2.3. Those engaged in online, electronic dialogue that involves information about Town business — including dialogue or information posted to personal social media sites and personal websites — are required to meet a standard that mandates:
 - 4.2.3.1. *Transparency of Origin:* Disclose their association with the Town in all communications to the public.
 - 4.2.3.2. *Accurate Information:* Communications on the Town's behalf, on all social media sites, should be based on current, accurate, complete, and relevant data. Town of Westlock will take all reasonable steps to assure the validity of information communicated via any approved Town of Westlock communication channel. It is the employee, contractor, or volunteer's responsibility to identify personal anecdotes and opinions as such.
 - 4.2.3.3. *Ethical Conduct:* Town of Westlock employees, contractors, and volunteers will not conduct activities that are illegal or contrary to the Town's corporate policies.
 - 4.2.3.4. *Protection of Confidential and Proprietary Information:* Employees, contractors, and volunteers must maintain the confidentiality of information considered confidential, including company financial business information, citizen and customer personal information, personal information about Town Council, personal employee data, partner and supplier information, or any information not generally available to the public.
 - 4.2.4. Town of Westlock-employee to employee communication to conduct official Town-related business should not occur using any social media tool.

- 4.2.5. Corporate responses to online postings, blogs and discussion forums about Town-related business will be coordinated through the CAO or designate(s) to social media moderators.
- 4.2.6. Employees, contractors, and volunteers will not use Town of Westlock logos for endorsements or any other corporate/Town images or iconography on personal social media sites and personal web sites or to promote a product, cause, or political party or candidate.
- 4.2.7. If Town employees, contractors, and volunteers share official Municipal posts/information to their social media network, they must do so in accordance with this policy.
- 4.2.8. Should a matter be brought to the Municipality's attention (i.e., a screenshot of a post, comment, etc.), individuals who fail to comply with this policy may be subject to discipline, up to and including termination of employment. In addition, depending on the nature of the policy violation or the online channel/page content, participants may also be subject to civil or criminal penalties.

4.3. Unacceptable Content

The following types of content are not acceptable and shall not be permitted on Town social media networks:

- 4.3.1. *Political Bias and Partisan Political Activity:* Content that explicitly supports or opposes political figures or parties is not acceptable.
- 4.3.2. *Personal Information:* Sharing private or confidential information about individuals without consent, including addresses, phone numbers, or personal identification numbers.
- 4.3.3. *Offensive Language:* Posts containing profanity, hate speech, or derogatory language aimed at specific groups based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or disability.
- 4.3.4. *Misinformation, mal-information, disinformation:* Spreading false or misleading information that could harm the public or undermine trust in public institutions.
- 4.3.5. *Commercial Endorsements:* Promoting specific products or services for commercial gain, especially when there's no direct relevance to municipal activities or community welfare.
- 4.3.6. *Inappropriate Images:* Posting images that are violent, explicit, or in poor taste.

4.3.7. *Legal Issues:* Sharing content that could be considered libelous, slanderous, or that might interfere with ongoing legal proceedings.

4.3.8. *Security Risks:* Posts that could compromise the security of public systems or infrastructure, such as detailed photos or descriptions of sensitive facilities.

5. Establishing Social Media Accounts and Profiles

5.1. The Town uses online social media accounts, including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube and our website to communicate initiatives, goals, and objectives with the community and interested groups. The purpose of these profiles is to inform the community of Town events and provide opportunities for strategic engagement.

5.2. Any social media profiles established in the name of the Town of Westlock or one of its departments are automatically the property of the Town.

5.3. Criteria for adopting new social media platforms or establishing new profiles shall be approved by the CAO or designate(s), and will require:

5.3.1. Demonstrated need for the specific site;

5.3.2. Demonstrated added benefits of using the site;

5.3.3. Content approval process to ensure that posted content is consistent with the Town's messaging and standards;

5.3.4. Demonstrated the new site will not interfere with the credibility of the Town's other established social media sites/networks; and

5.3.5. Identifies appropriate employee resources that would be required (additional or current) to establish and maintain the new account to ensure there is or will be capacity to manage the new account.

