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Subject: Corporate Social Media Policy

Policy #:

Date Approved: May 7, 2025

Date Revised:

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide direction on how the Town of Aylmer (hereinafter “the Town”) utilizes social media and online interactive channels to create authentic two-way dialogue and facilitate community engagement. Specifically, this Policy:

Governs the use of social media platforms by the Town – establishing the acceptable use and scope of official Town social media activities.

Provides guidelines for the establishment and administration of corporate social media accounts – outlining how new Town social media accounts are approved, set up, and managed.

Establishes procedures for authorized corporate social media content providers – to ensure all communications through the Town’s social media accounts are accurate, consistent, professional, and in line with Town standards.

Facilitates understanding of roles and responsibilities – helping Town staff and representatives distinguish their roles when using social media for corporate purposes versus personal use.

2. Background

The Town recognizes the growing importance of social media in municipal communications. This policy has been developed to ensure a consistent and professional approach to social media use, aligning with the [Town’s values and strategic priorities](#).

In 2021, the Town adopted a [formal Strategic Communication Plan](#). Adoption of this policy supports the continued implementation of that plan.

2.2. Scope

2.1. **This Social Media Policy** applies to all Town staff, appointed members of Town committees, and any individuals or third parties acting on behalf of the Town or deemed to be representatives of the Town in an official capacity.

- **Mayor and Council Accounts:** Official social media profiles representing the Mayor or individual Council members are exempt from the direct application of this Policy. However, the Town encourages the Mayor and Council to use their personal or official social media accounts to support and share information that has been officially released by the Town. (Guidelines for elected officials are provided in Appendix 1 to promote alignment with the Town's standards.)
- **Personal Use:** This Policy does not apply to employees' personal use of social media when it is entirely unrelated to Town business and the individual's affiliation with the Town is not identified, known, or apparent. If a personal social media post makes reference to Town matters or the individual's role with the Town, this policy and other relevant codes of conduct may become applicable.
- **Consistency with Other Policies:** All use of social media on behalf of the Town must comply with all other applicable Town policies, procedures, codes of conduct, and relevant legislation. This includes (but is not limited to) policies on confidentiality, privacy, respectful conduct, and information technology use.

3. Definitions

- **Communications Team:** Refers to the Legislative Services Department under the Director of Legislative Services/Clerk
- **Handle:** A username on a social media service (for example, @TownofAylmer). A handle is the unique identifier for a user's account on platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social networks.
- **Hashtag:** A word or phrase preceded by the # symbol used to categorize content on social media and make it easily searchable (for example, #AylmerProud or #YourTownEvent). Hashtags allow people to follow topics and conversations across social media.
- **Social Media:** Online interactive platforms and technologies that enable users to create and share content, information, ideas, and expressions in virtual communities or networks. This includes services such as Facebook, Twitter (X), Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, discussion forums, and any other online channels for public interaction and sharing of content.

- **Tag:** A functionality on social media that allows a user to mention or notify another user or entity by linking to their profile (for example, tagging the Town’s account in a post as @TownofAylmer). Tagging someone in a post will typically notify that person/account and make the post visible to others as associated with the tagged profile.
- **Social Media Management Platform:** A tool or software used by the Town to manage, schedule, and monitor social media content across multiple social media accounts. (For example, a platform that allows scheduling posts in advance and consolidating engagement metrics.)

4. Policy Statement

The Corporation of the Town of Aylmer recognizes the significant role that social media plays in engaging the community. Social media can inspire conversations, create authentic two-way dialogue, raise awareness of Town programs, projects, services, and successes, disseminate emergency communications, promote and profile Council initiatives and priorities, support local businesses and community groups, and facilitate timely and relevant community engagement.

The Town’s Legislative Services Department (“Communications team”) serves as the Town’s social media subject matter expert. The communications team is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Town’s official corporate social media accounts and provides counsel or support to other departments that manage sanctioned Town-affiliated social media accounts. All official Town social media activities are coordinated to maintain a consistent voice and message on behalf of the municipality.

All individuals and parties falling within the Scope of this Policy are expected to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined herein, in addition to adhering to all related Town policies and applicable laws. By complying with this Policy, users of the Town’s social media will help ensure that the Town’s online presence remains professional, accurate, and reflective of the [Town’s 2024–2027 Strategic Plan principles and priorities](#).

