

**CITY OF AVALON  
SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND PUBLIC OUTREACH POLICY**

**APPLICABILITY**

This Policy applies to all City of Avalon (“City”) employees, officers, and designated contractors who, as part of their job responsibilities and requirements, are authorized to speak on behalf of the City in their official capacity. This includes all employees, officers, and designated contractors engaged in the maintenance, participation, and observation of any City social media site (defined herein).

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

This Policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media sites by the City of Avalon (“City”) as a means of conveying information to its citizens about the City and its projects, programs, and activities.

To address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, City departments may consider using social media tools to reach a broader audience. The City encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the City and the missions of its departments, where appropriate.

The City intends to establish multiple forums and forms of public outreach with the purpose to disseminate information from the City, about the City and for the benefit of the City, its residents and visitors.

The City respects the legal rights of its employees. With a few exceptions, what employees do on their own time is not governed by this Policy. However, online activities at work or online activities outside of work that affect employee job performance, the performance of others, the legal rights of others, the privacy rights of others, and the operational and confidentiality interests of the City, are a proper focus for this Policy, and can be subject to the City of Avalon Personnel Rules and Regulations.

City employees, officers, and designated contractors can reference this policy as a guideline for personal use of social media. The City finds that statements on personal social media pages, accounts or sites that impair discipline by superiors or harmony among coworkers, such as by discussing or promoting political views, political organizations, candidates for office, or ballot initiatives, have a detrimental impact on the working relationships, loyalty and confidence necessary for City business and operations. City employees, officers, and designated contractors are advised that the City perceives such statements on personal social media pages, accounts or sites as contrary to the efficient and effective operation of the City and discourages such comments. Furthermore, technology or devices that are property of the City and issued to City employees, officers, or designated contractors may be monitored and the City discourages posting, publishing or making such statements on personal social media pages, accounts or sites with City-owned technology or devices.

Due to the personal nature of our community and the desire to build community relations, direct contact between City officials, staff and community members is encouraged. Conversations are preferred to replies to social media posts.

The City has an overriding interest and expectation in protecting the information posted on its social media sites and the content that is attributed to the City and its officials.

### **DEFINITIONS**

“Social media sites” means content created by individuals, using accessible, expandable, and upgradable publishing technologies, through and on the Internet. Examples of social media sites and technology include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, RSS, YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr and SendHub.

“City social media sites” means social media sites which the City establishes and maintains, and controls all postings to, except for advertisements or hyperlinks by the social media site’s owners, vendors, or partners. City social media sites shall supplement, and not replace, the City’s required notices and standard methods of communication.

“Posts” or “a posting” means information, articles, pictures, videos, or any other form of communication posted on a City social media site.

“Public Outreach” means any method or medium, generally digital in nature, used to disseminate information to, and engage with, the general public as an effort to connect beyond the limits of conventional forms of communication.

### **GENERAL POLICY GUIDELINES**

1. The establishment of each City social media site is subject to approval by the City Manager or his or her designee. Upon such approval, each City social media site created shall bear the name and/or official logo of the City.
2. The City’s website ([www.cityofavalon.com](http://www.cityofavalon.com)) will remain the City’s primary and predominant Internet presence. Wherever possible, content posted to City social media sites will also be available on the City’s website.
  - a. The best, most appropriate City uses of social media tools fall generally into two categories:
    - i. As channels for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible (i.e., emergency information, events information);
    - ii. As marketing/promotional channels, which increase the City’s ability to broadcast its messages to the widest possible audience.

