



## HUMAN RESOURCES

27700 Hilliard Blvd. Phone: 440.617.4300  
Westlake, OH 44145 Fax: 440.617.4299

# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY FOR THE CITY OF WESTLAKE, OHIO

## PURPOSE

This document defines the social media policy for the City of Westlake the "City." The City believes in the value of social media to provide public outreach and deliver messages directly to and from citizens. Social media encourages citizen involvement and provides a real-time means of communicating local government messages on a day-to-day and emergency basis. The purpose of this policy is to ensure appropriate use of the City's social media accounts, and to establish guidelines for personal use of social media by City employees.

## PROFESSIONAL USE

All official City-related communication through social media should remain professional in nature and relevant to citizens of the City. City communications through social media should remain fact-driven and refrain from expressing views or opinions. Employees must not use official City social media for political purposes, to conduct commercial private transactions, or to engage in private business activities. Only individuals authorized by the City may publish content to a City social media account.

All City social media sites shall be (1) approved by the Mayor, (2) published using approved social media platforms and tools, and (3) administered by the Department Director or their designee.

## POSTING

Official social media accounts need to be clear, precise and follow industry best practices for posting updates. All content posted to City social media accounts should be:

- Relevant – Information that engages residents and pertains to their daily lives
- Timely – Pertains to deadlines, upcoming events, or current news
- Actionable – Prompts residents to take action as necessary and appropriate

City employees may not publish content on City social media accounts that includes:

- Confidential information
- Copyrighted material without permission
- Content that is obscene; is vulgar and lewd; is libelous or defamatory; constitutes hate speech; promotes illegal drug use; is aimed at inciting an individual to engage in unlawful acts or to cause a substantial disruption or material interference with the City's operations; or interferes with the rights of others
- Political views
- Commercial endorsements or SPAM

## **MODERATION OF THIRD-PARTY CONTENT**

The City does not necessarily endorse, support, sanction, encourage, verify or agree with comments, messages, posts, opinions, advertisements, videos, promoted content, external hyperlinks, linked websites (or the information, products or services contained therein), statements, commercial products, processes or services posted by users on any City social media account.

The City's social media accounts serve as limited public forums and all content posted is subject to preservation and disclosure in accordance with State of Ohio Public Records laws.

User-generated comments may be rejected or removed when the content includes any of the following:

- Incitement of violence or violent behavior,
- Defamation or spread of misinformation,
- Copyrighted or commercial material,
- Fraudulent material or accusations,
- Obscene, harassing, discriminatory, or illegal material,
- Compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems.

Users participate at their own risk, taking personal responsibility for their comments, username and any information provided.

Social media accounts are not monitored 24/7. If there is an emergency, contact 911.

## **RETENTION**

Social media accounts are subject to the City's Public Records Policy Procedures and State of Ohio Public Records Law. Any content produced or maintained on the City's social media accounts, including communication posted by the City and communication received from users, is a public record.

Social media accounts contain communications sent to or received by the City and its employees, and such communications are therefore public records subject to The City of Westlake Public Records Policy and the State of Ohio Public Records Law. These retention requirements apply regardless the type of record (e.g. digital text, photos, audio, and video). The Department maintaining a site shall preserve records pursuant to a relevant records retention schedule.

If a social media page is no longer of use, (1) ensure records have been archived according to City guidelines, (2) unpublish and delete page.

## **PERSONAL USE**

The City recognizes that employees may use social media for personal, as well as professional reasons. The City neither encourages nor discourages employees' use of social media for personal purposes. All City employees may have personal social media accounts. These accounts should remain personal in nature and be used to share personal opinions and non-work-related information.

Due to the nature of social media, even when using personal social media on or off duty, City employees have no expectation of privacy in anything posted in cyberspace. Employees must use "common-sense" when posting any information related to their employment.

The City does not seek to control any purely personal content posted by employees when it is unrelated to the

City, posted during non-working hours, does not identify the employee's position with the City, and is not otherwise disruptive or contrary to City operations or objectives.

## **GUIDELINES**

1. All City officials and employees using social media must adhere to the City of Westlake's Code of Ethics and appropriately maintain the levels of confidentiality with which they have been entrusted. In addition to this Policy, an employee's use of social media is also subject to all other applicable City policies and Federal, State and Local laws.
2. Employees are not authorized to speak or comment on behalf of the City on non-City social media accounts or when commenting on City accounts from their personal account. They must clearly indicate any opinions are their own and they are not speaking on behalf of the City.
3. Employees shall not post anything related to the City, including but not limited to, employees, City property, or personnel, which may be disruptive or contrary to City operations or objectives.
4. Employees are free to express themselves on social media to the degree that their speech does not adversely affect job performance, the performance of fellow employees, the City's interests or objectives, or anyone with a vested interest in the City of Westlake.
5. Employees should avoid the use of material which could be viewed as malicious, disparaging, obscene, harassing, discriminatory, threatening, or any other content, deemed, inappropriate by those in receipt of the material.
6. Employees may not disseminate non-public confidential information through social media.
7. Employees are not permitted to use their City of Westlake email for creating personal social media accounts.

*Limitations:* Nothing in this Social Media Policy or any other policy of the City of Westlake will be construed to prohibit employees from discussing or communicating about wages, benefits, or other terms and conditions of employment or the employees' mutual aid and protection in the workplace. However, if an employee chooses to use social media to post complaints or criticisms about the City, employees shall not post content (i.e. statements, photographs, video or audio) that could be reasonably viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening, intimidating, disparaging to other City employees and clients, or that might constitute harassment or bullying. Examples of such conduct might include offensive posts meant to intentionally harm someone's reputation or posts that could contribute to a hostile work environment on the basis of race, sex, disability, religion or any other status protected by law or City policies. Employees shall refrain from any speech that would interfere with City operations or objectives.