

# **City of North Oaks Social Media Policy**

## **Purpose**

The City of North Oaks encourages factual and comprehensive communication with City residents. The City of North Oaks wishes to establish a positive and informative social media presence. In addition to, and supplementing, community television broadcast and replay of public City Council meetings, invitations for public attendance at meetings, information available on the City website and other efforts to keep residents informed.

The City intends to use social media to help promote its programs, services and community events and to represent itself appropriately and consistently on the Internet. Social media use by government serves to communicate and deliver messages directly to citizens and to encourage citizen involvement, interaction, and feedback from the broadest possible audience. Information which is distributed via social networking should be accurate, consistent and timely to meet the information needs of the City's residents and customers. Since social media is used for social networking, this policy seeks to ensure proper use of the City of North Oak's social media content by its residents.

City representatives must use the City's social media resources in an efficient, effective, ethical and lawful manner pursuant to all existing City policies. This policy also provides guidelines and standards for City representatives regarding the use of social media for communication with residents, colleagues and all other followers. The City reminds all users of City social media that it is public social media and not private.

**Technical.** The City of North Oaks will maintain a single Facebook page to represent the organization. The City has a "page" in Facebook and is not a "group." The type of Facebook page is "government." The City will standardize all Facebook page displays and any other social media should include the City Logo and other contact information.

**General Policy.** The City of North Oaks will determine, at its discretion, how its web-based social media resources will be designed, implemented and managed as part of its overall communication and information sharing strategy. City of North Oaks social media accounts are considered a City asset and access to these accounts must be securely administered in accordance with the City's Personnel Policy. City social media content may be modified or removed by the City at any time, for any reason and without notice, as described in this document. The City reserves all rights to posted content, including but not limited to the right to remove or modify content.

All social media web content created and utilized during the course and scope of an employees' performance of their job duties will be identified as belonging to the City of North Oaks, including all links to the City's official web site.

**Scope.** This policy applies to any existing or proposed social media web content sponsored, established, registered or authorized by the City of North Oaks. This policy also covers the private use of the City's social media accounts by all City representatives, including its employees, and Councilmembers to the extent it affects the City. Questions regarding the scope of this policy should be directed to the City Administrator.

**Definition.** Social media are internet and mobile-based applications, websites and functions, other than email, for sharing and discussing information, where users can post photos, video, comments and links to other information to create content on any imaginable topic. This may be referred to as "user-generated content" or "consumer-generated media."

Social media includes, but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Nextdoor, such other social media sites or applications that may be developed and including mobile apps
- Blogs
- Social news sites such as Reddit and BuzzFeed
- Video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram, SnapChat, and Flickr
- Wikis, or shared encyclopedias such as Wikipedia
- An ever emerging list of new web-based platforms generally regarded as social media or having many of the same functions as those listed above

As used in this policy, "employees and agents" means all City staff including its employees.

**Rules of Use.** City employees are responsible for managing social media content. All approved content will be clearly marked as the City of North Oaks site and will be linked with the official City website ([www.cityofnorthoaks.com](http://www.cityofnorthoaks.com)). No one may establish social media accounts or websites on behalf of the City unless authorized in accordance with this policy. Administration of all social media web sites must comply with applicable laws, regulations, and policies as well as proper business etiquette. The City Administrator shall have the final say if there are any disputes. Posts and monitoring shall be done during office hours with the exception of emergency situations, and all comments or questions shall be responded to in a timely manner within those parameters.

City social media accounts accessed and utilized during the course and scope of an employee's performance of his/her job duties may not be used for private or personal purposes or for the purpose of expressing private or personal views on personal, political or policy issues or to express personal views or concerns pertaining to City issues or City employment relations matters. No social media website may be used by the City or any City employee or agent to disclose private or confidential information. No social media web site should be used to disclose sensitive information; if there is any question as to whether information is private, confidential or sensitive, contact the City Administrator.

When using social media content as a representative of the City, employees will act in a professional manner. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Adhere to all City personnel policies

- Use only appropriate language

Be aware that content will not only reflect on the writer but also on the City of North Oaks as a whole, including Councilmembers and other city employees. Make sure information is accurate and free of grammatical errors. Content must;

- Not provide private or confidential information, including names, or using such material as part of any content added to a site.
- Not negatively comment on community partners or their services, or use such material as part of any content added to a site.
- Not provide information related to pending decisions that would compromise negotiations.
- Be aware that all content added to a site is subject to open records/right to know laws and discovery in legal cases.
- Always keep in mind the appropriateness of content.
- Comply with any existing code of ethical behavior established by the City.

Where moderation of comments is an available option, comments from the public will be moderated by City staff, with administrative rights, before posting. Where moderation prior to posting is not an option, content will be regularly monitored by City staff.

