



# Social Media Guidelines for Members of Council

## Social media guidelines

Social media is a lot different than the real world, but it should be approached in the same way you approach real life – by using sound judgment and common sense. One of the ‘safest’ ways to participate in social media is to treat all interactions as though you were at a dinner party – at your new boss’s house.

Members of Council who choose to utilize social media as a means of connecting with constituents in an official capacity must treat any account they create, operate and maintain as an extension of their official role. As such, any content posted to a Council Member’s official social media account must adhere to the Council Code of Conduct and ensure that information shared is accurate, respectful and will not harm the County’s public image.

Complaints related to a Council Member’s conduct on social media platforms may be submitted to the municipal clerk, and will be followed up on with the Integrity Commissioner if required.

## Follow Haldimand County’s codes of conduct and corporate values

Haldimand County’s codes of conduct, corporate pillars and policies are the foundation for these guidelines. As with all other public interactions, Members of Council are expected to abide by the Council Code of Conduct and other relevant protocols – including the Respect in the Workplace Policy, Information Technology Acceptable Usage and Council/Staff Protocol – when communicating online regarding municipal business.

## Set ground rules – and set the tone

If you’re going to create a ‘Page’ to share county-related information or share County-related information from a personal account, you should set some ground rules – and the tone – in order to manage the conversation and your audience’s expectations. “If you don’t do the gardening, it’s only a matter of time before you’re lost in the weeds.”

Members of Council who wish to create social media accounts are encouraged to highlight prominently whether the account is for information purposes only, whether it is for feedback or public engagement, whether the account is monitored, whether constituents can expect a response through that specific channel, etc.

Haldimand County’s Social Media Policy provides guidelines for members of the public who wish to engage with the county’s social media accounts. It also outlines the county’s commitment to engaging in meaningful discussion with its audience and how it will prevent disruptive or harmful comments from appearing on posts. Members of Council may adopt these guidelines for their own accounts.

## **Show up – or don't**

When you choose to engage actively on social media, you're committing to having an open, completely public conversation. You need to be strategic with your responses because you are going to have to deliver an outcome.

## **Maintain confidentiality**

Do not post information discussed in closed session or anything that you would not present in a public forum. If you aren't sure whether something can be shared publicly, always check with the subject matter expert or project lead. Better be safe than sorry!

## **Maintain privacy**

Do not post private or confidential information about fellow Councillors, county employees or constituents. Do not discuss situations involving named, pictured or otherwise identifiable individuals without their permission.

## **Refer customer service questions to the county's official channels**

When you're asked a question about county operations (garbage collection, snow removal, rink times etc.) you may not have all the answers, and that's okay. County staff respond to questions through a number of official channels. Elected officials can refer these types of questions to the county's official customer service channels like the website, [haldimandcounty.ca](http://haldimandcounty.ca), or by phone or email. For example:

Question: When will my street be plowed?

Answer: All @haldimandcounty streets are plowed in a specific order based on Ontario Maintenance Standards – a provincial regulation. You can see the plow route map at [www.haldimandcounty.ca/roads-operations/winter-control-snow-removal](http://www.haldimandcounty.ca/roads-operations/winter-control-snow-removal). If you've checked the map and think it has still been too long (i.e. 24 hours), you can call 905-318-5932 to report it.

Service complaints or complaints about staff should be acknowledged through social media but handled offline – through e-mail or phone – via a specific department's manager.

## **Be authentic and aware of copyright permissions**

Be authentic. Write as an extension of your own voice. When you re-post something written or created by someone else, first ensure you have the proper permissions to do so.

## **“Keep your words short and sweet in case you have to eat them.”**

Resist the urge to post too much and reply to everyone. Do not cut and paste emails from staff or constituents into posts without clear context and permissions. These messages are written for a specific audience and likely not meant to be shared in an open, public forum. You could be doing your constituents a disservice by sharing information without context. Wherever possible, share links to the county's Facebook posts or the county website for official

information. County web pages, Council reports and press releases top on the list of official documents that are appropriate to share with your social media audience.

## **Provide information when it counts**

Should you decide to engage in social media, know that monitoring and responding in a timely way are crucial. Social media participants expect timely responses to requests and expect co-participants to monitor social media properties frequently and regularly.

## **When in doubt, do not post**

Like County staff, Members of Council have an obligation to ensure their posts are accurate and not misleading, and that they do not reveal confidential information. Before posting in relation to a media inquiry, Council Members should contact Communications to provide a 'heads up' and obtain suggested key messages/assistance in drafting a response (to ensure accuracy).

## **Know the Internet is permanent**

Once information is published online, it becomes part of a permanent record. Tweets/Facebook posts can be deleted – but they WILL be screenshotted by your audience at the first scent of controversy. What's on the internet stays on the internet – you will be held to your word.

## **Social media is work. If you start it, commit to it**

Share relevant content from the County's official channels and keep your page updated. If your accounts appears static, it is likely to lose its relevance/credibility.

## **Dealing with difficult conversations**

Social media threads can quickly become a rabbit hole. Refer to the Red Brick Communications Social Media Response Chart for help navigating difficult conversations/questions. If you need more information or think the conversation would be better dealt with offline, suggest that. If you need further guidance – don't hesitate to reach out to Communications staff.

## **Haldimand County's official social media channels**

Sharing official content from Haldimand County's official social media channels helps spread factual information and updates about municipal programs, services and initiatives. It also enhances visibility of Haldimand's official channels and encourages members of the public to actively seek out information from the most accurate source: the County. The more followers Haldimand County has, the more widely we can share important news and stories of the important work being done in and around our community.

## **Matters under consideration by Council**

Refrain as much as possible from debating any matter under consideration by Council as a whole or publicly establishing a position in advance of receiving a staff report, discussion and deliberation at Council. It is appropriate to say you will bring the feedback forward and to inform staff and Council of feedback.



## Social Media Response Chart

