



## **Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh – Social Media Policy**

### **1. Background**

The Corporation of the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh is committed to building relationships with our community through strategic and relevant communication mediums. Current communication trends show residents and stakeholders demand greater access, better customer service and accurate information when and where they need it. Social media platforms are a great tool to spread news on local issues and provide a platform for citizens to access accurate and timely information on what is going in their community.

Social media platforms offer many benefits, including:

- Sharing information on programs, events, services, and news to a wide audience;
- Promote the Township online to local, regional, and national audiences;
- Disseminate time-sensitive information as quickly as possible; and
- Increase civic engagement by providing an additional tool for the public to communicate with the Township.

### **2. Purpose and Guiding Principles**

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent standards and guidelines to ensure the appropriate use and management of social media on behalf of the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh.

Social Media should be used as a communications tool for the intent of enhancing communication for the Township to the public for the following purposes;

- Raising awareness and sharing information
- Recruiting volunteers and employees
- Promoting township events, programs and services
- Increasing access to information
- Promoting opportunities for public involvement
- Where possible, Township social media accounts should link back to the Township website for the purpose of downloading forms, documents, and providing specific or additional information.

The guiding principles for the use of social media platforms include;

- Accessibility
- Accuracy
- Consistency
- Privacy rights of citizens
- Relevancy
- Transparency

### **3. Scope, Roles and Responsibilities**

#### **Scope**

This policy applies to Council and all Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh employees who make public statements on the Township social media platforms.

#### **Roles and Responsibilities**

##### *Chief Administrative Officer*

The CAO is responsible for working with employees to guide and direct the conversation on social media platforms. The CAO will have final review of all posts curated by Communications Team. Upon review of social media posts, the CAO will ensure that they follow the guiding principles outlined in this policy. The CAO will periodically review social media platforms to ensure that staff are following the standards and guidelines.

##### *Communication Team*

This formal workplace team will be comprised of the Clerk, the Social Media Administrators and at minimum the Department Head for which the communication is relevant. The Communications Teams objective is to ensure the effectiveness of our Township's communications with the citizens and other stakeholders. Regarding social media, this team will review the yearly post schedules provided by Department Heads, and review all posts provided by Social Media Administrators prior to the CAO. The team is responsible for ensuring all posts are approved by the CAO before they are made public.

##### *Social Media Administrators*

Appointed by the CAO, in conjunction with the Communications Team the Social Media Administrators will finalize and review all material provided by different departments, manage the social media calendar, ensure all posts follow ACW's Social Media Policy guidelines, post approved content to the Townships social media platforms and monitor the social media platforms during regular business hours on behalf of the Township. This role will be in addition to a full-time staff members job description. Staff must use judgement managing time and balancing the integration of social media within their overall work plans.

##### *Department Head*

Each Department Head will work with their staff to prepare a yearly schedule. The department head will also designate a member of their team to prepare the relevant information for each post, including applicable by-laws, links to website and contact person if applicable. The Department Head will be responsible for the communication of activities and relevant information for their department.

### **4. Definitions**

“*Accessibility*” refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities.

“*Accuracy*” freedom from mistake or error; provides information which aligns with the Townships strategic plan priorities and vetted by the Communications Team.

“*Consistency*” conformity in messaging across social media platforms and published with the approved branding template of the Township.

“*Emergency*” a situation or an impending situation that constitutes a danger of major proportions that could result in serious harm to persons or substantial damage to property and that is caused by the forces of nature, a disease or health risk, an accident or an act whether intentional or otherwise.

“*Relevancy*” the quality or state of being closely connected or appropriate; providing citizens with information that matters the most to them and aligns with the Townships strategic plan.

“*Social Media*” interactive digitally mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or exchange of information; platforms utilized by the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh include Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

“*Transparency*” the quality of being transparent; the Township’s openness, communication and accountability on social media platforms.

## **5. General Policy**

The Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh website is the primary source of online information exchange with the public and is the Township’s official internet presence. The Township will use social media platforms to enhance communication about Township news, programs and services to the community.

### **5.1 Account Creation & Management**

Before creating a corporate social media, account or adding a new social media channel, discussion should occur between the Communication Team, CAO, and Social Media Administrators on the need for and benefit of a new account and/or channel. Adequate resources, including staff time and material, must be present for the creation of a new account.

The Communications Team will work together to determine an appropriate name, and branding information for the applicable platform. Upon creation of the social media page, the Communication Team and CAO will review all information before the account becomes public.

### **5.2 Acceptable Use of Social Media by Social Media Administrators**

Social Media Administrators are permitted to engage in social media activity for corporate purposes. Social Media Administrators must use judgement managing time and balancing the integration of social media within their overall work plans.

