

# Town of Carleton Place Social Media Policy



## Background

Many municipal governments have incorporated the use of social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram, to reach their target audiences. The use of social media enables municipalities to communicate and engage directly and instantaneously with a wide range of residents. However, while the benefits of social media are substantial, its unregulated use can pose considerable risk.

The primary objective of the Town's social media presence is to communicate accurate, relevant and timely municipal information to residents, businesses and visitors.

Given the growth of the community as well as the increase in popularity of various social media platforms, having a clear policy will help ensure the appropriate use and management of social media and improve the effectiveness, efficiency, timeliness and transparency of the Town's communications.

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## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines and standards to ensure the appropriate use and management of social media on behalf of the Town of Carleton Place. This policy serves to:

- safeguard the Town's reputation;
- provide employees and members of Council with clear usage guidelines;
- provide guidelines around content creation, monitoring, and responding to inquiries to ensure residents are provided with useful information.

This policy is to be followed alongside other relevant municipal policies such as:

- Code of Conduct
- Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy
- Cell Phone Policy

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## Scope

This Policy applies to all employees of the Town of Carleton Place (including part-time, casual/temporary, and full-time employees) as well as to elected officials (Mayor / Council), and volunteers. A section of the policy also applies to social media users engaging with the Town on the Town's social media sites.

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## Section 1 - Strategy

### 1.1 Voice

It is important to keep in mind the need to maintain a consistent and recognizable tone when multiple users are posting to the Town’s various social media accounts by utilizing a collective rather than single voice in posts.

We Are:	But Not:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always use ‘we’ instead of “I”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blunt to the point of being rude</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casual when appropriate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent users of slang, emojis or memes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authoritative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overly bureaucratic</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledgeable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Condescending</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gossipers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proud</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrogant</li> </ul>

### 1.2 Goals for the Town’s Social Media Presence:

- Broadcast: Be the primary source of relevant and factual information regarding the delivery of municipal services and community initiatives.**
  - 1.1 Share information that directly affects residents and businesses (ex: waste collection information, disruption in municipal services, public meetings, etc.).
  - 1.2 Create visually appealing and creative content.
  - 1.3 Share information from specialized department accounts to the Primary Account.
- Connect: cultivate an environment that encourages a sense of community and inclusiveness.**
  - 2.1 Celebrate the significant accomplishments of residents, businesses and community organizations and be the ‘champion’ for a sense of community.
  - 2.2 Promote organized opportunities to residents to connect with other residents, local organizations and members of Council.
- Collect Feedback: gain public input on issues prior to decision-making.**
  - 3.1 Listen more than we speak.
  - 3.2 Create a safe and a healthy space for meaningful and impactful community discussion.
- Humanize Staff and Council: when the audience realizes there are actual people working to better their community and behind the decisions that are being made, they are more likely to resist the impulse to retort negatively.**

4.1 When possible, and appropriate, identify key decision-makers or policy-developers related to the information being shared by title and offer contact information to provide an opportunity for a more personal interaction.

5. **Integrate social media communications with the Town’s overall communications delivery program: Not every piece of communication is suitable for every medium. A coordinated effort will ensure that the appropriate channels are being used for a wider dissemination of information.**

5.1 Ensure that Council and Staff are made aware of social media interactions. Relevant questions and comments can be used to inform further communications and provide an opportunity to address items raised on social media in traditional communication channels (ex: Town’s website, newspaper advertisements, direct mail outs, etc.).

## 1.3 Conduct

1.3.1 - **Account Managers** posting content on the Town’s social media pages are expected to:

- Speak professionally as a representative of the Town. This means:
  - Being non-confrontational
  - Not offering personal opinions
  - Using appropriate language
- Ensure information and responses are accurate
- Ensure information and responses are posted in a timely manner.

1.3.2 **Residents** commenting on Town content or engaging in conversations on Town pages are expected to be:

- Respectful
- Non-discriminatory

The use of discriminatory, derogatory, obscene, offensive, racist, hateful, sexual, abusive, and/or threatening language will result in the comment being deleted from the page. Repeated behaviour of this nature will result in the user being blocked from the Town’s social media at the discretion of the Chief Administrative Officer.