5. Roles and Responsibilities

To maintain a coordinated and compliant social media presence, various participants have distinct roles and responsibilities as follows:

5.2. Mayor and Council

Members of Council are encouraged to model appropriate social media use in their capacity as elected officials. While their official social media accounts are exempt from the formal requirements of this Policy, the following guidelines are recommended for the Mayor and Councillors when using social media in reference to Town matters:

Be Proactive and Aware: Assist in identifying opportunities for positive Town engagement on social media, and be alert to potentially contentious issues or emerging community concerns on social channels. Early awareness can help the Town respond appropriately.

Verify Information Before Posting: Before responding to resident inquiries or posting content about Town matters on a personal account, confirm details with the relevant Town department head or the Communications Department. Ensuring information is factual and up-to-date helps maintain credibility and accuracy.

Direct Inquiries to Official Channels: When residents pose questions or service requests on your personal or official pages, kindly refer or redirect them to the Town's official customer service channels (e.g., the Town's Facebook page, official website contact forms, Town office phone or email). Acknowledge the question and guide the resident to the appropriate channel rather than handling Town business through personal accounts.

Support Official Messages: Use your platform to support and share the Town's official social media communications. When amplifying Town news on your personal accounts, follow Town guidelines (including this Policy, the Council Code of Conduct, and any applicable legislation). Ensure your posts uphold the Town's ethical standards and the principles outlined in the [Town's Strategic Plan](#), mirroring the Town's commitment to respectful and constructive communication.

*(See also **Appendix 1: Social Media Guidelines for Elected Officials** for more detailed expectations and best practices for Council members on social media.)*

5.3. Communications Team (Legislative Services Department)

The Communications Team is the lead authority for corporate social media and is responsible for the following:

- **Subject Matter Expertise:** Serve as the Town's expert resource on social media strategy, tools, trends, and best practices. Communications stays informed of emerging social media platforms and advises if new channels should be adopted to reach the community effectively.
- **Account Management:** Manage the day-to-day administration of the Town's official corporate social media accounts. This includes developing and scheduling content, monitoring comments and messages, and ensuring that each account's use aligns with this Policy and the Town's standards (branding, tone, etc.).
- **Community Engagement and Responsiveness:** Work in partnership with Council, the Town's Senior Leadership Team, and staff to leverage social media for community communication. Communications will coordinate proactive outreach on social media, respond to public inquiries or feedback directed at the Town's main accounts, and monitor online discussions for issues that may require the Town's attention.
- **Support to Departments:** Provide counsel and support to Town departments that have their own official social media presence (for example, if a department like Economic Development or Fire Services operates a Town-affiliated social media account). Communications will ensure those accounts

follow corporate guidelines, assist with training or content strategy as needed, and help maintain consistency across all Town social media channels.

- **Policy Oversight and Updates:** Periodically review this Social Media Policy and related practices to ensure they remain current with evolving social media platforms and technologies. Communications may recommend updates or enhancements to the Policy, guidelines, or the Town's approach to social media to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Council as appropriate. Communications also monitors changes in legislation or best practices that could impact the Town's use of social media.

5.2. Department Heads and Managers

Department heads and managers whose areas use social media are responsible for supporting compliance with this Policy within their teams:

- **Authorization of Accounts:** Managers must obtain approval from the Communications Team (and senior management as required) before establishing any new Town-related social media account for their department or program. A clear business case or purpose for the new account should be identified, and adequate resources (staff time, content, etc.) should be allocated to maintain the account.
- **Designation of Content Providers:** Department heads should designate qualified staff as authorized social media content providers for their department's social media activities. Only staff who have appropriate training or guidance should post on behalf of the Town or a Town department. The Communications Team should be informed of and involved in training these staff as needed.
- **Policy Compliance:** Ensure that staff under their supervision who engage in official social media activities are familiar with this Policy and adhere to it. Managers should periodically remind their teams of social media protocols and address any issues of non-compliance.
- **Content Oversight:** Monitor the department-specific content being posted on social media for accuracy and appropriateness. Department heads should review or approve, when necessary, social media postings about major initiatives or sensitive issues in their area. They should also promptly address any errors or misrepresentations related to their department's services on social media, coordinating with Communications for any necessary corrections.
- **Issues Management:** Communicate with the Communications Team about any social media incidents or significant concerns (for example, a surge of public complaints on social media about a departmental program

or a misinformation trend related to the department's operations). Collaborative efforts will ensure a timely and unified Town response.

