



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
Department:	Corporate Communications	Approval Level:	Council
Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set guidelines and standards to ensure the appropriate use and management of social media on behalf of the Town of Cobourg. This policy aims to outline corporate social media governance and provide employees and elected officials with usage guidelines.

The Town of Cobourg recognizes the frequent usage of social media and acknowledges that it represents both an opportunity and a risk for the organization. This policy sets expectations for appropriate behaviour for employees who use social media as part of their job and in a personal capacity. The policy conveys the Town's expectations where social media engagement regards the Town, its services, its people, and other business-related individuals or organizations.

Definitions

“Accessibility” means the degree of ease that something can be used and enjoyed by persons with a disability. The term implies conscious planning, design, and effort to ensure social media is barrier-free to all people. .

“Authorized Employee” means any employee that has been approved by the Social Media Account Administrator and the CAO to post on official Town of Cobourg social media accounts.

“Corporate Account” means the Town of Cobourg's primary social media account, within each of the selected social media channels, that provides communication for all municipal departments and functions, and is managed, maintained, and populated by the Social Media Account Administrator designated to be responsible for corporate accounts.

“Objectionable Material” means content that contradicts the principles established by the Ontario Human Rights Code or materials of a pornographic, profane, or sexually explicit nature, as well as content that may offend based on race, ancestry, place of origin, ethnicity, citizenship, creed, age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, family status, religion, or disability.

“Official Record” means any record of information recorded including correspondence, a memorandum, a book, a plan, a map, a drawing, a pictorial or graphic work, a photograph, a physical or digital file, a microfilm, a sound recording, a videotape, a machine-readable record, any other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, and any copy thereof.

“Online Communication” means the exchange of information using the internet or mobile communication network for any purpose.



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“Personal Use” means any use that is for non-work-related purposes regardless of whether that use is inside or outside the workplace, and during work or non-work hours.

“Separate Account” means a social media account set up by a municipal division, board, or committee that is in addition to the Corporate Account. Separate accounts are managed, maintained, and populated by the Social Media Account Administrator designated to be responsible for the separate account. The account is owned by the Town of Cobourg and will remain with the Corporation after employment ends.

“Social Media” means online communication channels in which the objective is to publicly share information and create dynamic interaction between multiple parties. These channels can include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, as well as blogs, mobile applications, websites, photo boards, discussion boards, or any other online location where commentary is publicly share and attributed to the corporation, an employee, or elected official.

“Social Media Account Administrator (SMAA)” means any employee and authorized by the Manager of Communications to maintain a particular Corporate or Separate Social Media Account, including writing and publishing content and monitoring, managing, and measuring account activity.

“Transitory Record” means any record that has temporary usefulness and is only required for the completion of a routine action or until superseded.

“Trolling” means the activity of making deliberately offensive or provocative online posts with the aim of upsetting someone, eliciting an angry response and encouraging negative or unproductive discussion.

Policy

1. Policy Statement

The Town of Cobourg website is the primary source of online information exchange with the public and is the Town’s official internet presence. The Town also uses social media to enhance communication and information-sharing with the public and other audiences. Where possible, social media sites should direct people to the Town website for more detailed information. The Town also operates the Engage Cobourg social media accounts as the primary source for tourism and cultural information within the municipality. All Engage Cobourg social media pages should direct people to the Engage Cobourg for more detailed information.

The Town supports and promotes the use of social media as a tool to deliver effective and accessible communication about Municipal news, programs, and services to the community.



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Social media tools offer many benefits, including:

- Sharing information on programs, services, and news to a wide audience.
- Promote/market the Town online to local, regional, and national audiences.
- Disseminate time-sensitive information as quickly as possible.
- Increase civic engagement by providing an additional tool for the public to communicate with the Town.