- b. Wherever possible, content posted to City social media sites shall contain links directing users back to the City's official websites for in-depth information, forms, documents, or online services necessary to conduct business with the City.
3. All content on City social media sites shall be reviewed, approved, and administered by the City's Department Directors or their designees with ultimate authority resting in and decisions overseen by the City Manager. Wherever possible, all City social media sites shall comply with all appropriate City policies and standards, including but not limited to the following:
  - a. Internet/Information Systems Policy
  - b. Electronic Communication Usage and Retention Policy
  - c. Harassment Policy
4. City social media sites shall be managed consistent with the Ralph M. Brown Act (Cal. Gov. Code § 54950 et seq.). Members of the City Council and all City Commissions shall not respond to any published postings, or use the City social media sites or any form of communication to respond to, blog or engage in serial meetings, or otherwise discuss, deliberate, or express opinions on any issue within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Council or Commission. The City generally as a policy does not wish to have City Councilmembers or City Commissioners individually engage on these types of issues on social media, instead through more traditional means of public communication and interaction.
5. City social media sites are subject to the California Public Records Act (Cal. Gov. Code § 6250 et seq.). Any content maintained in a social media format that is related to City business, including posted communications, and communications submitted for posting, may be public records subject to public disclosure. Wherever possible, such sites shall clearly indicate that all articles, comments and other content posted or submitted for posting as well as personal identifying information for users and visitors to the site, may be subject to public disclosure. Such sites shall also indicate that public disclosure requests must be directed to the City Clerk's office.
6. California state law and relevant City records retention schedules apply to social media sites and content. Unless otherwise addressed in a specific social media standards document, the department maintaining a City social media site shall preserve records required to be maintained pursuant to a relevant records retention schedule for the required retention period on a City server in a format that preserves the integrity of the original record and is easily accessible. Please contact an Information Services staff member to determine the appropriate retention formats for specific social media tools.

7. All City social media sites shall adhere to applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies. The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this Policy or any applicable law.
8. For each social media site approved for use by the City Manager or his or her designee, the following documentation will be developed and adopted:
  - a. Operational and use guidelines
    - i. The City will develop Standards for each City social media site, which will include the Purpose and Content Standards as well as any other details specific to the use of the particular City social media site.
    - ii. The City Manager or his or her designee will maintain a list of social media sites that are approved for use by City departments and staff.
    - iii. The City Manager or his or her designee will maintain a list of all City social media sites used by City departments and staff, including login and password information. Employees will inform the City Manager of any administrative changes to existing City social media sites.
    - iv. The City Manager or his or her designee will have authority to edit or remove content from City social media sites.
  - b. City and departmental branding standards
9. All City social media sites shall utilize authorized City contact information for account set-up, monitoring and access. The use of personal email accounts or phone numbers by any City employee shall not be allowed for the purpose of setting-up or monitoring a City social media site, unless set-up or monitoring is not technologically possible without such use.

The City Manager or his or her designee shall designate specific City employees as “account administrators” who shall be authorized to administer the City’s social media sites, including posting and removing comments, responding to messages and requests for communication, and posting or removing all forms of content including images and text. Such authorized City employees shall only connect to, and exchange information with, those social media sites authorized by the City pursuant to this Policy.

10. This Social Media Use and Public Outreach Policy may be revised at any time.

## CONTENT GUIDELINES

1. As a public entity, the City must abide by certain standards to serve all of its constituents in a civil and unbiased manner.
2. The following statement shall be posted on the City social media sites' primary pages, or if not able to be posted directly on the site, shall also be found on the City's main website:

“The intended purpose of this page (the City of Avalon’s social media sites) is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the City of Avalon and members of the public. However, this page is not the primary method of communication with the City, and any notices or requests for City services must be made via official communication methods identified on the City’s website, or by traditional methods of notification recognized by the City, and no comments or posts on this page will be construed as providing notice to the City of any claim, deficiency, dangerous condition, request, or otherwise.

Any comments or other content posted or submitted to this page for posting, as well as personal identifying information for the page’s users and visitors, and its list of fans, may be public records subject to disclosure pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Cal. Gov. Code § 6250 et seq.). Public disclosure requests must be directed to the City Clerk’s office.”