5.3. Authorized Social Media Content Providers (Staff)

Authorized content providers are Town staff (or other Town representatives) who have permission to post content on official Town social media accounts (including departmental accounts). These individuals are responsible for the following:

- **Adherence to Standards:** Follow all guidelines outlined in this Policy when creating or sharing content. Content providers must ensure their posts are factually accurate, written in a professional and consistent tone, and do not conflict with the Town's messaging or values.
- **Quality and Consistency:** Ensure that all information posted on Town accounts is up-to-date, clear, and grammatically correct. When in doubt about messaging or language, content providers should consult Communications for review or approval before posting.
- **Timeliness:** Monitor assigned social media channels regularly during business hours and coordinate with Communications to respond to inquiries or comments in a timely manner (per the guidelines in the Procedure section). Authorized content providers should also be prepared to assist Communications in monitoring their pages outside of regular hours during emergencies or critical incidents, as directed.
- **Engagement and Etiquette:** Engage with the public on social media courteously and helpfully. Content providers should never argue with or disrespect a commenter. In cases of incorrect information posted by a user, respond with correct information in a polite manner. For general opinions or commentary from users that do not require a response (see Procedure – Responding to Inquiries and Comments), use judgment to determine if a response is needed and consult Communications if unsure.

5.4. **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Protect sensitive information. Do not post personal information about any individual (staff or public) or confidential Town business on social media. Content providers must abide by privacy laws (e.g., do not share details that would violate someone's privacy rights or any information from closed sessions or confidential documents). If sharing photos or videos from Town events, ensure that appropriate permissions have been obtained (e.g., signed media release forms or posted notices at events) before publishing images of individuals.

- **Security and Access:** Work with Communications and IT (if applicable) to ensure account credentials are securely managed. Passwords for official accounts should be strong and only shared

with authorized individuals on a need-to-know basis. At least two Town staff members (for example, a department content provider and a Communications staff member) should have administrative access to each account to ensure continuity. If a content provider leaves the Town or changes roles, department heads must coordinate with Communications to revoke or transfer access and update passwords promptly.

- **Issues Escalation:** If a content provider encounters a difficult situation on social media (such as a hostile comment thread, a question they cannot answer, or a post that potentially violates the commenting guidelines), they should pause engagement and consult the Communications Team for guidance on next steps. Content providers should not attempt to handle sensitive issues entirely on their own without informing Communications or their manager.

(For guidelines on personal use of social media by staff, refer to *Appendix 2: Social Media Guidelines for Staff*, which provides recommendations to employees on how to reference or reflect their Town role appropriately on personal accounts.)

6. Procedure

The following procedures and guidelines govern how the Town's social media accounts are to be used and managed on a day-to-day basis.

6.5. Social Media Use Guidelines

- **Primary Information Source:** The Town's official website (and other official online platforms, as applicable) remains the primary and authoritative source of information about Town programs, services, and initiatives. Content posted on social media should, when feasible, direct users back to the Town's

website or other official resources for more detailed information. Social media is used to complement official communications, not replace them.

- **Uses of Official Accounts:** The Town’s social media accounts should be used to achieve the following goals:
 - Increase public awareness of municipal services, programs, initiatives, events, and projects.
 - Broaden the reach of key corporate messages and announcements to inform more residents.
 - Provide customer service by answering general inquiries and, in doing so, build public trust in the Town’s responsiveness and transparency.
 - Encourage engagement and collaboration with community members and stakeholders, inviting feedback and participation where appropriate.
 - Disseminate urgent or emergency information quickly (for example, alerts about weather events, road closures, or other time-sensitive notices) and to correct misinformation circulating in the community.

6.6. **Official Account Identification:** All official Town social media profiles must clearly indicate they are an official channel of the Town of Aylmer. This includes using the Town’s name, logo/branding as appropriate, and providing an official contact method. Each account’s about/bio section should include:

- A statement that the account is maintained by the Town of Aylmer (for example, “Official LinkedIn account of the Town of Aylmer”).
- Contact information or a link to the Town’s website for customer service (e.g., a phone number or email for inquiries, or direction to the main Town contact page).
- The hours during which the account is actively monitored (e.g., “Mon–Fri, 8:00am–5:00pm, excluding holidays”).