2. Governing Rules and Regulations

1. Where possible, social networking accounts will clearly indicate that they are maintained by the Town of Cobourg and will contain appropriate contact information.
2. Only SMAAs may publish using an official Town of Cobourg corporate account.
3. Authorized SMAAs shall only post within their area of expertise. Where appropriate, SMAAs may inform readers that another authorized employee with the correct subject matter expertise may respond later.
4. If residents refer to the Mayor or Council or ask questions related to these officeholders, authorized employees will acknowledge the comment and forward the message to the appropriate contact.
5. No confidential information will be published to any social media under any circumstances.
6. The Town of Cobourg has a zero-tolerance policy on disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour on any of its social media platforms. Comments containing any of the following will not be permitted on Town of Cobourg social media sites and will be removed including:
 - Comments not topically related to the topic or issue being commented upon.
 - Bullying of Town staff or malicious criticism of work conducted by Town staff.
 - Account spamming, trolling, or over posting.
 - Posts that are meant to solicit sales, products, or goods and services.
 - Profane, aggressive, hateful, defamatory, insulting, rude, abusive, or violent language or content.
 - Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination.
 - Defamatory or personal attacks.
 - Threats to any person or organization.
 - Content that includes link to objectionable material, as defined in this policy.
 - Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity.



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Division: Executive Services	Effective Date: July 3, 2023
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Policy Title: Social Media Policy	Section # 2-20
	Policy # HR-AP-A6

- Information that may compromise the privacy, safety, or security of the Town, public, or public systems.
- Comments or posts that include inaccurate material or misrepresent facts as known by the Corporation.
- Comments or posts that impersonate or misrepresent someone else, including public figures, Municipal staff, or Municipal officials.
- Comments in support of, or in opposition to, any political campaigns.
- Content that violates the legal ownership interest of any other party.

3. Social Media Account Administrator

The Manager of Communications shall be appointed as the Social Media Account Administrator for the Town. This person is responsible for posting, monitoring, and maintaining all social media accounts on behalf of the Town. In addition to the Social Media Account Administrator, the Communications Coordinator shall act as an alternate administrator. Additional account administrators may be assigned to Division-specific social media pages if authorized by the CAO upon recommendation by the Social Media Account Administrator. Furthermore, each Division Director will have access to the social media accounts specific to their Division.

4. Account Creation and Management

Before creating a corporate social media account or adding a new social media channel, discussion should occur between the Social Media Account Administrator, CAO, and any other relevant Division Director on the need for and benefit of a new account or channel. Adequate resources must be present for the creation and maintenance of a new account.

Before creating a separate account for a division, department, board, or committee, employees must obtain permission from the CAO if deemed appropriate.

Any corporate or separate social media account established by the Town of Cobourg prior to the adoption of this policy will be reviewed by the Social Media Account Administrator for compliance with the policy. Significant recommendations occurring from this review should be forwarded to the CAO and Senior Management Team for their review and decision.

5. Acceptable Use of Social Media

Social Media Account Administrators are permitted to engage in social media activity for corporate purposes. Anyone posting on behalf of the Town must use sound judgement to manage time and balance the integration of social media within their overall work plans.



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
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Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

5.1 Maintenance

The Social Media Account Administrator must maintain accounts to ensure they are kept current and relevant to the public. Social media accounts with frequent periods of inactivity (six weeks or more without new information) will be brought to the attention of the Social Media Account Administrator and relevant Division Director for discussion on continuation. This does not apply to any seasonal accounts.

The Social Media Account Administrator must frequently review social media comments to ensure inappropriate postings are removed in a timely fashion (e.g., commercial advertisement, disparaging remarks).

5.2 Purpose and Use

Social media should be used as a communications tool for the intent of enhancing communication from the Town to the public about programs and services for the following purposes:

- Raising awareness and sharing information.
- Disseminating time-sensitive information quickly and effectively.
- Recruiting staff members and volunteers.
- Promoting municipal events, programs, and services.
- Increasing access to information for specific audiences.
- Correcting misinformation and mistakes, and to improve trust and stronger relationships with the public.
- Promoting opportunities for public collaboration and comment on the Town's website or other online engagement platforms.
- Providing a mechanism for the Town to keep track of customer comments and perceptions regarding the municipality.
- Providing information regarding municipal elections including checking if you are on the Voters' List, voting methods, and voting dates.
- Where possible, municipal social media accounts should link back to the Town website for the purpose of downloading forms, documents, and providing specific or additional information.

