
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report CEC-04-2023 Social Media Policy Update

For Consideration by Council in Committee on April 11, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To update Policy 2015-03 Corporate Use of Social Media, rename it to Social Media Policy, and adopt the Social Media Guidelines for Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report CEC-04-2023 Social Media Policy Update be received;
2. AND THAT Policy 2015-03 Corporate Use of Social Media be replaced in its entirety with the updated version included as Attachment 1 to Report CEC-04-2023 and be renamed to Social Media Policy;
3. AND THAT the Social Media Guidelines for Council included as Attachment 2 to Report CEC-04-2023, be adopted.

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Approved: Craig Manley, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Social media is an extremely useful tool for sharing information about municipal programs, services and facilities. At present, Haldimand County uses a number of different social media platforms to reach community members and other external stakeholders.

As the landscape of social media continues to evolve, it is imperative that the County stay up-to-date on new technologies and best practices in order to share timely and relevant information with the public; engage in two-way communication with the community; and to ensure its highly visible brand and corporate image is safeguarded.

In order to better reflect current best practices, staff recommend the Corporate Use of Social Media Policy be replaced with an updated version. The updated policy includes significant amendments to the scope, terminology, definitions, and organizational oversight structure, and also establishes new protocols, criteria and courses of action for the County and its employees, volunteers and members of boards and committees. The policy does not explicitly apply to members of Council, however, Social Media Guidelines for Members of Council have also been drafted for reference and have been attached to this report.

BACKGROUND:

Haldimand County first emerged on social media in 2010 with the creation of its corporate Twitter account, as well as a Facebook page focused on Economic Development and Tourism. Information was sent irregularly through the corporate Twitter account until early 2017 when staffing resources were expanded to include a focused public relations and communications position to provide social media coordination and oversight, amongst other duties.

In 2017, through report [CAO-M01-2017 Launch of Corporate Facebook Account](#), Council approved the adoption of Facebook as a tool to be used for corporate communications, public relations and community engagement purposes, and subsequently the launch of the corporate Haldimand County Facebook page.

Since the launch, Haldimand County's Facebook audience has grown to nearly 6,000 followers. Over time, additional County social media accounts have been launched to further promote municipal programs, services and facilities, as shown in Chart 1. Recently staff have engaged the use of a third-party content management system to effectively manage its growing list of social media accounts and channels.

Chart 1: Summary of Haldimand County Social Media Accounts

Account	Platform	Primarily Operated by	Launch date	Followers (as of Feb 7, 2023)
@HaldimandCounty	Twitter	Customer Experience & Communications	2010	4,131
@HaldEmerg	Twitter	Emergency Services	2014	3,293
Haldimand County (Corporate)	Facebook	Customer Experience & Communications	2017	5,700
Haldimand County Public Library	Facebook	Haldimand County Public Library	2012	1,787
Haldimand County Tourism	Facebook	Economic Development & Tourism	2010	3,100
Business Haldimand	Facebook	Economic Development & Tourism	2020	356
@tourismhaldimand	Instagram	Economic Development & Tourism	2021	1,651
@haldemerg	Instagram	Emergency Services	2022	883

To date, any Haldimand County employee speaking on behalf of the municipality through official corporate channels, or commenting on County matters from personal accounts, have been required to abide by the Corporate Use of Social Media Policy, however, the policy did not include volunteers or members of Boards and Committees of Council. Experience in applying this policy has demonstrated a need to improve the clarity of language and intent which is being addressed through the proposed revisions.

Additionally, there was very little guidance with respect to Members of Council for engaging online regarding municipal business.

ANALYSIS:

Social media has become an incredibly important conduit of information and engagement between the County and the community it serves. Given the highly visible nature of social media content and the ability for information to be shared immediately and broadly, there is additional risk and scrutiny for the organization and individuals who represent the Corporation. For these reasons, protocols must be established that outline expectations for employees, volunteers and members of boards and committees with regards to the corporate standards and principles of communicating in the online world when it relates to discussing, sharing or commenting on County business. Due to the constantly evolving landscape of social media, it is important to frequently evaluate associated policies and protocols and ensure they are in alignment with organizational needs and industry best practices. Within the current Corporate Use of Social Media Policy, staff identified a large amount of content that is no longer relevant with current digital communications practices. As a result, staff drafted the proposed Social Media Policy and are recommending rescinding the existing one.

The proposed Social Media Policy outlines the expectations of employees, volunteers, and members of Boards and Committees of Council with regards to posting content to or commenting on any official Haldimand County operated accounts. The key principles of the current policy have not changed and continue to be included in the updated policy, as follows:

- Protect the County's reputation and ensure consistency and professionalism in how County staff communicate with public stakeholders via online forums and social media/networking platforms.
- Establish protocols, criteria and courses of action for:
 - establishing and monitoring acceptable social media tools for use by the corporation,
 - appropriately monitoring and administration of corporate social media tools,
 - providing timely, effective and accurate information and responses,
 - addressing controversial or sensitive matters relating to online content about the County, its business, or its employees,
 - identifying and addressing inappropriate conduct posted to corporate social media channels by either employees, volunteers, and members of Boards and Committees of Council,
 - ensuring appropriate records management and retention efforts as it relates to online platforms and tools,
 - ensuring appropriate protection of privacy for members of the public who engage or interact with the County via social media/networking tools.

Additionally, a number of key changes were made from the current policy, to contemporize the updated policy and are summarized below.

Scope:

- Expanded the scope to ensure volunteers and members of Boards and Committees of Council are also included in the policy. These individuals are considered representatives of Haldimand County and should be held to the same standard as employees with regard to safeguarding the organization's reputation;
- Further defined the expectations for employees with respect to commenting on County business from personal social media accounts.

Processes/Authorizations:

- Clarified expectations around staff use of corporate social media accounts;
- Delegated oversight and enforcement of the policy to the Customer Experience & Communications division.

Permissible Content:

- Addressed sharing posts from external agencies like conservation authorities or waste and water/wastewater contractors including job postings for urgent, public-safety related employment positions;
- Further delineated the role of Haldimand County's corporate social media accounts for the creation and scheduling of posts pertaining to municipal services, programs, and facilities that support meaningful, two-way engagement between the County and its stakeholders.

Should Council adopt the updated Social Media Policy, staff will continue to actively monitor digital communication trends and best practices, and will bring forward recommendations for further amendments as needed.

Staff are also introducing Social Media Guidelines for Council, attached in this report, as a reference document which provides a high-level guidance for sharing municipal information and engaging in two-way dialogue with members of the public. The Social Media Policy does not specifically apply to Council members since they are already expected to abide by the Council Code of Conduct.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

Not applicable.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: Yes

REFERENCES:

1. [CAO-M01-2017 - Launch of Corporate Facebook Account](#)
2. [Policy 2015-03 Corporate Use of Social Media](#)

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Social Media Policy
2. Social Media Guidelines for Council