6.7. A link to or notice of the Town’s social media Terms of Use or Commenting Guidelines (which inform the public about moderation policies – see Appendix 3 if applicable). For example, profiles might include a line: “Please note: comments violating our guidelines may be removed. See our commenting policy on [Town Website link].”

- **Account Management and Access:** Each Town social media account must have designated administrators (authorized content providers) as assigned by the Communications Team and relevant Department Head. Account credentials (usernames and passwords) must be stored securely. The Communications Team should have access to all corporate social media account credentials to ensure oversight and the ability to intervene or post in the event of staff turnover or emergencies.
- **Approval of New Accounts:** Before creating a new official Town social media account (for a department, project, or campaign), the department must consult with Communications. Together, they will evaluate the need for the

account, ensure it serves a clear purpose and audience, and that there are adequate resources to maintain it. Communications will guide account setup to ensure brand consistency and will log the account in the Town's inventory of social media channels.

- **Content Planning:** Social media content should be planned and, when appropriate, scheduled in advance (using the Town's Social Media Management Platform). Communications and departments will collaborate to create a content calendar that aligns messages across different platforms and ties into Town events, seasonal activities, or announcements. However, staff will remain flexible to post unscheduled content as needed for timely updates or emergent issues.
- **Appropriate Content:** Posts on Town accounts should be relevant to municipal business and of public interest. Examples of suitable content include: municipal service announcements, event promotions, council meeting highlights, public safety information, employment opportunities, community surveys or engagement initiatives, emergency alerts, and recognition of community or staff achievements. Content must always remain politically neutral in tone – Town accounts must not be used for campaigning or politically partisan messages. During an election period, additional care must be taken to ensure posts do not favour any candidate (in accordance with the Municipal Elections Act and Town policies).
- **Inappropriate Content:** The Town will not post or tolerate certain types of content on its accounts, including but not limited to: content that is illegal, defamatory, or harassing; personal opinions unrelated to Town business; confidential information or personal data; content that violates copyright/trademark laws; or any material that contravenes the Town's codes of conduct (e.g., offensive language or discriminatory material). If staff are unsure whether a piece of content is appropriate for posting, they should seek guidance from the Communications Team.
- **Compliance with Accessibility:** All social media content should strive to meet accessibility standards in line with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This means, for example, providing alternative text for images (descriptions for screen readers), using captions or transcripts for videos when possible, and writing in clear language. The Communications Team will provide tools or training for content providers to ensure posts are accessible to all community members.
- **Monitoring and Maintenance:** The Communications Team will regularly review the performance and relevance of each social media channel the Town operates. Platforms that are no longer effective in reaching the intended audience may be re-evaluated or deactivated in consultation with the relevant department. Likewise, new platforms that gain popularity will be reviewed for

potential use. Communications will recommend changes to the Town's social media portfolio as necessary to keep our outreach current and impactful.

6.8. Responding to Inquiries and Comments

Consistent and courteous responsiveness on social media is important to maintain public trust. The Town will adhere to the following practices when engaging with the public online:

- **Regular Monitoring and Response Times:** The Town (primarily through the Communications Team or designated content providers) will monitor official social media accounts during regular business hours (for example, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays). The Town will strive to acknowledge or respond to direct inquiries, questions, or comments requiring a response within one business day.
 - Outside of regular hours, urgent issues will be addressed on an as-needed basis. The Town may pre-schedule posts outside of business hours (such as reminders about events or emergency alerts), but routine monitoring in evenings or on weekends will generally not occur unless a special situation requires it. In exceptional circumstances (e.g., a significant weather event or emergency situation after hours), the Town will make arrangements to monitor and respond as necessary outside normal hours.
- **Guidelines for When to Respond:** The Town will determine which social media comments or messages require a response:
 - The Town will reply to questions or comments if they are inquiries about Town services, programs, events, or policies, or if they contain information that is incorrect or misleading about the Town. In these cases, staff will provide the correct information or direct the individual to the appropriate resources.
 - The Town may choose not to reply to comments that are statements of personal opinion (whether in favor of or against Town decisions) or general remarks that do not seem to be asking for a response. People are free to express their views, including disagreement with Town policies or decisions, and such posts may simply be noted without an official answer as long as they remain respectful (see Moderation below).