Each Division is responsible for submitting completed information to the Social Media Account Administrator for posting on Town social media sites.

5.3 Conduct

The Social Media Account Administrator and authorized staff using social media on behalf of the Town will conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner, including:



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
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Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

- Post accurate, credible, and consistent information and links that are consistent with the Municipality's information, messages, brand identity, and policies.
- Division Directors are responsible for the accuracy and relevancy of any information forwarded to the Social Media Account Administrator for posting.
- Strive for transparency and openness, including when deemed necessary, identifying their name and position within the Town.
- Adhere to the objectives, values, and guidelines established through Town of Cobourg policies.
- Publicly correct any information communicated and found to be in error on official Town of Cobourg social media pages using the same platform it was produced in a timely manner.
- Post content in a manner that is discreet, does not disclose confidential information or release personal or corporate information, without prior consent. Social media content shall comply with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA).
- Engage other users by responding to questions, comments, and correcting any erroneous information posted by other users in a respectful manner in line with the Town of Cobourg's Customer Service Strategy.
- Must not engage in offensive language, respond in a confrontational manner, or post content that is not professional or that contravenes the Town of Cobourg's Code of Conduct or any other municipal policy.
- Be polite and respectful of all individuals and communities with whom they interact online.
- Refrain from debates over matters of opinion or from making partisan, political comments, or criticizing Canadian government policy.
- Must not use corporate accounts to express personal opinions or further personal agendas.
- Ensure proper protocols and permissions are obtained for posting any copyrighted material.
- Ensure security of social media accounts is maintained including password and login information.

Where possible, each social media account used by the Town should contain a disclaimer clearly advising visitors to the site that third party comments are not official communications of the Town of Cobourg. The disclaimer should also note that the Town website is the official destination for municipal information and that social media accounts are regularly monitored Monday-Friday during regular business hours.

Disclaimer example:

"Comments made by members of the public are not official communications of the Town



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
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		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

of Cobourg and are owned by the contributing commenter. These comments are not reflective of the Town's views, opinions, and policies.

This page is primarily monitored during regular business hours, between 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. The Corporate website at Cobourg.ca should be used as the official resource for municipal information.”

5.4 Sharing/Re-posting Content

When sharing or re-posting content from a social media account that is not owned by the Town, staff must follow the below guidelines.

Content that includes external links:

- Connects the public with information and services provided by upper-tier governments, government-funded agencies, or boards in Canada.
- Provides further information on subject matter found on the Town's website. Such information must be provided by an official or accredited source.
- A municipally affiliated organization, service club, or registered charity (direct partnership by way of funding, sponsorship, staff resources or in-kind contributions).
- A business improvement area operating within the municipality.
- An organization or subject matter expert regarding an approved initiative endorsed by the Town of Cobourg.
- Good news stories on behalf of verified local businesses and associations.
- A professional association as determined solely by the Town of Cobourg.
- Any organization approved by Council.

Content promoting events:

- Organized or funded by another level of government.
- Organized by a government-funded agency or board.
- Organized by a Town of Cobourg affiliated organization/group.
- Funded in full, or in part, by the Town of Cobourg.
- Sponsored by the Town of Cobourg.
- Organized by a registered charity organization operating within the Town of Cobourg.
- Organized by a service club operating within the Town of Cobourg performing work that benefits Cobourg residents.
- Organized by a business improvement area or Chamber of Commerce located in the municipality for general purposes.
- Located in a facility owned by the Town of Cobourg.

Any posts that include links to a personal account/website, political party/candidate



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

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Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

account/website, or objectionable material as defined in this policy must not be shared or reposted on a Town social media account.

Any posts that promote events that include objectionable material, do not comply with municipal, provincial, or federal legislation, encourage a political position or promote an individual religion over others must not be shared or reposted on a municipal social media account.

