



TOWN OF PLYMOUTH

Social Media Policy

Select Board Approved: January 21, 2025

Effective: January 21, 2025

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The Town of Plymouth (“Town”) recognizes the importance of online social media networks as a communication tool. The use of social media presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. Social Media, while a new form of activity, does not change the law or expectations around public service. The Town recognizes that employees have the right to participate as citizens in public forums and discussions (including social media platforms) on matters of public concern. However, that right is balanced against the legitimate interests of the Town in promoting accountability, responsible and mature judgment, and the efficiency of the public services it performs through its employees and officials. The goal is to ensure that use of social media advances, rather than impedes, the operation of government.

To that end, this policy establishes guidelines for the personal use of social media (Section II).

The Policy applies to all employees of the Town.

Employees whose employment is governed by law, or a collective bargaining agreement are subject only to those provisions of this Policy not specifically regulated by law or said collective bargaining agreement.

This Policy is to be read in conjunction with all other applicable policies and rules of the Town. It may be amended from time to time and may be supplemented with additional administrative procedures and rules as may be issued, provided the Town meets its bargaining obligations. Nothing in this Policy is designed to, or should be interpreted to, interfere with, restrain or prevent employee communications that are otherwise protected under law (i.e., First Amendment, Whistleblower, Union Activities).

A. Definitions

The following definitions apply for purposes of this Policy.

1. “Social media” includes all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort on the Internet, including to your own or someone else’s web log or blog, journal or diary, personal web site, social networking or affinity web site, web bulletin board or a chat room, whether or not associated or affiliated with the Town, as well as any other form of electronic communication.

2. “Social media sites” and “social networking sites” refer to websites that facilitate user participation, networking, and collaboration through the submission of user generated content, including but not limited to tools such as: blogs; wikis; microblogging sites, such as Twitter; social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn; video sharing sites, such as YouTube; messaging applications such as Snapchat and Instagram; and bookmarking sites such as Pinterest.
3. A “social media identity” is a specific user identity or account that has been registered on a third-party social media site.
4. A “blog” (an abridgement of the term web log) is a website with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.
5. “Town Systems” are any electronic communication and information equipment and systems. Such Systems include, but are not limited to, computer workstations, hardware and software, electronic mail (e-mail) servers and systems, telephones, cellular phones, “smartphone”/PDA-style devices, tablets, pagers, facsimile machines, and the Internet.
6. “Town social media site” is any official social media site established by or for a Town department, with the authorization of the Town Manager.

II. GUIDELINES FOR PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

All employees are responsible for what they post online. Through this Policy, the Town is not intending to act as “thought police” or otherwise unnecessarily intrude upon the personal associations and relationships of employees. However, the impact of social media participation by employees upon the ability of Town government to function efficiently and effectively cannot be ignored. Any conduct that exposes the Town to legal liability, or adversely affects individual or collective job performance or the Town’s legitimate business interests, may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination, provided, in instances where a CBA applies, there is just cause to support any such discipline and the Town has otherwise complied with the terms of the CBA.

A. Required Conduct

1. Whenever the topic is one related to the functioning or operations of Town government, including any matter pending or reasonably anticipated to be pending before any Town board, committee, commission, or Town Meeting, all personal posts on any social media site shall contain an express statement that “The postings on this site are my own and do not represent the views, positions or opinions of the Town” or similar disclaimer. Employees should not, except as authorized by their supervisor or board, represent themselves as a spokesperson for the Town.

2. Employees may include in their social media personal profiles, their job titles, as well as information about their personal participation in Town-sponsored events, including volunteer activities. Employees shall not include the official titles when posting personal statements as per Section II.A. (1) of this policy.
3. Employees shall ensure that postings are consistent with the requirements of both state and federal law, the rules of any social media site on which the employee is participating, as well as the Town's policies. Employees are advised to carefully read these guidelines, together with all of the Town's policies, including but not limited to the Town's Internet Access and Use/Electronic mail "E-Mail" Policy, Discriminatory Harassment Policy, or any other Policy contained in the Town's Personnel Rules and Regulations.
4. Department heads and other employees with policy-making authority must be mindful that there is greater risk that their comments or conduct while participating in social media may have a direct and negative impact upon the integrity of their board/committee or department and the public's perception of Town government as a whole. Furthermore, there is a greater likelihood that the public will view their conduct/comments as representative of an official position or policy of the Town, even when personal disclaimers are made. Department heads and employees with policy-making authority must take great care that their personal participation in social media does not undermine the Town's ability to effectively and efficiently provide necessary public services.

B. Prohibited Conduct

1. No Town Systems are to be used to make personal posts on any social media site or platform.
2. No personal posts shall be made during work time.
3. Town e-mail addresses should not be used to register on social networks, blogs, or other online tools utilized for personal use, and should not be used when setting up or establishing social media sites.
4. Per G.L. c. 268, §35, no employee shall post the Town Seal on any Internet site [i.e., social media network, website, blog site] or in any other Internet and/or social media communication or posting, with intent to give to such site or posting an official character which it does not possess, or unless authorized in writing in advance by the Town Manager or by majority vote of the Select Board.
5. No employee shall post images, or audio or video footage, of co-workers or other town officials without consent from those individual(s). Employees are prohibited from posting any images of nonpublic areas of the Town's premises and property, without prior authorization from the Town Manager or his/her designee.

6. Inappropriate postings that include, for example, discriminatory comments/remarks, harassment, bullying, and/or threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct, will not be tolerated.
7. Do not post internal reports, draft policies, procedures, or other internal confidential communications or documents. Maintain the confidentiality of the Town's procedures for the development of policy and other such data exempt from the Public Records Law. The state Conflict of Interest Law [G.L. c. 268A, §23(c)(2)] expressly prohibits an employee from improperly disclosing materials or data obtained in the course of official duties, that is otherwise exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law, and further prohibits the use of such information to further "personal interest." If an employee has a question about whether information is appropriately considered public or not, s/he should contact the Town of Plymouth Public Records Access Officer/Archivist.
8. Do not post information about others that is protected from public disclosure by law, such as: Criminal Offender Record Information, HIPAA-protected information and any other personal medical information, information concerning allegations of domestic violence and abuse, information protected under student privacy statutes, and the like.
9. Employees, in their capacity as Town employees, should not publicly comment upon rumors or political disputes related to or concerning Town government, or Town employees and officials.
10. Employees operating personal social media sites are subject to the same guidelines as above for the operation and administration of sites under their control, when focusing on topics relating to the functioning or operations of Town government. The site should carry a disclaimer to the effect of "The operation and administration of this site are my own and do not represent the views, positions or opinions of the Town" in order to avoid the appearance of being an official Town social media site.
11. Members of multi-member boards, committees and commissions must be mindful of the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, when participating in social media, in both personal and (where authorized) official capacities. A quorum of a board/committee/ commission should avoid posting on social media sites discussing topics relating to the functioning or operations of Town government, or on topics relating to matters under that board/committee/commission's jurisdiction, as doing so may violate the Open Meeting Law.

III. Retaliation is Prohibited

The Town prohibits taking negative action against any employee for reporting a possible deviation from, or violation of, this Policy, or for cooperating in an investigation of same. The Town also agrees that it will not retaliate against any employee for engaging in speech that might otherwise be protected.

IV. For More Information

If you have questions or need further guidance regarding the Town's Social Media Policy, please contact the Human Resources Department.