In addition to the above statement, the City social media sites' primary page shall also contain contact information for the City and a hyperlink to the City website providing addresses, names, phone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses of applicable department listings or City staff and methods of making official requests for maintenance or services and notice of the condition of City property or other similar requests.

3. The content of City social media sites shall pertain to City-sponsored or City-endorsed programs, services, and events. Content includes, but is not limited to, information, photographs, videos, and hyperlinks. City social media sites may include information or materials not directly sponsored or endorsed by the City, so long as such information or materials have the intent to educate or engage the community on topics relevant to the City as well as germane to the purpose and topic of the particular City social media site.
4. The City shall have full permission or rights to any content posted by the City on City social media sites, including photographs and videos.
5. City social media sites shall be viewed as a municipal resource. Therefore, City employees, officers, and designated contractors shall avoid any type of political campaigning or political commentary on a City social media site.

6. City social media sites shall not be used for the following purposes (within posted content, messages, or “Liking” or “Following” other pages or accounts): promoting commercial products, entities, or causes; promoting religious or political views; or promoting political organizations, candidates for office, or ballot initiatives. City social media sites can be used to engage the broader community with content that are germane to the site and intended to further its purpose. Any interaction with other entities through City social media does not denote endorsement.
7. “Likes,” “Follows,” mentions of, or interactions with other social media pages or accounts by a City social media site will be at the discretion of the City Manager or his or her designee and do not denote endorsement by the City.
8. Any employee authorized to post items on any of the City’s social media sites shall review, be familiar with, and comply with the particular social media site’s use policies and terms and conditions.
9. Any employee authorized to post items on any of the City’s social media sites shall not express his or her own personal views or concerns through such postings. Instead, postings on any of the City’s social media sites by an authorized City employee shall only reflect the views of the City. All postings to City social media sites should be reviewed for accuracy, and should include facts and not personal opinions.
10. Due to the informal nature of social media, City generated content may be more conversational and less formal in nature. Keeping with the intention to inform and engage the community, content may reflect the personalities, styles and enthusiasm of the authorized user and department as an extension of the customer service policy and personal nature of the City’s community.
11. Postings, including responses to comments or questions from the public, shall be in support of the City’s mission and limited to official City business or germane to the purpose and topic of the particular City social media site.
12. Postings must contain information that is freely available to the public and not be confidential as defined by any City policy or state or federal law.
13. Postings may not contain any personal information, except for the names, titles, and City departments of employees whose duties include being available for contact by the public.
14. Postings should be written as if by the City and sent from a City social media site, not the personal account of any employee, officer, or designated contractor. None of these individuals shall be permitted to post any content on a City social media site in his or her personal capacity, whether during or after work hours. There shall be clear division between City and personal social media sites and accounts.
15. Postings should be checked for spelling, grammatical errors and factual accuracy.

16. Employees shall immediately report to their direct supervisor any false, misleading, malicious, obscene, commercial, pornographic, or offensive behavior appearing on a City social media site.
17. Employees shall not spend excessive time maintaining or monitoring City social media sites, and agree to only spend on City social media sites the time necessary to adequately maintain and monitor City social media sites consistent with the employees' assigned job duties.
18. Employees shall be provided a copy of this Policy, and shall, prior to engaging in or continuing any activities described hereunder, sign an acknowledgement of receipt of this Policy and an agreement to comply herewith. Any employee who violates this Policy in any manner may face discipline for such violation.

#### COMMENTS GUIDELINES

1. Users and visitors to City social media sites shall be notified of the City's public comment and messaging standards, by a message appearing on the City social media site or by a hyperlink directing a user to the same which states as follows:

“The City disclaims any and all responsibility and liability for any materials that the City deems inappropriate for posting which cannot be removed in an expeditious or otherwise timely manner. The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable law. Any articles, messages, posts, comments, images, video or other content containing any of the following shall not be allowed and may be removed as soon as possible:

  - a. Comments not topically related to the particular article or post being commented on;
  - b. Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
  - c. Profane language or content;
  - d. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
  - e. Sexual content or links to sexual content;
  - f. Solicitations of commerce;
  - g. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
  - h. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
  - i. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.”
2. Any content removed based on these guidelines must be retained, via a printed hard copy, and shall include the date and time of the deleted post as well as the identity of the poster when available. Content posted by outside users shall not be deleted or removed unless it expressly violates the aforementioned policy and legal counsel has been consulted.

3. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution may prevent content regulation by the City, as a public entity web page or social media site likely is considered a public forum. To avoid First Amendment challenge, the City must not regulate, restrict, remove, or delete public comments or posts on any City social media site, unless the direct supervisor of the employee seeking to remove the content has first consulted with legal counsel.

4. Wherever possible, users and visitors to City social media sites shall be notified by the following message appearing on the City social media site or by a hyperlink directing a user to the same regarding comments posted by the public:

“A comment posted by a member of the public on this page is the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and publication of a comment does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by, the City, nor do such comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City.”

5. Authorized personnel designated by the City Manager, as described above, shall monitor all City social media sites for comments requesting responses from the City and for comments in violation of this Policy.

6. When reviewing and monitoring comments, it shall be the general policy of the City not to respond or reply to comments.

7. When an authorized City employee responds to a comment, in his or her capacity as a City employee, the employee's name, title and City department shall be made available, and the employee shall not share personal information about himself or herself or other City employees.

8. All comments posted to any City social media site are also bound by the site's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, Terms of Service, or any set of rules established by the site, and the City reserves the right to report any violation to the site with the intent of the site taking appropriate and reasonable responsive action.

#### **LINKS AND EMBEDDED CONTENT GUIDELINES**

1. The City may select links to other social media sites and outside websites that offer helpful resources for users. Once an individual user links from a City social media site to another outside page or website, the City's Policies no longer apply and the user becomes subject to the policies of that page or website.

2. The City social media sites are intended specifically to share information about City programs, events and services. The City is not responsible for the content that appears on outside links, pages or websites and provides these links as a convenience only.

3. Outside websites or entities may request to be linked on City social media sites and other official City sites. However, the City reserves the right to authorize posts or links to outside websites or entities germane to the purpose and topic of the particular City social media site, or to remove content or links that are not germane. Entities requesting to be linked on City social media sites shall be in line with the content standards set forth in the City of Avalon Social Media Use and Public Outreach Policy. A City social media site linking to an outside website does not denote endorsement by the City of content found on or linked by the outside website.
4. Users should be aware that outside pages and websites and the information found on those pages and websites are not controlled by, provided by or endorsed by the City. The City reserves the right to delete links posted by outside pages and websites that violate the City of Avalon Social Media Use and Public Outreach Policy at any time without notice.
5. Outside pages and websites are not required to secure advance permission from the City to link to City social media sites. However, entities, individuals, pages or websites linking to City social media sites shall not in any way suggest that the City has any relationship or affiliation with the posting entity or individual, or that the City endorses, sponsors or recommends the information, products or services of the posting entity, individual, page or website.
6. Outside pages and websites are not required to secure advance permission from the City to embed City social media site content. However, entities, individuals, pages or websites embedding content shall not present City content as their own or otherwise misrepresent any City social media site content. Furthermore, entities, individuals, pages or websites shall not misinform users about the origin or ownership of City social media site content. Embedded content from City social media sites should not in any way suggest that the City has any relationship or affiliation with the posting entity or individual, or that the City endorses, sponsors or recommends the information, products or services of the posting entity, individual, page or website.

#### **APPROVED CITY SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

The City Manager or his or her designee will maintain this list of social media sites that are approved for use by City departments and staff in accordance with this Policy. At the time of adoption of this Policy, the following social media sites and public outreach tools have been approved for use by the City:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Vine
- SendHub
- Livestream
- Digital Signage
- Qnotify City Email