6.9. The Town will not engage in back-and-forth arguments on social media. If a response has been given to correct misinformation or answer a question, and the user continues to argue or is unsatisfied, staff will consider directing the conversation offline or into a private channel (e.g., direct message by email or suggesting a phone call) to avoid prolonged public disputes.

- **Moderation of Comments:** The Town's social media pages are intended to be open forums for community discussion, but they are moderated to ensure a respectful and constructive environment. The Town will not tolerate comments or posts on its pages that are offensive or inappropriate. Specifically, content that includes vulgar language, personal attacks

(especially those targeting Town employees or any individual), hate speech, discriminatory remarks, or anything that violates the law or the Town's policies is considered unacceptable.

- If a comment or post from a follower violates the Town's public commenting guidelines or this Policy, the Town reserves the right to take appropriate action. Moderation actions may include hiding or deleting the offending comment (where platform settings allow) and/or blocking or muting the user who posted it. For severe or repeated violations, the Town may also report the user or the content to the platform administrators.
- Examples of content that will be removed or result in further action include: harassment or bullying of any individual, profanity-laden commentary, clearly false accusations against the Town or others, commercial spam, and comments that divulge someone's personal information without consent.
- When a comment includes criticism or negative feedback about the Town that is expressed in a civil manner, the Town will not remove it simply because it is unfavorable. Constructive criticism and diverse opinions are welcome; only comments violating the standards of decorum and respect, noted in appendix 3, will be moderated.
- **Tone of Engagement:** When responding on social media, Town representatives will maintain a professional, helpful, and polite tone. Responses should be written in the first-person plural (e.g., "We will look into this issue for you.") to reflect the Town's voice, and whenever appropriate, should include an offer of further assistance or contact information for follow-up. The goal is to provide accurate information and excellent customer service online, just as the Town strives to do in person or on the phone.

6.10. **Privacy in Responses:** Staff should be cautious not to request or reveal personal details in public responses. If a resident's inquiry requires sharing personal information (e.g., account numbers, addresses, or any private details), the staff member should move the conversation to a private message by email or recommend an offline contact method for resolution. For example, "We'll need some personal details to assist you. Please send us a direct message by email or email us at [address] so we can help."

- **Sharing and Following:** As an active participant in the online community, the Town's official accounts may choose to follow other reputable organizations, partners, or community groups. The Town may also share or "repost" content from other organizations or individuals, if that content is positive, informative, and relevant to the Town's work or community. Any content the Town shares should align with the [Town of Aylmer's Strategic Plan principles](#), the [Town of Aylmer Strategic Communications Plan](#), and support the Town's programs, services, or initiatives. For example, sharing a post from a local public health authority or a school about a community event would be appropriate. Conversely, the Town will avoid sharing or engaging with content that is

partisan, religious (beyond cultural or community recognition), or otherwise outside the Town's municipal mandate.

By following these response guidelines, the Town aims to foster a respectful and informative dialogue on its social media channels while managing community expectations regarding responsiveness and appropriate conduct.

7. Documentation / References

This Policy should be read and implemented in conjunction with the following documents and legislation (as applicable):

- [Town of Aylmer 2024–2027 Strategic Plan](#) – particularly the guiding principles and strategic priorities that outline the Town's values and vision.
- [Town of Aylmer Strategic Communications Plan](#) – which provides a vision for improved engagement and stakeholder relations
- Town of Aylmer Employee Code of Conduct – standards of conduct expected of all staff, which apply to online behavior just as they do in the workplace.
- Town of Aylmer Council Code of Conduct – standards for Mayor and Council members in all activities, including guidance on social media conduct and ethics.
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) – Ontario legislation governing the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information by municipalities. Social media content is subject to MFIPPA, meaning that information posted by the Town or comments received could be considered public records and must respect privacy rules.
- Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (Ontario) – governs campaign activities. During municipal election periods, this Act, along with the Town's Use of Corporate Resources policy, imposes specific restrictions on social media use (e.g., not using Town accounts or resources to promote any candidate).
- Municipal Conflict of Interest Act (Ontario) – outlines how members of Council must avoid conflicts. Social media should not be used to circumvent any process related to declaring or addressing conflicts of interest in Council matters.
- Ontario Human Rights Code and Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) (Harassment provisions) – while not specific to social media, these laws inform our commitment to a workplace and community free of discrimination and harassment. Online interactions by staff or officials are expected to uphold these principles.
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) – requires that communications, including online content, be accessible. This Policy supports AODA compliance by integrating accessibility considerations into social media use.

