

Town of North Topsail Beach



TOWN OF NORTH TOPSAIL BEACH SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

PURPOSE:

Social media is an additional medium commonly used to communicate with the public. This policy outlines the necessary approval process to utilize social media for Town business, as well as best practices and guidelines that all Town officials and employees will follow when communicating with the public through social media outlets.

For this policy, a basic definition of social media are resources similar to, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, Google+, Vimeo, and various blogs.

The use of social media is a tool for the Town to reach out to populations who do not use traditional media. It can be used as a tool to augment traditional means of communications, and should be considered as part of the overall communications strategies developed by the Public Information Officer and Town.

As with all communications tools, social media should be used in ways that maximize transparency, enhance productivity, maintain the security of the network, and are appropriately professional. Therefore, the application of social media for the Town of North Topsail Beach must be done in order to achieve the following purposes:

- 1) Social media content should be thoughtful and professional so as to leave citizens and users of the media with a positive impression of the Town, and have a consistent and positive message about the provision of service by the Town to its citizens;
- 2) Care should be given so that content does not propose a risk to the Town, particularly with vulgar or offensive content, libelous remarks, partisan political views, or other content that does not directly relate to the provision of public services; and,
- 3) As social media communications are considered public records, such content must be retained for the time specified by the Town Clerk and applicable public records laws.

POLICY STATEMENT:

I. Acceptable Professional Use

All usage of social media shall follow applicable State, Federal, and local laws. Employees are not to use any Town sponsored social media for personal gain or to share personal information or opinions. Great care shall be taken when posting content/comments to prevent disclosing proprietary Town information, sharing personal information of any member of Town staff, the governing body, or the public, posting copyrighted or trademarked material, and disclosing identities of individuals shown in photographs, especially if the subject is a minor, without written permission. For any content that Town Staff is unsure about the legalities of posting, the Town Attorney must be consulted in advance of posting

Town staff should be aware of the Terms of Service (TOS) of the particular form of social media. Each form has its own unique TOS that regulates how users interact with the company and public. Any staff member using social media on behalf of the Town should continually consult the most current TOS in order to avoid violations. If the TOS contradicts Town policy, then the Town Manager, Town Attorney, and Public Information Officer should be consulted to determine whether the use of such media is appropriate.

II. Security Requirements

All social media sites/outlets that are managed under Town representation will be secured with a password that meets the minimum requirements of the site, as well as be at least eight characters in length, and have at least one number. The passwords shall not be the same as what is used for any Town user accounts to avoid security attacks. For example, if John Doe is the site administrator and registers the account with their Town e-mail address, the password used for the Town e-mail account and the social media site will not be the same. Further, the password and any security questions should not be a common word or phrase that is associated with the Town and easily guessable or compromised by outsiders.

All Town sponsored social media account information, logins, and passwords will be kept in the Town Clerk's office and accessible to the Town Manager so account access may be recovered due to change in staff responsibilities.

III. Content

Information distributed by way of a social media account generally will be similar to information published on the Town's website. Staff using social media to communicate on behalf of the Town will be mindful that any statements made are on behalf of Town government; therefore, employees need to use discretion before posting or commenting. With most social media outlets, once comments or content has been submitted, they can be seen by anyone and may not be able to be redacted. Town Staff is always expected to remain courteous and professional in their interactions with the public.

Staff should always consider whether it is appropriate to post an opinion, commit oneself or one's department to a course of action, or discuss areas outside of one's expertise or control. There should be great care given to screening any communication made on behalf of the Town using social media as improper posting and use of social media tools can result in disciplinary action.

As with other communications, communication via Town and department social networking outlets is considered public record, and there is no expectation of privacy. This means that content posted by Town representatives and the public are likely to become part of the public record.

The moderator (Town Clerk or designee) should not allow the public to start new topics or add new content on social media pages that belong to the Town. Also, moderators should not respond to any removable comments from sites. This may turn removable content into a public record and make the content undeletable. Do not respond to service requests or complaints that are posted by the public on social media sites. Requests or complaints are delete eligible until such time that communication is made with the poster on the social media site.

IV. Disclaimers

The following indemnification statements shall be included on all Town and departmental social media outlets:

Public Records:

This is the official {enter social media outlet name} for the Town of North Topsail Beach, North Carolina. This page is updated as needed and may not be regularly monitored for questions or comments. Any communication via this site (whether by a Town employee or the general public) may be subject to monitoring and disclosure to third parties as a public record.

Content Disclaimer:

The Town of North Topsail Beach makes use of a variety of forms of media to communicate to the public in an accurate, timely, and open manner. To that end, the Town of North Topsail Beach has a {enter social media outlet name} page as one way to provide communication. The Town welcomes participation and feedback from the public on this site. Once posted, the Town reserves the right to delete comments that:

- *Contain vulgar language*
- *Are personal attacks of any kind*
- *Are offensive or inflammatory*
- *Are prejudiced or hurtful remarks made toward any person or entity, including an ethnic, racial, or religious group*
- *Are spam*
- *Include sales/promotion of goods or services, or links to other sites*
- *Are off-topic*
- *Advocate illegal activity*
- *Promote services, products, or political organizations*
- *Infringe on copyrights or trademarks*
- *Are requests for services*
- *Include personal indentifying information such as home addresses, phone numbers, or personal e-mail addresses*

Please note that comments expressed on the Town's {enter social media outlet name} page do not reflect the opinions or positions of the Town of North Topsail Beach, its employees, or elected officials.

V. Responsibilities

Messages through the private message service offered by many social media sites should direct the user to contact the Town at a public e-mail address maintained by the Town, and/or to contact the appropriate Staff member by telephone during normal business hours.

VI. Revision

Technology and mediums of communication with the public are constantly changing. This policy will be modified as necessary to comply with issues that arise from usage, law changes, social changes, or best practices. Policy change recommendations should initially be directed to the Town's Public Information Officer (Town Clerk), who will propose and make the changes.

Approved by the Board of Aldermen on: May 1, 2014