

## COUNTY WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Subject: Website & Social Media Use Ref: Personnel & Human Resources Code: 18

Date Approved: March 13, 2018 Motion No: 103/13/03/18 Replaces: 057/14/02/12

The County of Northern Lights believes in the importance of maintaining transparent communication in order to be accountable to its residents. The County welcomes input from, and dialogue with, all members of the community, and seeks to ensure that current, accurate information regarding County activities, initiatives, and decisions is available to the public.

The County Website and Social media accounts allow County of Northern Lights to:

- Monitor and respond to current topics and emerging issues quickly.
- Open up local government to encourage citizen participation and support a strong civic culture.
- Increase transparency of government.
- Listen to residents and customers and enable us to improve County services, programs and practices.
- Provide a venue in which we can celebrate the community by publicizing events and sharing stories, videos and photos.
- Increase County administration effectiveness by distributing official notices and tender package notices through social media streams.

The scope of this policy is applicable to all County Employees, Volunteers and Councillors.

Signed:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Elected Official

Signed:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Administrative Officer

## **POLICY**

1. The County website and all social media sites must be approved by the Chief Administrative Officer or designate, who will appoint County staff members to administer the County's website and social media profiles. These individuals will be responsible for monitoring and updating County accounts. Anyone wishing to post information to a County website or social media account must do so through the designated individuals.
2. The content on the County website and social media sites shall adhere to County policies, and federal and provincial regulations.
3. Content on the County website and social media sites will be monitored to ensure adherence to this policy for appropriate use, message and branding consistent with the mission, vision, and guiding principles of the County. The County retains the authority to remove information from the sites as deemed appropriate.

Whenever possible, links should be established to direct users back to the County's official website from its social media sites, for more information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the County.

## **INTERNAL COMMENT GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SITES & COUNTY WEBSITE POSTINGS**

Designated staff members posting to the County website and social media sites are responsible for regularly reviewing comments and posting feedback on the social media sites. Staff should be knowledgeable about the topic and able to answer questions about the subject. The following guidelines must be followed when posting to a social media site:

- Write what you know. Make sure that you write and post about your area of expertise and ensure that the information you provide is both factual and accurate.
- Be transparent. Your honesty, or dishonesty, will be quickly noticed in the social media environment.
- Be judicious. All statements must be true and not misleading and all claims must be substantiated.
- Be responsible. What you write is ultimately your responsibility. When responding to a request or question, or stating information on behalf of the County, be sure you are the right person to be doing so. When in doubt, consult your supervisor or department head.
- Where appropriate, avoid bureaucratic language, formal language or industry jargon. Do not be combative.
- Ensure information is put out on a timely basis and that the information provided is accurate and reliable.

Do not write any content or postings that involve or are related to the following:

- Harassing statements.
- Matters in litigation or otherwise in dispute, or that could be in the future.
- Non-public information of any kind.
- References to illegal or banned substances and narcotics unless for public educational purposes.
- Pornographic, sexually-oriented, or otherwise offensive or illegal materials.
- Defamatory, libelous, offensive or demeaning material (do not engage in a combative exchange).
- Solicitation of business.
- Comments supporting and/or opposing political campaigns or referendums.
- Information that might compromise the safety or security of public buildings or activities.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

Social media websites that are maintained by the County shall contain a link to the public comment and moderation guidelines as follows:

Welcome to the County of Northern Lights' <insert name of social media website>! The purpose of this page is to share information of public interest with our many residents, businesses and visitors. If you are looking for the official source of information about the County of Northern Lights, please visit our website at [www.CountyofNorthernLights.com](http://www.CountyofNorthernLights.com). We value the opportunity for dialogue that <insert social media website> provides and while this is an open forum, it is also a family friendly one and we ask that you follow our posting guidelines:

- The County reserves the right to remove any comments that contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or that are deemed discriminatory, slanderous or obscene. Comments should reflect the topic or subject.
- We do not allow graphic, explicit or racial comments or submissions nor do we allow comments that contain unproven accusations or are abusive, hateful or intended to defame anyone or any organization.
- We do not allow posts that are solicitations or advertisements for commercial entities (excluding charitable events), products, political organizations or candidates.
- We do not allow comments that suggest or encourage illegal activity.
- We reserve the right to delete comments that are spam or include links to other sites.
- You agree to participate at your own risk, taking personal responsibility for your comments, your username and any information provided.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Social Media** - any form of online publication or presence that allows employees and citizens to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around the content on an internet-based application. For the purposes of this policy, social media should be broadly understood to include blogs, wikis, microblogs, message boards, chat rooms, electronic newsletters, online forums, social networking sites, and other sites and services that permit users to share information with others in a contemporary manner.

**County Website** – a composite of webpages designed for the County of Northern Lights by a webdeveloper of which all content is related to the County, its services, programs, policies, and departments.

**Personal Information** - Information about an identifiable individual. In the context of social media, it may include an individual's name, information such as their email address or username if it includes the individual's name, a portion of their name, or is otherwise identifying in nature (e.g. jane.smith, smithjane, jsmith, etc) or is a pseudonym (e.g. painter18) that is attributable to an identifiable individual by using other readily available information.

- **Non-identifying or individual anonymous** information is defined as information about a specific individual; however, the identity of the individual is not known and cannot easily become known by accessing other readily available information. This does not qualify as personal information.
- **Aggregate, statistical or anonymous information** is defined as information about groups of people or about specific individuals who are not and cannot be identified. This does not qualify as personal information.

## AS A PRIVATE CITIZEN

As private citizens County employees have the same rights of free speech as all other citizens; however, they may not represent the County of Northern Lights on their own personal social media sites and they are reminded that they agreed to keep County of Northern Lights related information confidential. All information arising from employment with the County is subject to this duty of confidentiality and also to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, which restricts the disclosure or use of personal information.

Acting as a private citizen, a County employee must use a private email address and make every reasonable effort to make it clear that their contribution to social media sites is as a private individual and not as a County representative.

Employees are to be aware of and adhere to the County of Northern Lights Personnel Code of Conduct, as well as the Harrassment & Bullying Policy and any other applicable County policies when using social media.

Employees should be aware that the County of Northern Lights may observe content and information made available by employees through social media. Employees should use their best judgement in posting material that is neither inappropriate nor harmful to the County of Northern Lights, its employees or customers.

After hours online activity or use of social media contrary to the terms of this policy or which otherwise contravenes the County of Northern Lights Personnel Code of Conduct or other County policy, may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination for cause.