Failure to adhere to this Social Media Policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or appointment. Any disciplinary

measures will be determined in accordance with the Town's human resources policies and the specific circumstances of the infraction.

Appendix 1: Social Media Guidelines for Elected Officials

The following guidelines are provided to assist the Town's elected officials (Mayor and Council members) in managing their use of social media in a manner that upholds the integrity of the office and complies with the Town's standards and policies. These guidelines supplement the Council Code of Conduct and the provisions of the Town of Aylmer's Social Media Policy.

1. **Maintain confidentiality:** Do not post information that has been discussed in closed (in-camera) Council sessions or any information that is confidential or proprietary to the Town. If you would not present certain information in a public Council meeting, it is not appropriate to share on social media. Always protect sensitive Town business and the privacy of individuals.
2. **Maintain privacy:** Avoid sharing personal or private information about others (fellow Council members, Town staff, or residents) on social media without consent. Do not discuss specific situations involving identifiable individuals (such as residents or employees) on public forums. If someone shares a personal concern with you as a Councillor, take care to address it through the proper channels rather than public posts, unless you have permission and it's appropriate to do so.
3. **Be authentic:** Use social media in your own voice to genuinely connect with the community. It's best to post content that you have written yourself or that reflects your personal perspective as an elected official. If you share or re-post material written by someone else (such as an article, letter, or statement), ensure you have the right to do so and give proper credit. Clearly state the source of the material and avoid implying others' content or opinions are your own. Also, respect intellectual property rights – do not use images, videos, or text owned by others without permission.
4. **Provide timely information:** If you choose to engage on social media, be prepared to monitor your accounts and respond in a timely manner. Citizens often expect quick replies or updates. During urgent situations, use your social media to amplify official Town communications. In routine times, try to reply to inquiries or comments directed at you as an official in a reasonable timeframe, or direct the person to the appropriate Town channel for quicker service. Consistency and timeliness in your social media presence can improve public trust and confidence in your responsiveness.
5. **When in doubt, do not post:** You have an obligation to ensure that your social media posts as a Councillor are accurate, truthful, and not misleading. If you are unsure about a piece of information – for example, a detail about a Town project or the correctness of a statistic – verify it with Town staff (such as the CAO or Communications) before posting. Similarly, if you are uncertain whether it is appropriate to share certain information, err on the side of caution and refrain from posting. It is better to double-check facts or seek advice than to post something that might have to be retracted or could breach policy.
6. **Respect Town staff:** Always be mindful of the professional role of Town employees. Social media should not be used as a venue to criticize or second-

guess staff or their decisions. If you have concerns about an employee or operational issue, those concerns should be raised through proper internal channels, not on a public forum. Publicly disparaging staff can damage the reputation and working relationship between Council and employees and can undermine staff's ability to do their jobs impartially. Maintain a tone of respect toward staff in all online communications, as you would in Council chambers.