5.5 Records Management and Retention

Posts/user content deemed to be official records must be retained and destroyed according to the Town's record retention by-law and comply with appropriate sections of MFIPPA.

Posts/user content that is considered a transitory record of the Town is not required to be retained and may be removed from social media sites.

All records or other personal information collected through social media are protected under the Municipal Act and MFIPPA.

6. Personal Use of social media by Councillors and Employees

Municipal employees, except for the Social Media Account Administrator, are not permitted to publish or comment via social media in any way that suggests they are doing so in connection with or as representatives of the Town of Cobourg unless authorized to do so.

The Town of Cobourg recognizes that employees may use social media in their personal life. This policy does not intend to discourage or unduly limit an employee's personal expression or online activities. Incidental or occasional personal use of social media on personal or workplace devices is allowed, providing such limited use will not result in any measurable expense to the Corporation in time, material, or productivity, and is subject to the limitations of this policy.

Employees should be aware of the potential for damage to be caused to the Town via their personal use of social media when the individual may be directly identified as an employee of the Town. Action on personal social media that is not in line with Town policy, values, and/or are detrimental to its operations may be subject to corrective actions up to and including termination.

6.1 Conduct

The Town expects all employees and Councillors who use social media to do so without breaching their duties to the Town and adhere to their respective Codes of Conduct.



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
Department:	Corporate Communications	Approval Level:	Council
Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

Employees and Councillors should consider the following:

- Even if you do not explicitly identify yourself as a Town employee or Councillor, others may identify you as an employee or Councillor by your name, your place of work, a photograph, or by the content you post.
- Do not use visual cues that suggest you represent the Town. Do not post municipally owned logos, photographs, graphics, or other media without the Town's authorization.
- Do not circulate any organizational or confidential information, such as client or employee information, or negative comments about the Town of Cobourg, Councillors, employees, or residents.
- Do not disparage or criticize the Town, individual Councillors, employees, and others associated with the Town.
- Do not engage in workplace discrimination or harassment, or activity that includes inappropriate comments, photographs, or links.
- Councillors may use their social media accounts to seek community input on the business of Council provided the questions posed, and information received is not offensive.

Overall, employees and Councillors are expected to conduct themselves professionally both on-and-off duty. Even when an employee does not publicly associate themselves with the Town on social media, all materials associated with their page may be perceived to reflect upon the Town.

Further, employees and Councillors should not expect confidentiality or privacy in relation to their online activities as they pertain to the Town of Cobourg. The traditional legal view is that posting content on social media sites about an employer is considered a publication and not a private activity. Councillors and employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online as it relates to the Town.

6.2 Municipal Councillor and Other Government Accounts

If a Councillor, MP, or MPP representing the area of the Town of Cobourg has a personal social media account, the Town's social media accounts are permitted to like/follow the account. Accounts belonging to Municipal Councillors must be created and maintained by the Councillor and not Town staff. Councillors must sign a copy of this policy and indicate what accounts they will be using to post on matters relating to the business of Council.

The Town's social media accounts are permitted to share/re-post content from posts belonging to a Municipal Councillor, MP, or MPP representing the area of the Town of Cobourg if the content does not clearly promote or criticize a political party, candidate, or ideology. Appropriate shareable content includes, but is not limited to, community events, funding announcements, and bill/law announcements. Overall, the Social Media Account Administrator



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
Department:	Corporate Communications	Approval Level:	Council
Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

should use their best judgement when sharing/re-posting content belonging to a Municipal Councillor, MP, or MPP.

Effective at the beginning of Nomination Period, all links, likes/follows, and sharing of content with a Councillor, MP, or MPP site shall be stopped and removed until the inaugural meeting of the newly elected Council or Legislature is complete.

7. Consequences of Inappropriate Behaviour

Employees must be aware of the potential damage to individuals and the Town through inappropriate disclosure of personal, confidential, or sensitive information through social media channels. The possible consequences of an improper or unintended action may be:

- A defamation lawsuit.
- Copyright, patent, or trademark infringement claims.
- A privacy or human rights complaint.
- A workplace grievance under the Collective Agreement or an unfair labour practice complaint.
- Criminal charges with respect to obscene or hate materials.
- Damage to the employer's reputation and business interests.

