



City of Plymouth Social Media Policy

I. Guidelines

The City of Plymouth will determine, at its discretion, how its web-based social media sites will be designed, implemented and managed as part of its overall communications and marketing strategy. City-related social media sites administered by the Communications Division may be modified or removed by the city at any time and without notice as further described in this document.

II. Purpose

The City of Plymouth wishes to represent itself appropriately and consistently on social media platforms. The purpose of these guidelines is to define social media, as well as establish procedures for creating an overall social media presence. As a general philosophy, the City of Plymouth will manage its online social media presence in a centralized manner. Departments, facilities and individual employees shall not create social media accounts themselves that are intended to represent the City of Plymouth, but must follow the guidelines in *Section VI – General Conditions and Restrictions*, found later in this document.

A social media presence is another way government can communicate to the broadest possible audience of those it serves – without relying on news media to relay the message – and residents can communicate with their government. The City of Plymouth’s intent is to increase transparency, reach, immediacy and stakeholder feedback. The ultimate goal of social media will be to drive residents and visitors to the City of Plymouth website.

The City of Plymouth will use social media platforms, as appropriate, to distribute time-sensitive information and news to the public about its programs, events and services. However, the city’s official website, www.plymouthmn.gov, will remain the city’s primary online medium for communicating information to the public. The city’s “eNotify” email notification system, available via the city website, will remain the city’s primary email notification tool.

The best, most appropriate, use of social media for the City of Plymouth is as follows:

1. As channels for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible (ex: emergency information).
2. As marketing/promotional channels that increase the city’s ability to broadcast its messages to the widest possible audience.

III. Scope

The City of Plymouth has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is communicated on behalf of the city on social media sites. To protect the city’s image and maintain a consistent voice, this policy applies to any pre-existing or proposed city social media/networking platforms.

The following guidelines establish best practices for the use of social media for the City of Plymouth:

1. The City of Plymouth website, www.plymouthmn.gov, will remain the city’s primary and predominant Internet presence.
2. Wherever possible, content posted to the City of Plymouth social media sites should contain links directing users back to the city’s official website.
3. All City of Plymouth social media sites must comply with all appropriate city policies and standards. Exceptions must be approved by the city manager.

4. All City of Plymouth social media sites are subject to the State of Minnesota public records laws. Any content maintained in a social media format that is related to city business, including posted communication, is a public record. Content related to city business must be maintained in an accessible format so that it can be produced in response to a request. Wherever possible, such sites should clearly indicate that any articles and any other content posted or submitted for posting are subject to public disclosure. Users should be notified that public disclosure requests must be directed to the Plymouth City Clerk.
5. Minnesota state law and relevant City of Plymouth records retention schedules apply to social media formats and social media content as reflected in the city's record retention policy.
6. Any content or comments removed based on the guidelines in *Section V – Disclaimer/Content Removal*, must be retained, including the time, date and identity of the poster, when available.

IV. Definitions

Social media platforms – Social media platforms focus on creating and fostering online social communities for a specific purpose and connect users from varying locations and interest areas.

Employees/staff – The term “employees” or “staff,” referred to in this document, is defined as all full-time, part-time, paid-on-call, temporary and seasonal employees; volunteers; and all elected and appointed officials of the City of Plymouth.

Blog (abbreviation of “web log”) – A blog is a website where a blog author posts information about a specific topic, targeted to a specific audience. A blog, if commenting is enabled, allows registered members of the public (called “blog commentators”) to post comments about posts by the blog author.

V. Disclaimer/Content Removal

Wherever possible, the following disclaimer should be posted on social media sites maintained by the city:

The purpose of the site is to share information about City of Plymouth news, events, services and programs with our many residents, businesses and visitors. This is not a public forum.

The City of Plymouth reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments, including those that:

- *Are not topically related to the particular posting*
- *Contain offensive or vulgar language or photos*
- *Are associated with unlawful activity*
- *Personal attacks*
- *Threaten or defame any person or organization*
- *Violate the legal ownership interest of another party*
- *Contain political endorsements or oppositions of any kind*
- *Contain links to outside websites or are spam*
- *Are commercial advertisements or solicitation*
- *Are harassing*
- *Target or disparage any group protected by anti-discrimination laws*

In addition, all content or comments posted during an election season by anyone who has filed for office will be removed.

The City of Plymouth has the right to reproduce any pictures or videos posted to this site in any of its publications or websites or any other media outlets. The City of Plymouth has the right to quote any comments or suggestions left by users. The city will not accept requests to post events, videos or photos on any of the city's social networking sites.

The City of Plymouth does not endorse any product, service, company or organization advertising on its social media pages. Please note that comments expressed on this site do not reflect the opinions and position of the City of Plymouth or its elected officials and employees. The City of Plymouth does not share information gathered through this site with third parties for promotional purposes. However, any information you provide to the city is subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. This law classifies certain information as available to the public on request.

If you have any questions concerning the operation of this site, please email communications@plymouthmn.gov.

If a post or comment on one of the city's social media platforms is deemed inappropriate based on the standards stated above, the information will be collected and then the post or comment will be removed. In its place, an explanation for the removal will be provided.

VI. General Conditions and Restrictions

1. General Standards

City of Plymouth social media platforms and their associated content act as a reflection of the city's website and, whenever possible, are used as tools to direct traffic back to the city's website. They must be organized in a congruent manner to maintain consistent city branding and messaging across all platforms. All approved social media platforms will be linked with the official city website.

The City of Plymouth does not take requests from outside organizations or individuals for images, events, videos or pictures to be posted to any of its social media platforms, or to the city's official website. The city has the right, at its sole discretion, to accept or deny any such requests.

2. Employee Use

City social media platforms may not be used by any city employee, elected official or appointed representative for private or personal purposes or for the purpose of expressing private or personal views on personnel, political or policy issues.

City social media platforms may not be used to express personal views or concerns pertaining to city labor relations matters. A social media website account may not be used by the city or by any city employee, elected official or appointed representative to disclose sensitive or not public data, such as personal or private information about city employees, without express written approval of the city manager or city attorney.

As related to City of Plymouth social media sites, only designated social media site moderators or administrators should respond to direct questions or comments posted through city social networking sites.

For additional detail on employee use, see the Electronic Communications Policy.

3. Process for Creating and Maintaining a Social Media Presence

The city will approach the use of social media tools as consistently as possible. All social media platforms will be managed by staff of the Communications Division, unless expressly delegated by Communications staff to a specific department, division or staff member.

Any new social media platform will be developed by the Communications Division staff in consultation with the city manager.

At this time, social media sites are not allowed for individual city departments or divisions, advisory committees or commissions, or for city-sponsored events, programs or services. Individual city departments should instead take a more active role in providing timely, newsworthy content to the Communications Division for posting on the city's official website and social media platforms.

VII. Exceptions/Change

Any exception to these guidelines may be granted only by the city manager. These guidelines may be reviewed and changed at any time. Communications staff continues to monitor social media developments and will make changes to these guidelines as needed. Any revisions to these guidelines must be approved by the city manager.