1.3.3 **Employees** are advised to consider the Town’s Code of Conduct and Workplace Violence and Harassment policy when posting to their personal social media pages. Employees are to be aware that whether they are at work or communicating through personal accounts, their actions can have a negative impact on the municipality’s reputation. We advise employees of the Town of Carleton Place to:

- **Make it clear that posts/statements/comments on your personal account are yours and in no way represent those of the Town of Carleton Place.** It should never be implied that personal opinions and content posted on your personal accounts are authorized, on behalf of, or endorsed by the Town.
- **Avoid sharing confidential information received as a result of your employment with the Town.**
- **Avoid posting or commenting in a manner that is offensive, derogatory or discriminatory, or contrary to the Corporation’s values.** If content of this nature is brought to the Town’s attention, the employee may be asked to remove their place of employment from their profile.
- **Employment Status** – when you are no longer an employee with the Town of Carleton Place you are expected to promptly remove the Town of Carleton Place as your current workplace/employer.

If an employee is found to be in violation of the Town’s Code of Conduct, Workplace Violence and Harassment or Social Media Policy, it may result in discipline, up to and including termination from employment.

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## Section 2 – Content

### 2.1 Approved Content:

Prior to posting, content submitted to the account manager for posting on social media should be vetted by the respective Departmental Manager. The posting of the content below should be done in a factual and straightforward manner:

- Municipal information specifically pertaining to the following departments:
  - Administration (Chief Administrative Officer's office);
  - Clerk;
  - Treasurer;
  - Public Works;
  - Development Services including Planning, Building and Engineering;
  - Library;
  - Childcare Services;
  - Protective Services;
  - Recreation and Culture.
- Contact information for Town officials and staff.
- Items from Council and Committee Agendas.
- Notification of awards given to members of the community (ex: Citizen of the Year, Senior of the Year).
- Shared information from regional, provincial or federal accounts (including recognition of grants or awards).
- Information sharing from the Carleton Place Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Carleton Place, Carleton Place Hospital, Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority, or Leeds, Grenville, Lanark District Health Unit.
- Information pertaining to a major community tourist attraction or event.
- Information from a local charitable organization that services the community (ex: Legion Branch, Interval House, Food Bank) that will assist, benefit or affect the general population.
- Holiday Greetings from the Mayor or Community Addresses from the Mayor of a general nature – with review and approval from the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO).

## **2.2 Approval Process for Content Requiring Authorization:**

When content is received that isn't obviously in the list of approved content, the account manager must always receive permission to post from his/her supervisor. In the case of the Communications Coordinator, approval is required from the CAO. Examples of content requiring authorization include:

- Information that is heavily influenced by personal opinion of a member of Council or Staff.
- Information pertaining to a sensitive or highly political decision made by Council. In this case, Council shall be notified prior to posting by the CAO and the information will only be posted with the express permission of the CAO after a review of Council comments.
- The advertisement of any individual business within the community, ribbon cuttings, donations and awards will be given special consideration.
- Information that *could be perceived* as the promotion of a member of Council, an individual or organization for political purposes.
- Community related content that originates outside of the organization.

## **2.3 Delegation of Authority**

- Account managers may post content without seeking prior approval as long as it falls under items identified in the approved content section and in no way could be viewed as questionable content.

- Members of Council are encouraged to participate and engage in social media, preferably on a ‘Public Figure’ page that indicates their position within Council (Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Councillor) or on their personal Facebook pages.
- Members of Council can comment on posts on the Town Hall Facebook page provided it is for the purpose of providing clarification on decisions made by Council and that the clarification is factual, void of personal opinions, and adequately communicates the collective decisions of the Council, Board or Committee, even if a Member disagrees with a majority decision. It will be at the discretion of the CAO as to whether or not a comment is at odds with what is allowed and should be removed.
- When material is being posted ‘on behalf of Council’, the remaining members of Council must be notified in writing by the CAO with a minimum of 1 hours’ notice prior to posting.
- Ultimately, the CAO will make the final decision as to whether or not an item can be posted as the page is Corporate property and this includes requests for postings from members of Council. Should a member of Council disagree with the CAO’s decision, they can ask that the matter be discussed on a Committee of the Whole agenda for a decision of Council on the matter.

