

SECTION 5 – EMPLOYEE CONDUCT AND PROCEDURES
POLICY 5.16 – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

To: All Department Directors
From: James J. Stokes, City Manager
Subject: Administrative Policy #53 Social Media Policy
Date: Revised 12/02/2025

With the rise of social media for both business and personal purposes, it has become necessary to establish and enact a social media policy for the City.

Attached is the City of Deer Park's Social Media Policy. Its purposes are to address the personal use of social media by City employees and volunteers and establish protocol for the use of social media in the dissemination of public information by the City of Deer Park.

Please see that all employees are advised of this.

James J. Stokes, City Manager

CITY OF DEER PARK SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. PURPOSE

This policy addresses the responsibility of all employees and volunteers with regard to their personal use of social media. This policy also outlines the protocol and procedure for employee and volunteer use of social media to disseminate public information and/or promote special events, programs, and services on behalf of the City of Deer Park.

2. DEFINITION

For purposes of this policy, "social media" shall mean the use of technology in combination with electronic social networks of any type. Social media sites may include, but not be limited to, Facebook, Twitter, X, Instagram, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, blogs, Wikis, chat rooms, and on-line forums.

It will also include official City of Deer Park websites and all forms of on-line community sites that are established and maintained by the City of Deer Park. Social media activity includes but is not limited to texting, blogging, posting, and other actions involving technology and social media sites. The term "Employee" shall mean a full-time, part-time, or contract employee or volunteer for the City.

3. COVERAGE

This policy applies to all city departments and all employees.

4. EMPLOYEE PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The lines between public and private, personal and professional can become blurred in on-line social networks. With that in mind, below are guidelines for social media use by City employees while off duty.

4.1 Employees who use social media for personal use should not discuss information about the City's employees, citizens, vendors, issues, business, or legal matters without express consent to do so. Posting of confidential information may violate state law and subject the user to criminal penalty.

4.2 Personal use of social media while off duty must not interfere with or conflict with the employee's duties or job performance, reflect negatively on the City or violate any City policy.

4.3 Employees are encouraged to act responsibly while off duty and to exercise good judgment when using social media. Employees should consider the following guidelines for personal use of social media:

- Respect coworkers and the City. Do not post any information and/or pictures on the Internet that may defame, embarrass, insult, demean or damage the reputation of the City or any of its employees.
- Do not post any information and/or pictures that may constitute violation of any City policy.
- Do not post pictures containing images of City uniforms or insignia, City logos, City equipment or City work sites.
- Do not permit or fail to remove postings violating this policy, even when placed by others on the employee's page/profile. Recognize that postings, even if done off premises and while off duty could have an adverse effect on the City's legitimate business interests.
- Do not link from a personal blog or social networking site to the City's internal or

external web site.

- Do not post on social media sites the name, trademark, slogan or logo of the City.
- Do not use City names or identifiers for your personal social networking accounts or email accounts.
- The City may require removal of any material that is disruptive to the workplace or impairs the mission of the City.

4.4 The City of Deer Park Social Media Policy provides a framework for addressing violations, with disciplinary action up to and including termination, depending on the circumstance(s) of the offense. While progressive discipline may be appropriate in many circumstances, the City recognizes that each situation is unique. Therefore, discipline action will be determined on a case-by-case basis and may begin at any level of discipline deemed appropriate, based on several factors including, but not limited to the nature of the violation, employee history, and potential impact to the City.

When applicable, the following disciplinary steps may be used such as a verbal warning requiring removal of content, written warning, suspension without pay, a final written warning, or termination.

Immediate Termination may be warranted for the most severe violations that significantly harm the City's interests, reputation, or operations. Based on the policy, other options that could result in immediate termination include:

- **Posting Confidential Information.** Posting confidential information, such as about the City's employees, citizens, vendors, issues, business, or legal matters without express consent, may violate state law and subject the user to criminal penalty, which is a basis for immediate termination.
- **Creating a Liability Risk.** Certain violations could result in civil or criminal liabilities for the user. Actions that immediately expose the City to legal liability, such as severe copyright infringement (plagiarism is prohibited) or the intentional release of protected data, could justify immediate termination.
- **Egregious Violations While On Duty.** Any on-duty communication representing the City that is incomplete, inaccurate, inappropriate, threatening, demeaning, harassing, or poorly worded may be harmful to the City's reputation or violate City policy. Given that inappropriate usage of social media can be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination, a flagrant offense while acting as the City's "voice" could be cause for immediate dismissal.
- **Violating City Policy.** Posting information or pictures that violate any City policy or have an adverse effect on the City's legitimate business interests (even off-duty). If an employee's post is deemed egregiously abusive or threatening to the point of requiring immediate blocking of a user from the City's social media pages, the employee responsible for the original abusive post could face immediate termination.

The City has a vested interest in protecting its reputation and ensuring that an employee's communication with people outside the City, not only reflects positively on the employee as an individual, but also on the City.

5. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DUTY

The City of Deer Park permits the use of social media while on duty for the sole purpose of conducting City business and only with department director approval. Alternately, the City prohibits all personal use of social media while on duty regardless of whether the personal use is on a personal device or city- owned equipment, public Wi-Fi or city-owned private network unless such use is expressly permitted by the department director.

5.1 All communication representing the City through social media outlets should remain professional in nature. Incomplete, inaccurate, inappropriate, threatening, demeaning,

harassing or poorly worded postings may be harmful to the City's reputation or violate City policy. Such wording will be removed by either the Public Relations/Marketing or the Information Technology Services Department.

- 5.2 All employees (e.g., full-time, part-time, temporary, and seasonal) and volunteers bear full responsibility for the material they post on social media sites. Inappropriate usage of social media can be grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
- 5.3 Public messages relating to City of Deer Park activities on social media sites and/or any messages that might act as the "voice" or attempt to reflect the views of the City of Deer Park must be approved by the department director.
- 5.4 Any part-time employee who is tasked with generating content for a social media channel must submit all content to their supervisor for prior approval before that content is made public.
- 5.5 Employees shall not ignore copyright laws, cite, or reference sources inaccurately. Plagiarism is prohibited.
- 5.6 All information published on social media sites must comply with City of Deer Park's privacy and/or data policies. This includes comments, pictures, video, audio, or any other multimedia posted on social networking sites, blogs, and forums.
- 5.7 Media inquiries generated on social media sites should be referred to the City Secretary, the City Manager or Public Relations/Marketing Administrator.

6 OFFICIAL SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

- 6.1 Official social media sites representing the City of Deer Park will be the property of the City of Deer Park. All social media sites and email accounts shall be established by the Information Technology Services Department.
- 6.2 The Information Technology Services Department shall be responsible for the technical oversight of the City of Deer Park's social media formats to include:
 - 6.2.1 Establishing social media sites and related email accounts.
 - 6.2.2 Maintaining a list of social media domains, account logins and passwords and changing passwords. Notification to Information Technology Services is required if an employee is no longer designated to update content on a social media site(s).
 - 6.2.3 Utilizing Archive Social to maintain social media content per Texas State Library and Archive Commission requirements
- 6.3 Social media formats must meet one or both of the following purposes:
 - 6.3.1 Provide residents of Deer Park information about City events, activities and issues.
 - 6.3.2 Promote the positive aspects of the City of Deer Park to those in and outside the community.
- 6.4 The City's official website, www.deerparktx.gov, will remain the primary location for internet content regarding city business, services and events. Whenever possible, links within social media formats should direct users back to the City's website for more information, forms, documents or on-line services necessary to conduct business with the City of Deer Park.
- 6.5 Request(s) to the Information Technology Services Department and PR/Marketing and approval by the City Manager, is required prior to the establishment of any social

media site. Requests must include:

- 6.5.1 Purpose for the site and intended content to be posted/shared including the primary audience to be served;
- 6.5.2 Indication of how often the site's content will be reviewed and updated to ensure material accuracy and appropriateness;
- 6.5.3 Identification of individual(s) responsible for managing/overseeing and corresponding with the public (employee's name and position must be included) as well as indicating what provisions will be made if the responsible party leaves the position or is absent.

7 CONTENT MANAGEMENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

7.1 Only designated department employees approved by the Department Director will have authority to publish content on official social media sites of the City of Deer Park. Departments are required to maintain a list of such employees.

7.2 Department directors are responsible for monitoring site activity and ensuring content is consistent with the goals and objectives of the City.

7.3 While the intention of social media is to provide a two-way communication platform between City departments and the community, best judgement must be applied in all interactions. Departmental page administrators do have a right to respond to public commentary, inquires, or complaints – pertaining to the city or partnering entities – as they relate to the original message and intention of the original post.

However, if after an initial response is posted, a member of the public responds with a subsequent inquiry, the page administrator is advised to make their Director aware of the exchange and to notify PR/Marketing and /or City administration.

Public messages – be they initial posts or responses - relating to City of Deer Park activities on social media sites and/or any messages that might act as the “voice” or attempt to reflect the views of the City of Deer Park must be approved by the department director.

7.3.1 Responses in an effort to control misinformation/rumors: As dictated by available time and immediacy, all efforts should be made to respond to rumors (true or false) or misinformation posted on City social media outlets.

In these instances, basic responses that confirm accurate information (e.g., “This statement is accurate based on current information. We will provide additional information via the City website when it becomes available.”); deny inaccurate information (e.g., “This rumor/statement is false. For correct information, please visit the City website.”); or indicate that no information is available (e.g., “The City has no information about this item currently. Please check back for updates.”) are permissible.

7.4 Communication through social media is a public record. Both the posts by City employees and any feedback by others will be part of the public records of the City of Deer Park and will be subject to the Texas Public Information Act (Chapter 552 of the Texas Government Code).

7.5 Content posted by “friends,” “followers” or “fans” will not constitute a representation, agreement or endorsement on the part of the City of Deer Park.

