

Social Media Guidelines for Elected Officials

The purpose of these guidelines are to ensure the appropriate use and management of social media on behalf of the Municipality of Chatham-Kent elected officials.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent's Codes of Conduct, corporate values and policies are the foundation to maintain and protect integrity and reputations of individuals and the municipality.

Definition - Social media means the various online, accessible communication channels or technologies that enable individuals to join and/or participate in online communities for the purpose of publicly sharing information, ideas, messages, pictures, etc. 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 allows for efficient and direct engagement between members and citizens. When used in accordance with the Code of Conduct, social media enables members to showcase their diligent and conscientious service to their constituents and can help to improve trust and confidence in Municipal Council and the Municipality of Chatham-Kent.

The following are guidelines to ensure elected officials manage social media accounts within the Council Code of Conduct, corporate values and policies:

1. Maintain confidentiality - Do not post information discussed in closed session or anything that you would not present in a public forum.
2. Maintain privacy - Do not post private or confidential information about fellow Councillors, employees or constituents. Do not discuss situations involving named, pictured or otherwise identifiable individuals without their permission.
3. Be authentic - Write as an extension of your own voice. When you re-post something written by someone else, first ensure you have the proper permissions to do so. Then clearly state the material, letter, response, etc. has been authored by someone else. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without the necessary permissions of the rightholder(s).
4. Provide information when it counts - Should you decide to engage in social media, know that monitoring and responding in a timely way are crucial. Social media participants expect timely responses to requests and expect co-participants to monitor social media properties frequently and regularly.
5. When in doubt, do not post - Elected officials have an obligation to ensure their posts are accurate and not misleading, and that they do not reveal confidential information. If in doubt, consider conferring with administration for information or confirmation of facts prior to posting or re-posting.

6. Respecting Staff - The Code of Conduct requires members to be respectful of the role of staff to provide professional and politically neutral advice. Members should not use social media to engage in criticism of municipal staff. The public nature of social media can increase the risk of harming the professional and ethical reputation of municipal staff.
7. Respecting Each Other and the Public - Just as residents expect members of Council to maintain decorum in Council Chambers, they also expect members to act with decorum on social media. Members must never use social media as a platform to treat members of the public, one another, or staff without respect. Members should not engage in or encourage bullying, flaming, or shaming of any other social media users. These types of interactions on social media misplace the focus of the interaction on attacking individuals rather than engaging in constructive discussion or debate. This manner of communication is inconsistent with the Code of Conduct and unbecoming of the office that members hold.
8. Once information is published online, it becomes part of a permanent record. It is a good practice to provide a link to an online space where your thought or message can be expressed completely and accurately if it, along with its context, cannot fit within a character-restricted space (such as Twitter).
9. If you start it, commit to it - Be dynamic: update news feeds, post developments, upload new pictures. Social media participants are savvy; if your online property appears static, it is likely to quickly fall into disuse.
10. Corporate Social Media Policy – Councillors should also review the Chatham-Kent Corporate Social Media Policy as it contains valuable information pertaining to expectation for the use of social media forums and help to use the resources wisely.
11. The use of social media is subject to the following policies/legislation:
 - The Municipal Elections Act
 - The Municipal Conflict of Interest Act
 - The Chatham-Kent Council Code of Conduct