City of North Oak's staff with administrative rights will not edit any posted comments. However, comments posted by members of the public will be removed if they are abusive, obscene, defamatory, in violation of the copyright, trademark right or other intellectual property right of any third party, or otherwise inappropriate or incorrect. The following are examples of content that may be removed by City staff before or shortly after being published:

- Potentially libelous comments
- Obscene or racist comments
- Personal attacks, insults, or threatening language
- Plagiarized material
- Private, personal information published without consent
- Comments totally unrelated to the topic of the forum
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Hyperlinks to material that is not directly related to the discussion
- Comments on any political contest
- Comments on any social issue not directly related to North Oaks

**Social Media Guidelines for Councilmembers.** While every individual has a right to speak out on issues facing the community, Councilmembers shall not originate content on City social media sites but share the same ability as the public to comment on City content, subject to the policy noted below. Councilmembers should be careful to differentiate between ~~their~~ stating personal opinions and stating the formal position of the City Council. Councilmembers should also refrain from stating how they will vote on a matter before it comes before the City Council. Councilmembers should comply with the following guidelines when using City of North Oaks' social media sites.

- Councilmembers shall not use official City social media sites for campaign purposes.

- Councilmembers shall not post comments or links to any content that endorses or opposes an official's campaign site or any other campaign site.
- All comments posted to a City social media site during an election season by anyone who has filed for office will be removed.
- Councilmembers are encouraged to avoid posting inaccurate information about their campaign or any other campaign on any site.
- Councilmembers should be mindful of the risks of electronic communication in relation to the Minnesota Data Practices Act and the Open Meeting Law; two way communication between Councilmembers should be avoided.
- Councilmembers should not use social media as a mechanism for conducting official business other than to informally communicate with residents of North Oaks and the public.
- Councilmembers should reveal their identity as Councilmembers of the City of North Oaks when commenting; elected officials should at all times be honest, straightforward and respectful of all.
- Councilmembers should not disclose non-public information related to co-workers, staff, personnel data, medical information, claims or lawsuits, or other non-public or confidential information in any communication, including social media.
- Councilmembers should stay focused on the issue at hand, adding value to the discussion with all comments.
- To prevent errors and avoid potential liability for individuals and the City, Councilmembers should not add official information to comments or provide incorrect information about an ordinance or other official information.
- If an elected official makes an error, correction should follow as soon as the elected official is notified of the error; if the elected official does not correct the error immediately, a correction will be made by the City. Correction should be acknowledged and timely. If an earlier comment is modified, the modified comment should clearly note the modification with a designation such as "Fact Correction" or "Correction" at the beginning of the comment.
- Councilmembers contacted by the media on a topic of official City business should follow City communication protocols or refer the media to the City Administrator.

**Personal Social Media Use.** The City of North Oaks respects employees' rights to post and maintain personal websites, blogs and social media pages and to use and enjoy social media on their own personal devices during non-work hours. The City requires employees to act in a prudent manner with regard to website and internet postings that reference the City of North Oaks, its personnel, its operation or its property. Employees, agents, and others affiliated with the City may not use a City brand, logo or other City identifiers on their personal sites, nor post information that purports to be the position of the City without prior authorization.

City employees should not identify themselves as city employees when responding to or commenting on blogs with personal opinions or views. If an employee chooses to identify himself as a City of North Oaks employee, and posts a statement on a matter related to City business, a disclaimer similar to the following must be used:

"These are my own opinions and do not represent those of the City."

Occasional access to personal social media websites during work hours is permitted, but employees must adhere to the guidelines outlined in the City's Personnel Policy. Employees should also review the Data Ownership section of this policy (below).

There may be times when personal use of social media (even if it is off-duty or using the employee's own equipment) may spill over into the workplace and become the basis for employee coaching or discipline. Examples of situations where this might occur include:

- Friendships, dating or romance between co-workers
- Cyber-bullying, stalking or harassment
- Release of confidential or private data; if there are questions about what constitutes confidential or private data, contact the City Administrator.
- Unlawful activities
- Misuse of City-owned social media
- Inappropriate use of the City's name, logo or the employee's position or title
- Using City owned equipment or City time for extensive personal social media use

Each situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis because the laws in this area are complex. If questions arise about what types of activities might result in discipline, please discuss the type of usage with the City Administrator. Failure to follow instructions regarding the use of social media may result in discipline, including and up to termination.

**Data Ownership.** All social media communications or messages composed, sent, or received on City equipment in an official capacity are the properties of the City and will be subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. This law classifies certain information as available to the public upon request. The City of North Oaks also maintains the sole property rights to any image, video or audio captured while a City employee is representing the City in any capacity.

The City retains the right to monitor employees' social media use on City equipment and will exercise its right as necessary. Users should have no expectation of privacy. Social media is not a secure means of communication.

## **Policy Violations**

Violations of the policy will subject the employee to disciplinary action up to and including discharge from employment.