



TOWN OF BLACKSTONE

Social Media Policy

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this social media policy for the Town of Blackstone (Town) is to effectively utilize the Internet to deliver information to residents, businesses, and visitors. The goal of the Town of Blackstone's social media sites is to:

- Encourage increased citizen participation in town government by making public information available.
- Keep the public informed of community events, municipal meetings, and Town programs.
- Provide a tool to rapidly distribute information across various electronic sites, connecting quickly with readers.
- Link readers back to the town's official website, www.townofblackstone.org

This policy is adopted to ensure that what is “spoken” on behalf of the Town through social media reflects and conforms with the Town’s standards for such content and establishes guidelines for the responsible and effective use of social media by Town employees and officials. It encompasses the creation, management, and representation of the Town on various social media platforms. This policy also establishes standards for instances when social media serves as a limited forum for public comment.

This policy shall not be interpreted or applied to prohibit or infringe upon any communication or expression that is protected or privileged under the law, including under state or federal constitutions.

DEFINITIONS:

"Social media" shall mean:

- a. Any Social Networking website (e.g., Twitter, X, Myspace, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Glassdoor, Instagram, Snapchat)
- b. Multimedia sharing websites (e.g. Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo, Picasa)
- c. Blogs (e.g. Wikipedia, Wikispaces)
- d. Forums and discussion boards (e.g., Google Groups, Yahoo! Groups, Yammer)
- e. Personally managed websites, blogs, etc.
- f. On-line polls and surveys (e.g., Survey Monkey, Doodle)

“Social media” shall exclude the Town of Blackstone website www.townofblackstone.org, which is subject to a dedicated website policy.

"Official social media" or “Town social media” shall mean:

Any social media sites and affiliated accounts that were established by and through the Town of Blackstone or any of its departments, agencies, Boards, Committees, or Commissions as authorized by the Town and which are maintained by the Town of Blackstone, its employees, volunteers, officials, or Board, Committee or Commission members, distinguishable from social media created, used, or maintained by a Town-affiliated or other person for that person’s own personal use.

“Town user” shall mean any Town official, board, committee or commission member, employee or volunteer.



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GENERAL STANDARDS FOR OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA SITES:

All content and information submissions, regardless of the source or submitter, are subject to the following **publication criteria** to determine if they are appropriate for the Town social media sites and accounts:

1. **Allowed Content Types:** Official social media will be used to communicate information concerning Town-related services, resources, news, and events. Examples include but are not limited to Town/Department announcements, official Town news, Emergency notifications, Town events, and activities.
2. **Excluded Content:** The following is a non-exhaustive list of activities on official social media sites and accounts which would violate this policy:
 - Opinions or endorsements regarding candidates, political issues, or initiatives
 - Promotion or advertisement of businesses or special interest groups
 - Links to campaign websites for candidates.
 - Promotion of political organizations or organizations advocating a candidate, position, or legislation.
 - Solicitations of commerce, links to corporate or for-profit organizations unless meeting specific criteria. Examples are town supported events.
 - Individual or personal social media sites
 - Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, gender, religion, marital status, military service, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, as well as any other category protected by federal, state, or local laws;
 - Sexually explicit content or links to sexually explicit content;
 - Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
 - Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
 - Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

3. **Public Comment**

Official social media should not allow posting from the public, and commenting and creating new posts by the public should be disabled, whenever possible. To the extent that disabling posting and commenting is not possible, Town social media sites that provide for public input, comment, or discussion shall be limited public forums only for discussing Town-related services, resources, news and events. In the interests of supporting free expression and exchange of ideas, the Town will generally refrain from deleting or hiding content made by members of the public. However, the Town reserves the right to restrict or remove, on a viewpoint-neutral basis, content that is deemed to be in violation of this policy or any applicable federal, state, or local law regulation, or policy. A copy of any content that is removed or hidden shall be retained by the Town along with a description of the reason(s) the specific content was deleted. The Town may, but is not required to, notify the individual who posted the content shall be notified of its removal



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and the rationale for its deletion. The Town reserves the right to monitor posted content on any of its social media accounts before the content becomes publicly visible, and to remove any messages which violate this policy without approving them to appear publicly. Individuals who have concerns about their posted content having been removed from Town social media may contact the Town Administrator.

- 4. Non-Official Sites:** An employee, volunteer, official, Board, Committee, or Commission member may not misrepresent any personal or non-official social media site or account as a Town of Blackstone official social media site. Employees, volunteers, officials, Board, committee, and Commission members posting on non-official social media sites or accounts should make clear that they are not representing the Town and understand that they bear full responsibility for the content of such posts. Using the Town's official name or holding out a posting as an official communication of the Town government is prohibited unless approved by the Town Administrator or their designee.
- 5. Public Records:** Town users should be informed that content posted to Official Social Media sites may constitute public records within the meaning of the Massachusetts Public Records Law and may be obtained by members of the public upon request.

Members of boards, commissions, and committees may not post material on social media, violating the Open Meeting Law.

Town users may not disclose any Town-related information that is not already considered public information on any social media site. This rule applies even in circumstances where password or other privacy controls are in place.

- 6. Privacy:** Town users shall have no expectation of privacy on any official social media site, including for messages sent via direct messaging features. The Town reserves the right to access, view, and act upon any information on its social media sites and accounts without notice.
- 7. Creation of Official Social Media Accounts:** Official Social Media sites and accounts of any type may only be initiated, established, and/or authorized with prior approval by the Town Administrator. Once approved, all Town Departments, Divisions, Boards, Committees, and Commissions may establish an Official Social Media account. The accounts should be used to promote the Department, Division, Board, Committee, Commission, and its functions in a manner that complies with the applicable requirements of this policy. All Official Social Media accounts will include the Town Administrator as an account administrator.

When posting to Social Media sites, employees, volunteers, officials, and members of Boards, Committees, and Commissions, while representing themselves as Town employees, volunteers, officials, or members of a Board, Commission, or Committee, should do so in a way that maintains the Town's image as a professional organization.

Passwords to all Town social media sites shall be kept by the Town Administrator and shall not be altered by any Town user without the Town Administrator's permission.



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The Town reserves the right to monitor content on all official social media sites and accounts and to modify or remove any messages, posting, or images made by an employee that violate this policy.

8. **Linking to the official website:** All posts on official media sites and accounts should link to the town's official website, www.townofblackstone.org. Information on social media sites should be brief and provide links back to the site or include instructions to visit the town's website for additional information.
9. **Types of sites:** Official social media sites should not be group-type pages requiring approval or unique processes to be admitted beyond belonging to the social media platform.

APPLICABILITY:

This policy applies to all Town of Blackstone employees, officials, volunteers, and any other individuals representing the Town on social media platforms. All Town users shall receive a copy of this policy prior to receiving access to any official social media site.