7. **Respect fellow Council members and the public:** Hold yourself to the same standard of decorum online as you do in official Council proceedings. Do not use social media to insult, bully, or belittle members of the public, other elected officials, or anyone interacting on the platform. Avoid “flaming” (heated, angry exchanges) or “shaming” individuals, even if you strongly disagree with their comments. Focus on factual, constructive dialogue regarding issues, not personal attacks. Remember that you are always seen as a representative of the Town; contentious or disrespectful behavior on your part can reflect poorly on the municipality and the office you hold.
8. **Remember the permanence of the internet:** Once information is published online, it is effectively part of a permanent public record. Even if you delete a post, it may have been archived, screenshot, or shared elsewhere. Always assume that anything you say or do on social media could be saved and rediscovered in the future. This doesn't mean you shouldn't post at all – rather, it's a reminder to post thoughtfully. If a topic is too complex to address within the character limits or format of a social media platform, consider directing people to a more complete statement or article (for example, a link to a detailed explanation on the Town's website or a personal blog where you can fully articulate your position). Providing context is key to avoid misunderstandings in short-form social media posts.
9. **“If you start it, commit to it”:** Before creating an official social media presence (e.g., a Facebook page or LinkedIn account) as a Councillor, be ready to maintain it. An outdated or infrequently used account can cause confusion or lead to missed communications. Keep your official pages active with current information – share updates, post news from around the community, and engage periodically so that residents know the account is still a valid channel to reach you. If you find you cannot maintain a particular account, it may be better to close or pause it rather than leave it unattended (but remember that archiving the content might be necessary). Being consistent and reliable on social media will enhance your credibility with constituents.
- 7.11. **Adhere to policies and laws:** Your use of social media is subject to all applicable legislation and Town policies. This includes election campaign rules and conflict of interest laws. For example, during an election, be careful to separate campaign social media activities from any Town-affiliated accounts and do not use Town resources for election purposes (per the Municipal Elections Act). Be mindful of the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act – do not use social media to influence Council decisions in which you have a declared conflict. Always follow the Council Code of Conduct on social media as it applies to standards like respectful conduct, confidentiality, and upholding the integrity of

your office. In short, all the rules that govern your behavior as a Councillor offline also apply online.

By following these guidelines, elected officials can use social media as an effective tool to engage with residents and share information while maintaining the decorum and integrity expected of public office holders.

Appendix 2: Social Media Guidelines for Staff

These guidelines provide Town of Aylmer staff with recommended best practices for using personal social media accounts in relation to their role as Town employees. They are intended to help staff positively represent the Town's values and avoid conflicts or issues when online. Note that these are guidelines and examples for personal conduct; official use of social media on behalf of the Town is covered by the main Policy.

- **Share positive experiences:** Employees are encouraged to use their personal social media to share and celebrate the positive aspects of their work and involvement in the community. This might include highlighting personal achievements at work or events you participated in as a Town employee (e.g., completing a successful project, receiving an award or certification, volunteering at a Town-sponsored community clean-up, or attending a Town event). Such posts can reflect well on both you and the Town, showcasing pride in public service and commitment to the community. When doing so, ensure that you are not disclosing anything confidential – focus on the publicly known aspects of the achievement or event.
- **Use your best judgment:** Before you post content that in any way relates to your job, the Town, or municipal matters, pause and think critically. Ask yourself:
 - Does this post align with the [Town's 2024–2027 Strategic Plan](#) principles and the overall values of the organization? For instance, if one of the Town's principles is collaboration, posting something that is divisive or dismissive of others would not be aligned.
 - Does this support the [Town's vision and priorities](#)? Consider whether your content is in harmony with the Town's goals (for example, fostering a welcoming community, encouraging civic engagement, etc.). Posts that severely contradict the Town's mission or strategic priorities could erode public trust.
 - If the answer to these questions is "no" or even unclear, it might be best to rethink or refrain from posting that content. Remember that even on personal accounts, your role as a Town employee could be recognized by community members, and your posts might be interpreted as reflecting on the Town. Using good judgment protects both you and the Town's reputation.
- **Remember that the internet is permanent:** Once you publish something online, it can be difficult or impossible to fully remove it. Even if you delete a post or tweet, it may have been already captured (via screenshots or archiving) and could exist elsewhere. Always post with the assumption that it