6. Site Administration

6.1. The use of all social media sites by the Town will adhere to:

6.1.1. Applicable municipal, provincial, and federal laws, regulations, and policies, the Terms of Service of each social media site,

6.1.2. All Administrative and Records Management policies and other applicable Municipal policies and guidelines,

6.2. All Town social media profiles must include a disclaimer specifying that the sites are monitored during regular business hours, and

- 6.2.1. The following code of conduct statement must be included on all social media profiles:

The purpose of this forum is to inform Westlock residents. Town of Westlock reserves the right to monitor and maintain all comments on this public platform, including but not limited to: delete verbal attacks, derogatory remarks, or comments unfit for the public such as content that endorses, promotes, or perpetuates discrimination based on race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, public assistance status, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation. Please remain respectful of all people and their views to make this a positive experience for all visitors. Violations of these terms of engagement may result in limited or blocked access of the Town social media feeds.

This communications platform is for the Town, published content will promote Town and community partner initiatives, and posts from external businesses and organizations will be moderated and may be removed.

Town of Westlock social media accounts are not a valid method of receiving legal notices. Any person(s) or business(es) seeking to activate, pause or stop services must contact the Town of Westlock at 780-349-4444 and follow the specified steps and procedures to give legal notice.

7. Terms of Engagement

- 7.1. The Town's social media followers and engagers must abide by the following principles of appropriate use or may be subject to removal. The Town reserves the right to remove posted online content, comments or links which contain any of the following:

- 7.1.1. Comments not relevant to the particular posting by the Town;
- 7.1.2. Slanderous or derogatory remarks, obscenities, profane language or sexual content;
- 7.1.3. Content that endorses, promotes, or perpetuates discrimination based on race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, public assistance status, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- 7.1.4. Promotion of commercial services or products other than sponsors, affiliations, or business partnerships;
- 7.1.5. Promotion of political candidates;

- 7.1.6. Promotion of illegal activity;
- 7.1.7. Spam or irrelevant external links;
- 7.1.8. Confidential information of the municipality, employees, members of the community or any other individual or entity;
- 7.1.9. Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
- 7.1.10. Content that is deliberately misleading, and contains misinformation; and/or
- 7.1.11. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

8. Emergency Response

- 8.1. During an emergency, crisis communications will take priority over routine posts. The Town will share key posts and content and will also post provincial information as needed. Emergency information will be shared on the Town's website at www.westlock.ca and through these Town approved channels:
 - 8.1.1. Facebook pages (Town of Westlock, Westlock Fire Department, Westlock & District FCSS)
 - 8.1.2. Westlock Regional Notification System: Connect
- 8.2. During an emergency, employees, contractors, and volunteers cannot take photos or videos of incident scenes, emergency response apparatus, employees engaged in the incident and civilians who may or may not be involved.
 - 8.2.1. EXCEPTIONS:
 - 8.2.1.1. For the purposes of training, investigation, or documentation the CAO, Directors, or Fire Chief may assign individuals to take supporting photos or videos;
 - 8.2.1.2. Approved photos or videos are not to be shared on personal social media or through any Town social media platforms, unless express written approval with a valid explanation for the use has been given by the CAO, Directors, or Fire Chief.
 - 8.2.1.3. Photos that do not contain any personal details or sensitive imagery may be used to promote fire department recruitment and for campaigns as determined and approved by the Fire Chief, CAO or Directors.

8.2.1.4. Photos that the CAO or designate has expressly approved are eligible to be shared through social media, promotion and marketing campaigns.

9. Elections

9.1. During a Town of Westlock Election or By-election, the Town's website and social media will only be used to share information on the process of the election, names of the candidates, and the locations for voting.

9.2. The Town's website and social media channels will not be used as a discussion tool or a campaign platform in support of or against any candidate or party. Any messages or posts of a commentary nature will be removed.

10. Records

All Town social media sites shall adhere to applicable Provincial, Federal, and local laws, regulations, and policies, including all information technology and Records Management policies and other applicable Town policies and bylaws. The *Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act* applies to social media content. Therefore, content must be able to be managed, stored, and retrieved to comply with the Act.

11. Effective Date

This policy shall take effect on the date passed by Council resolution.



Jon Kramer, Mayor

June 17 / 24
Date



Simone Wiley, Chief Administrative Officer

June 14 / 24
Date