Legal responsibility for damages from inappropriate behaviour could potentially rest with individual employees, management, or the organization.

8. Security and Monitoring of Corporate Use

8.1 Information Technology (IT)

Town of Cobourg IT staff may facilitate a request to monitor and oversee social media accounts and may:

- Allow internet access to an authorized user.
- Limit or prevent functionality within social media sites.
- Enable technical risk mitigation controls, including filtering and scanning files exchanged with social media sites.

All information created on corporate and separate social media accounts using municipal devices is the property of the Town of Cobourg. Reasonable technological and procedural measures, including auditing and random monitoring of social media accounts will occur to ensure adherence to corporate policies and standards.



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division:	Executive Services	Effective Date:	July 3, 2023
Department:	Corporate Communications	Approval Level:	Council
Policy Title:	Social Media Policy	Section #	2-20
		Policy #	HR-AP-A6

8.2 Login and Password Management

The Town's corporate and separate social media accounts are owned by the Town. The CAO and Division Directors will have full administrator access privileges to social media accounts managed within their area.

All credentials and details for corporate and separate accounts must be communicated to the Town's IT. The Town's IT staff will maintain a master list of the Town's social media login information. Password changes must be immediately communicated to IT.

Accounts created to represent the Town of Cobourg must be associated with a valid municipal email address.

9. Citizen Conduct

Users and visitors to the Town's social media accounts/pages should be notified that the intended purpose of the site is to serve as a communication platform and information-sharing tool between the Town and the public.

A hyperlink to the Town's social media policy will be posted on respective social media accounts/pages where possible. The Town reserves the right to remove inappropriate, inaccurate, irrelevant, or inappropriate content from Town-owned social media accounts. Notice of this action will be provided to the user. If the user continues to post inappropriate, irrelevant, inaccurate, or unproductive content, the Town may ban/block the user from the site at the discretion of staff. Comments, posts, or articles contrary to this policy will not be allowed.

The Town of Cobourg is not responsible for any comments or use of material posted by users. All comments and posts will only be addressed during normal business hours. After hours comments and posts will be addressed in a timely manner.

10. Legal

Comments and content uploaded to a social media account may be permanently available for viewing and printing and can be republished in other media without the Municipality's permission. As a result, the Social Media Administrator must ensure that privacy, confidentiality, copyright, and data protection laws are adhered to.

All corporate and separate social media accounts must adhere to applicable provincial, federal, and local laws, regulations, and policies, including other applicable municipal policies.

Any content removed based on the guidelines stated in this policy will be retained by the Social Media Account Administrator, and have supporting documentation, including the time, date,



Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division: Executive Services **Effective Date:** July 3, 2023
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Policy Title: Social Media Policy **Section #** 2-20
Policy # HR-AP-A6

identity of poster, reason for removal, and any required incident reporting.

Scope

This policy applies to all Town of Cobourg employees and officials who make public statements on Town social media sites and social networks that discuss, share, or comment on the Town. This policy also applies to members of the public who use, comment, or post on Town social media sites and social networks. This policy applies to all social media channels as defined in this policy.

This policy does not apply to employees' personal use of social media platforms where the employee cannot be associated with the Town and where the employee cannot be perceived to be acting within an official capacity on behalf of the Town of Cobourg.

Administration


The Chief Administrative Officer shall implement and administer the terms of this policy and shall establish related operating procedures as required.

The Chief Administrative Officer in discussion with SMAAs and relevant Division Directors shall approve access to, and proper use of, all social media sites and ensure that all persons that have access understand and follow the procedures set forth in this policy.

Cross Reference

Policy #

Procedure #

	Revision Purpose/Description:	Municipal Clerk/Approved by CAO:  Signature	Council/Division Director Approval Date: July 5 th 2023
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