- will exist indefinitely. This mindset will help you avoid sharing anything that you might later regret or that could negatively impact your career or the Town.
- **If in doubt, don't post:** When you feel uncertain about whether it's appropriate to share information related to your work or the Town, it's safer not to post it. In particular:
 - Do not share confidential or sensitive information. Information that has not been made public by the Town (such as internal plans, draft documents, personal data about others, or incidents under investigation) should never be posted on social media.
 - Avoid posting inaccurate or speculative information. If you are not sure about the accuracy of something, do not guess or spread rumors online. Misinformation can quickly spread and cause confusion.
 - Protect privacy. Do not post personal contact details (like personal phone numbers or personal email addresses) of your colleagues, supervisors, or any private individuals you interact with through work. Similarly, avoid posting photos of colleagues or citizens taken during work activities unless you have their permission and the content is suitable for public sharing.
 - **Respect professional boundaries:** You may sometimes receive social media friend/follow requests or messages from residents or clients because of your role. It's perfectly acceptable to maintain boundaries. You are not obligated to connect with residents on your personal accounts. If a resident contacts you on your personal account about Town business, it's advisable to redirect them to an official Town channel for service (or to your work contact, if appropriate). This keeps a proper record of the inquiry and ensures it's handled through official systems.
 - **Avoid copying correspondence into social media:** Do not copy and paste emails or other private communications from Town staff or residents directly into social media posts. Doing so can easily strip important context and might breach confidentiality or privacy. If you feel that information from an email is important to share publicly, obtain permission from the author or your supervisor and consider having Communications or the appropriate department share it through official channels with proper context.
 - **Use clear and appropriate media:** If you choose to share photos or videos related to your work (and you have ensured it's okay to do so), make sure they are clear and appropriate. Avoid images that might inadvertently show sensitive information (like a whiteboard in the background with confidential notes). Also, attempt to include text descriptions of images for accessibility if the platform allows (e.g., use alt text for images on LinkedIn/Facebook). When using hashtags in your personal posts about Town matters, consider using the same hashtags the Town is using in its official communications to help others find and contextualize your post (for example, if the Town is using

#Aylmer2025 for a strategic plan initiative, you might use that tag when talking about that initiative on your own profile).

- **Be transparent about your views:** If you talk about Town-related issues on your personal social media, it can be useful to clarify that these are your personal views, not an official Town position (when that is the case). For instance, you might preface a statement with “Speaking as a resident/staff member, not on behalf of the Town...”. However, note that even with a disclaimer, you should still use judgment – a disclaimer won’t shield you or the Town from all repercussions if the content is inappropriate. It simply helps delineate personal opinion versus official information.

Examples of appropriate ways to use your personal social media in relation to your work:

- Sharing a public Town announcement or news release on your own timeline, along with a positive comment. Example: “Proud of our Town – we just launched a new park clean-up program! Check it out [link to official announcement].” This amplifies the Town’s message and shows your engagement as an employee.
- Promoting a Town job posting or event. If the Town posts about a job opening in your department or an upcoming community event, you can share that post or create your own, saying for example, “We’re hiring for our team – come work with us! [link]” or “Looking forward to this weekend’s Fall Festival in Aylmer – hope to see you there! [link to event details].”
- Engaging with partner content. If a partner organization (like a local charity, library, or police service) posts something relevant to the Town’s initiatives, you might share it. Example: sharing a conservation authority’s post about a tree-planting event in town, adding “Great to see our community partners in action for the environment.” This kind of sharing reinforces community relationships.
- Redirecting public inquiries appropriately. Suppose someone you know asks a question on your Facebook profile like, “Does anyone know when the town will pick up yard waste bags?” As a Town employee (not in an official capacity on your personal page), you could respond: “The Town has a schedule for yard waste pickup – best info is on the Town’s website or you can call Town Hall at xxx-xxxx. You can also tag the Town’s official page here @TownofAylmer for more details.” In doing so, you’re helpful but also guiding them to the official source. If you know the exact answer and it’s straightforward, it’s okay to provide it, but tagging the Town or giving the official contact ensures the information is verified and logged through the right channels.

In all cases, remember that as a Town employee your personal actions online can reflect on the Town. By following these guidelines – thinking before posting, keeping content positive and factual, and separating your personal voice from the Town’s voice

– you can enjoy social media personally while still being mindful of your role in the organization.

Appendix 3: Social Media Commenting Guidelines for Followers

The Town invites community members to post, share, discuss, and debate while treating each other with respect. The Town will not tolerate posts or comments that include:

- Profane or inappropriate language;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation;
- Personal attacks, harassment, threats, or defamatory statements directed at any individual or group.
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Comments/posts not related to a posted article/topic/information;
- Business solicitation;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Information about any identifiable individual (including photographs of, or information about that individual, as well as views or opinions about that individual), unless the identifiable individual provided specific, written consent to the Town in advance; and,
- Content that is false, misleading, or promotes misinformation.
- Any content deemed inappropriate by the Town of Aylmer.

The Town may ask users to refrain from posting inappropriate comments, or mute, block, and/or ban users for violating these social media commenting guidelines.