



Social Media Policy

PURPOSE:

To provide guidance to the Town of Butner employees (“Employees”) in the implementation of social media in order to inform Employees of expectations when using social media so that the Town achieves high standards in communication that reflect positively on the Town and complies with Town policies such as the Town’s public records retention policy, personnel policy, and any internet usage policy adopted by the Town.

POLICY SCOPE:

This policy applies to all Town of Butner departments and employees and includes all forms of social, digital, and mobile media platforms.

Definition:

For purposes of this policy, “social media” is an umbrella term that encompasses various Town of Butner engagement activities while integrating technology, social interaction and content creation to share or exchange information, allow comment on user-generated content or otherwise encourage online discussion about Town of Butner programs, services, projects, events, activities and other matters of public interest.

1. Use of Social Media

Social media enables the Town to reach different demographics to achieve certain business and communication goals including the following:

- Transparency in conducting local government business
- Civic engagement regarding Town projects, programs, and initiatives
- Disseminating information, especially time-sensitive material during public safety emergencies
- Promotion of the Town and its services and programs

Social media tools supplement the Town's primary website and, among other purposes, should drive people to the primary web resource. The Town's website (www.butnenc.org) is its primary and definitive repository of accurate information about the Town.

As a rule, Town communications posted to social or mobile media sites should also be available on the Town's main website or contain links directly to the Town’s main website.

2. Prohibited Uses of Social Media

Employees representing the Town of Butner on social media platforms should always act, communicate, and execute their duties professionally. Employees must not use Town-related

social networking sites for political purposes, to conduct private commercial transactions, or to engage in private business activities. Employees should be mindful that inappropriate usage of Town-related social media can be grounds for disciplinary action.

Whether an Employee is using social media for personal or official Town use, the following are always strictly prohibited whether on or off duty and whether using a Town of Butner or a personal device. This is a representative list and does not include all prohibitions that would violate Town of Butner policies and procedures.

- Disclosure of confidential information to which an Employee has access as part of the employee's role or duties. Examples of such information are a vendor's patented information of which the Employee has knowledge due to his/her assignment on a Town project; personal, confidential or health information about someone; billing information of customers compiled and maintained by the Town; any data collected from a person applying for financial or other types of assistance including, but not limited to, their income, bank accounts, savings account, etc.
- Disclosure of non-public information or legally protected personal information to which an Employee has access or has obtained from the Town such as someone's address, date of birth, driver's license number, social security number or other personal information.
- Information related to unlawful activities including, but not limited to, the use, sale, or distribution of illegal substances.

3. Personal Use of Social Media

Personal use is defined as use of social media by an Employee speaking as an individual. Personal use of social media by an Employee is permitted for social or professional networking purposes. In personal use, the employee is speaking as an individual and not on behalf of the Town of Butner.

Employees' use and comments made on social media sites are subject to limited First Amendment protections. As a public employee, use of social media is considered an extension of the workplace as it relates to employee conduct.

Personal use of social media by Town Employees is subject to these guidelines:

- Where personal use is related to a matter of public concern, it must be conducted in such a manner that a reader would not think the employee is speaking for or on behalf of the Town.
- Employees' must comply with Town policies, standard operating procedures, and the Town Personnel Policy.
- Employees should exercise sound judgment and discretion so as not to reflect adversely on the Town in contributing to social media sites.
- Personal use of social media may not violate or infringe upon the right of any other person or entity or constitute a criminal offense or create civil liability.

- Personal use of social media while on duty, including during breaks, must not be excessive such that it interferes with the employee's work or work of others.

***** Inappropriate personal usage of social media may be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including, termination. *****

4. Requirements for Social Media Sites

Town social media sites and applications, regardless of date of establishment or whether maintained internally or externally, must adhere to Town policies and protocols. These include the following:

- *Best Practices:* Use of social media sites shall meet best practices for maintaining social media such as but not limited to frequent updates and accurate information.
- *Public Records and Retention:* All sites are subject to North Carolina public records laws and retention and shall be based on standards for other public records.
- *Political Activity:* The social media sites shall not contain any political information or be used for political activity.
- *Internet Security Policies:* All sites shall comply with any Town policies and procedures for information security.
- *Conduct:* Any Town policies, rules, regulations, and standards of conduct apply to employees who engage in social activities while conducting Town business.
- *Privacy:* Information created for or posted on social media sites by Town employees shall comply with all privacy protection laws to protect the privacy of employees, privacy of citizens and the confidential information that the Town maintains.
- *Other Laws:* Sites also shall adhere to all copyright, public records, retention, fair use and financial disclosure laws and other statutes that might apply to the Town or department.
- *Third-Party Citations.* Information created for or posted on social media sites by Town employees shall not contain citations of vendors, suppliers, clients, citizens, co-workers, or other stakeholders without their explicit permission.

5. Official Use of Social Media Guidelines

When an Employee is designated by a department as for official use of social media, the Employee shall follow these guidelines.

- *Identify oneself and capacity:* When Town-related matters are discussed in one's official capacity, each employee must identify himself/herself and the role held at the Town. It is important to clearly articulate when speaking for oneself, when giving an opinion and/or when speaking on behalf of the Town.
- *Employees are personally responsible for what they publish:* Be mindful that information published in social media constitutes a public record and as such will be retained per the regulations of public records law.

- *Be transparent, admit mistakes and respectfully differ:* Promptly admit to and correct mistakes, and do not enter into verbal altercations. Stick to facts when correcting users who have made misrepresentations about the Town, using only Town sponsored social media sites to provide correct information.
- *Use good judgment:* If the content of what is being published or posted causes discomfort, pause, review, and edit the submission; if discomfort remains, discuss it with the department head before posting.
- *Adhere to all the same prohibitions that are included in Section 3. Personal Use of Social Media.*

6. Public Comment Guidelines – Including the Blockage of and Removal of Comments

Town social media sites that permit public comments/postings shall include the following disclaimers:

- Views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not reflect those of Town officials and employees.
- People who comment shall have no expectation of privacy. Their comments are public records retained and subject to disclosure in accordance with applicable laws and Town policies.
- Town social media policies are subject to amendment or modification at any time without prior notice.
- Multiple violations of comment standards may result in a public user's comments/postings being banned from Town social media sites.
- Limitations may apply to public users. For example, users should be cautioned not to use the site for emergency purposes. Similarly, users should be cautioned not to use the site when another form of filing and notification or request is required.

All comments/postings shall be retained in accordance with Town policies.

Public comments from Town social media sites may be blocked, hidden, or removed as long as the site manager develops content-neutral comment standards.

All comments/postings that are blocked, hidden, or removed from Town social media sites shall be retained until such time as the Town Attorney advises otherwise.

Content-neutral comment standards include notice that the site is a moderated online discussion site, and that while comments/postings will not be blocked, hidden or removed from the site based strictly on their content generally, the Town reserves the right to block, hide or remove comments/postings that contain the following:

- Vulgar, abusive, or threatening language, defamatory statements or nudity in profile pictures or attachments.

- Personal attacks, hate speech or offensive terminology targeting individuals or groups of individuals.
- Suggestions or encouragement of illegal activity.
- Unsolicited business proposals or endorsements/promotion of commercial services, products, or entities.
- Infringements of copyrights, trademarks, or other intellectual property.
- Endorsements of political parties, candidates, or groups.
- Off-topic comments/posts, spam, or links to unrelated sites.

7. Oversight of Social Media Sites, Policies & Use

The Town Manager has delegated oversight of the Town's use of social media as follows:

Administration and Human Resources Manager