## 2.4 Removal of Content

- Account managers may remove content under the following circumstances:
    - The content contains derogatory, obscene, racist, hateful, sexual, abusive, threatening or discriminatory language;
    - The content violates the Corporation’s Code of Conduct policy, particularly in respect to harassment;
    - A comment or post that is false and would perpetuate the sharing of misinformation;
    - Information that is in direct violation of an individual’s right to privacy;
    - Personal, antagonistic, or openly hostile attacks in which the individual is identified by name, against a staff member or member of Council;
    - Confidential information published without prior consent;
    - Content that suggests or encourages illegal activity;
    - Promotional messages for personal gain, advertisement or solicitation;
    - Content for the purpose of promoting a candidate for any elected or appointed office.
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## Section 3 - Monitoring and Responding

### 3.1 Monitoring

Each authorized social media account shall have a designated Account Manager. It is the responsibility of the Account Manager to monitor conversations and comments on their pages in order to answer legitimate questions or to respond when appropriate.

Due to the nature of social media, users typically expect responses in a timely, sometimes unreasonably fast, manner. Responding to comments outside of working hours and on the weekend will be at the discretion of the Account Manager unless they are explicitly instructed to do so by their manager or the CAO. Each Account Manager should receive instruction from their supervisor as to the amount of time they are permitted to spend monitoring and responding to comments each week outside of their regular working hours.

### 3.2 Responding

Providing an appropriate response, or how to action a response in a certain situation isn’t always obvious. There has to be some acceptance that not all feedback received will be positive. In fact, due to the nature of social media, a considerable amount of feedback or general comments could be considered negative. Participating in

the discussion can show that the Town is listening to the feedback, concerns and questions from residents. Account Managers should always respond in a non-defensive, factual and helpful manner.

The Account Manager **should** reply to social media communications if:

- The post is asking a direct question in a respectful manner about a specific municipal service and the account manager is able to provide an answer and/or further clarification in a customer service capacity;
- The Account Manager can provide suggestions or information that could help the poster make a decision or fix a problem;
- The post contains inaccurate or misinformation at which point the Account Manager can provide factual, supporting information to clear up conflicts;
- The post is in relation to an experience or observation (positive or negative) in which the Account Manager can provide further context, offer an explanation or offer to gather more information in a non-defensive way.

The Account Manager **is not expected to** reply to social media communications if:

- the post is perceived by the Account Manager as being intentionally inflammatory based on language used, tone or past history of the commenter;
- the post or tagging is directed at other users within the commenting thread;
- the post/comment is a statement of opinion in which the Account Manager can provide no further information/context/assistance or in which it is obvious the poster is not seeking resolution.
- Information is being shared via Facebook that relates to a change or reminder in relation to municipal policies or By-laws, and exceeds the Account Manager's technical knowledge of the respective subject area. The Account Manager will post a comment in the comments section of the post which states:
  - Please note, staff will not be replying to comments or answering questions within the comments section of this post. As the information in this post relates specifically to the -insert Department name here- Department, please contact – enter staff name and title here- with questions or requests for further information. We appreciate your patience. Staff will reply at their earliest opportunity.”

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## Appendix A - Authorized Accounts

**Approach:** The Town uses a decentralized approach when it comes to accounts associated with the municipality. The Primary account acts as the official voice of Town Hall. Specialized accounts are managed separately though information is also shared via the primary account.

**Note:** The Library has a separate social media policy which governs Library staff posting on their managed social media accounts which has been approved by the Library Board.

### **Primary Account: Town Hall**

Account Manger: Communications Coordinator

Administrators: Executive Assistant to CAO, Mayor and Council

Facebook: [carletonplacetownhall](#)

Twitter: [carleton\\_place](#)

YouTube: [townofcarletonplace](#)

### **Specialized Department Account: Library**

Account Manager: Children's Librarian / Assistant Librarian

Facebook: [carletonplacepubliclibrary](#)

Instagram: [cplibrary](#)

**Specialized Department Account: CP Childcare Services**

Account Manager: Childcare Supervisor

Facebook: [The Town of Carleton Place Childcare Services – 3 Francis Street](#) and [School Age Program](#)

**Specialized Department Account: Carleton Place Recreation and Culture Department**

Account Manager: Community Programmer

Facebook: [cprecreationandculture](#)

**Specialized Department Account: Ocean Wave Fire Company**

Account Manager: Assistant Chief of Fire Prevention

Facebook: [oceanwavefire](#)

Instagram: [oceanwavefire](#)

Twitter: [oceanwavefire](#)