

Social Media Best Practices & Guidelines for Elected Officials and Appointed Boards, Commissions and Committees Using Personal or Professional Social Media Platforms

While elected officials and City Council-appointed board, committee and commission members may maintain and use personal web pages and websites, blogs, and social networking sites, their status as elected/appointed officials requires that the content of any postings on those sites not be in violation of the City's Code of Ethics as outlined in Chapter 1A of the Code of Ordinances.

The City's image as a professional, nonpartisan organization is critical to maintaining the respect of its constituents and operations free from personal opinions. Although the City recognizes that elected and appointed officials may choose to express themselves by posting personal information upon social media platforms or by making comments on sites hosted by other persons, groups, or organizations, this right of expression should not interfere with the operation and governance of the City. That is, although the City acknowledges its officials have the First Amendment right to free speech, the right is not absolute when involving matters of official City business, issues, or concerns.

If an elected or appointed official conducts any City business or communication as an official from a personal account, professional account, or an account created for a board/committee/commission, officials should assume that any City-related communications will be considered a public record subject to the Texas Public Information Act as set forth in Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code Sec. 552.002, as well as applicable portions of the records retention laws.

Definitions

1. **Social Media:** Social media accounts are third-party hosted online technologies that facilitate social interactions and dialogue. These online technologies are operated by non-City hosted services and may be used by elected and appointed officials to communicate with the public. Such third party hosted services/tools may include, but are not limited to: social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Nextdoor, etc.), micro-blogging tools (Twitter, RSS feeds, etc.), audiovisual networking sites (YouTube, Flickr, Snapchat, etc.), and blogs, etc.
2. **Personal Social Media Account:** Personal accounts are intended strictly for individual people only and are not meant for commercial or official purposes. On a personal account, a user can post updates, share photos and videos, maintain a friends list, share interests and more. Personal profiles are associated with a person, as opposed to a position.
3. **Professional Social Media Account:** A professional account is a place where artists, public figures, businesses, brands, organizations, and nonprofits can connect with their fans, constituents, or customers. Professional profiles are associated with an appointed or elected official's position, office, or seat.
4. **Campaign Social Media Account:** This kind of account is used by candidates to share information about their platform and views.

5. Non-public Information: Non-public information is information made available to elected and appointed officials that has not yet been made available to the general public. Non-public information may not be considered confidential by law, statute, or judicial decision.

Records Retention Recommendations

Any City-related content (messages, posts, photographs, videos, etc.) created or received using a social media account may be considered public record. As such, the following should be considered.

1. The City does not archive or manage social media accounts for elected or appointed officials. The official is solely responsible for the retention and archival of content published to individual accounts.
2. It is recommended that elected and appointed officials create a digital folder for City-related social media content. Officials should capture screenshots of City-related posts and save them in this folder.
3. Any posts that are deleted or hidden from an elected or appointed official's social media account for violation of the [City's posted social media guidelines](#) - whether the content was posted by the official or a member of the public - should be captured via screenshot and retained.

Best Practices for Elected and Appointed Officials

The following best practices are recommended to ensure that the personal and professional use of social media by elected and appointed officials is done so in a responsible manner.

1. Public officials should separate personal social media accounts from professional social media accounts so that City-related matters and all public records generated from those posts are easily archived and to avoid City-related information being intermingled with personal posts not related to City matters.
2. Officials should not delete posts and related comments regarding any City-related matters to avoid violating record preservation requirements outlined in Texas Government Code Sec. 552.
3. Officials should be mindful that posting content regarding City-related matters could inadvertently result in the violation of the Open Meetings Law if enough other public officials respond or comment on the post, resulting in a quorum. If this occurs, the online conversation should immediately cease with no further posts by the officials, and the City Secretary should be immediately notified.
4. It is expected that officials will occasionally have access to information that is considered to be non-public. It is recommended that officials consider the impact of sharing this type

of information publicly prior to posting. By way of example, such information may include but is not limited to, personnel retirement or resignation announcements.

5. Officials should be honest and accurate when posting information or news, and should quickly correct any mistakes, misstatements and/or factual errors in content upon discovery.
6. Officials should exercise caution with respect to posted comments, particularly those concerning the City and the business of the City.
7. Officials are strongly encouraged to consider the potential impact of social media statements prior to posting. Public comments, in any forum – including on personal and professional social media accounts – that contain racial slurs, profane language or acronyms for profane language, express bigotry toward a group based on race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, party affiliation, or any other legally protected classification may be considered conduct unbecoming. Such activity could result in a violation of the City's Code of Ethics.
8. Officials should consider whether liking, sharing, retweeting, or commenting on any social media posts could be perceived as an endorsement of or about the City, its employees, constituents, other public officials, suppliers, vendors, or contractors relating to views on various issues, including political affiliation.
9. Officials should refrain from using social media accounts to communicate with City employees about City-related matters, as this creates a public record on employees' personal accounts that must be retained per Public Records Law outlined in Texas Government Code Sec. 552. If elected officials want the City's official pages to respond to a social media inquiry, the following responses are suggested:
 - Twitter: "Tagging @CityofCoppell on your inquiry so staff may respond to you directly."
 - Facebook: "Tagging @City of Coppell on your inquiry so staff may respond to you directly."
 - Instagram: "Tagging @cityofcoppelltx on your inquiry so staff may respond to you directly."
 - Other platforms, such as Nextdoor: "Please contact the City of Coppell directly so staff may respond to you. You may also submit your inquiry online by visiting <https://www.coppelltx.gov/146/Submit> or by calling the City of Coppell during business hours at 972-462-0022."
10. Public officials should be cautious in using official City-provided logos, taglines, symbols, and photographs that belong to or are licensed by the City on personal social media sites. Elected and appointed officials choosing to use official City-provided photographs and identifying themselves as elected officials on personal social media sites should tailor communications on those sites accordingly.