*Maintenance*

Social Media Administrators must maintain accounts to ensure they are kept current and relevant to the public. Social Media Administrators must undertake regular audits of social media comments to ensure inappropriate postings are removed in a timely fashion (e.g., commercial advertisement, disparaging remarks).

If a Social Media Administrator is no longer employed by the organization, all social media platforms will have the passwords reset to ensure that access is only available to current employees of the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh.

### *Posts*

Each post will be reviewed by the Communications Team and CAO. To provide consistency across social media platforms the same messaging will be used on each platform.

Each department must provide the Social Media Administrators with the relevant information needed one week prior to the day it is to be published. This will ensure adequate time to prepare and review the information with the Communications Team and CAO.

In the event of an emergency the Social Media Administrators will be responsible for crafting a post in a timely manner. The CAO will provide guidance and approval, in the absence of the CAO the approval will come from the Communications Team and/or Mayor.

Scheduled posts should be made in the morning to allow Social Media Administrators to oversee the interactions with the post and provide feedback to citizens throughout the day in a timely manner.

Usually, the Township responds to social media comments or questions during regular business hours; Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Questions or comments made after hours will be addressed the next business day.

The Township may schedule promotional messages after business hours or on weekends.

### *Sharing or Re-posting Content*

When sharing or re-posting content from a social media account that is not owned by the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh, Social Media Administrators must follow these guidelines.

The Township may only post third party content which:

- Connects the public with information and services provided by upper tier governments or government-funded agencies or boards in Canada.
- Provides further information on subject matter found on the Townships website. Such information must be provided by an official and/or accredited source.
- A Township affiliated organization, service club or registered charity (direct partnership by way of funding, sponsorship, staff resources or in-kind contributions).
- A business improvement area operating within the municipality or upper-tier.
- Any organization approved by Council.

Any posts that include links to a personal account/website, individual business account/website, political party/candidate account/website, or objectionable material as defined in this policy must not be shared or reposted on a Township social media account.

Content promoting events:

- Organized or funded by another level of government;
- Organized by a government-funded agency or board;
- Organized by a Township affiliated organization/group;
- Funded in full, or in part, by the Township;
- Organized by a registered charitable organization operating within the Township or the County of Huron;
- Organized by a service club operating within the Township performing work that benefits Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh residents;
- Located in a facility owned by the Township.

Any posts that promote events that are for individual businesses, include objectionable material, do not comply with municipal, provincial or federal legislation, are political in nature, or promote an individual religion or religious service must not be shared or reposted on a Township social media account.

#### *Guidelines for Managing the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh Accounts*

Social Media Administrators will reply on behalf of the Township to questions or comments which meet the below guidelines. Should a comment or question be directed at an elected official or staff, Social Media Administrators will provide them with the identified individuals work email or direct them to the contact page on the official Township website. This process will ensure that we are directing residents to the correct communication means for contacting Township staff and elected officials.

The Township may reply to questions or comments if:

- the post asks a sincere question about a Township service, program or policy.
- the post includes inaccurate information – the Township may provide a correction.

The Township may not reply to questions or comments if:

- the post includes respectful statements of opinion – people are welcome to express their views even if they disagree with Township policies, programs or decisions.
- the post is respectful and directed at other participants in the conversation.

#### *Social media commenting guidelines*

The Township welcomes community members to post, share, discuss and debate while treating each other with respect. The Township will not tolerate posts or comments that include:

- Profane or inappropriate language;

- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- Content considered to be defamatory, disrespectful or insulting to Township staff, representatives, or members of the public;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Comments/posts not related to a posted article/topic/information;
- Business solicitation;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Information about any identifiable individual (including photographs of, or information about that individual, as well as views or opinions about that individual), unless the identifiable individual provided specific, written consent to the Township in advance;
- Any content deemed inappropriate by the Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh.

If a comment includes any of the above the Township will hide or delete the post. Notice of this action will be given to the user. When a comment is directed at an employee, a member of Council, or a member of the public that is disrespectful and inappropriate, the Township will remove the user from the platform. The Township has a Zero-Tolerance policy on disrespectful or inappropriate comments. The user will be advised that they have violated the policy.

The social media platforms utilized by the Township have measures in place to encourage the use of the medium as effective communication tools, without fear of hateful or disrespectful comments. With our guiding principles in place, the Communications Team will endeavour to utilize tools to establish a safe place for communication for all residents, staff and elected officials.

### **5.3 Account Inactivity**

The Communication Team in conjunction with the CAO has the discretionary power to add or remove an account or channel due to limited public interaction or inactivity. Accounts which are deemed inactive will be removed immediately following the decision made by the CAO and Communications Team.

## **6. Policy Communication**

This policy will be communicated internally with staff and available in the shared drive. The policy will be posted on the township website for public use. The policy will also be hyperlinked onto Township social media accounts.

This policy is to be reviewed by staff on an ongoing basis as part of new employee orientation session.