The City of Deer Park reserves the right to hide or delete any comment or posting that is deemed inappropriate, pornographic, malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, insulting, or grossly inaccurate. Content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, disability, national origin or sexual orientation will not be permitted. Content that promotes an event that the City of Deer Park is not affiliated with may be hidden and/or deleted. The same applies to commercial postings conducted by individuals, a spam account or “bots.”

The City of Deer Park does not hide or delete comments or block users from any official social media outlet based on viewpoint discrimination.

In the event that an individual repeatedly posts egregiously abusive or threatening comments/images as outlined above, the City of Deer Park reserves the right to block the user from posting commentary to City social media sites/pages. The same will apply to commercial posting conducted by a spam account. For this purpose, users may be blocked after the third time a comment is deemed inappropriate and must be deleted.

Please note: The City of Deer Park will employ a “three-strike” process for those users who violate the Social Media Policy. Violations will be retained indefinitely by the City of Deer Park Information Technology Department. Three violations on any one outlet – or on a combination of multiple outlets – will result in the user being blocked from any and all impacted outlets.

If hiding or deleting a comment or blocking a user becomes a possibility due to an egregiously abusive comment, as outlined above, the page administrator managing the individual social media channel must:

1. Screenshot the comment as soon as possible;
2. Hide the comment as soon as a screenshot has been created; and
3. Provide Information Technology and PR/Marketing – as well as their Director - with the name of the user and the nature of the comment.
4. Complete a Social Media Policy violation form which will be received by socialmedia@deerparktx.org.

Page administrators are encouraged to monitor their channels frequently and to maintain awareness of all comments/exchanges that take place. Further, page administrators are advised that any action on social media not shared with the appropriate chain of command may result in repercussions including verbal or written warnings and up to termination.

Upon receipt of a comment that may warrant deleting, Information Technology and/or PR/Marketing will review the comment and consult with administration, as necessary. If the comment is deemed abusive, it will be deleted and begin the “three-strike” process for the specific user.

In these cases, the City will:

1. Send communication to the user notifying them that their comment has been deleted, citing the Social Media Policy and explicitly outlining the potential for being blocked from the channel after two (2) additional violations.
2. Screenshot the communication and retain indefinitely.

First warning message:

This is an official warning from the City of Deer Park regarding your use of one of our official social media outlets.

You are hereby notified that the comment you posted on (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE) on (DATE AND TIME) was in violation of the City's Social Media Policy, adopted by the Deer Park City Council on November 19, 2019. As stated in the policy, "The City of Deer Park reserves the right to hide and/or delete any comment or posting that is deemed inappropriate, pornographic, malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, insulting or grossly inaccurate."

As a result, your comment was permanently deleted from the page.

Please be advised that per the Social Media Policy, the City of Deer Park reserves the right to block an individual who repeatedly posts egregiously abusive or threatening comments/images as outlined above from the impacted social media site/page.

This is your first warning. In the event of a subsequent violation, you will receive a final warning. A third violation will result in your account being blocked from (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE) for one (1) year.

You may submit any questions about this warning to socialmedia@deerparktx.org.

3. The same steps will be taken upon the second violation by the same user.

Second (final) warning message:

This is your second and final warning from the City of Deer Park regarding your use of one of our official social media outlets. Your first warning was issued on (FIRST WARNING DATE).

You are hereby notified that the comment you posted on (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE) on (DATE AND TIME) was in violation of the City's Social Media Policy, adopted by the Deer Park City Council on November 19, 2019. As stated in the policy, "The City of Deer Park reserves the right to hide and/or delete any comment or posting that is deemed inappropriate, pornographic, malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, insulting or grossly inaccurate."

As a result, your comment was permanently deleted from the page.

Please be advised that per the Social Media Policy, the City of Deer Park reserves the right to block an individual who repeatedly posts egregiously abusive or threatening comments/images as outlined above from the impacted social media site/page.

This is your final warning. In the event of a subsequent violation, your account will be blocked from (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE) for one (1) year.

You may submit any questions about this warning to socialmedia@deerparktx.org.

If, after two warnings, blocking a user is deemed necessary, Information Technology and/or PR/Marketing – with administrative oversight – will:

1. Maintain screenshots of all violations of this policy for permanent retention;
2. Notify the page administrator, Director associated with the page, and administration that the user will be blocked;
3. Send communication to the user notifying them that they will be banned from the individual channel for one (1) year and retain indefinitely; and
4. Block the user and screenshot the updated list of banned users for the channel.

Final message – Blocking notification

You are hereby notified that your account has been blocked from (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE).

Per the City of Deer Park's Social Media Policy, adopted by the Deer Park City Council on November 19, 2019, you were issued two warnings regarding posting abusive content on (FIRST WARNING DATE) and (SECOND WARNING DATE).

Your most recent violation - posted on (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE) on (DATE AND TIME) - was in violation of the City's Social Media Policy. As stated in the policy, "The City of Deer Park reserves the right to hide and/or delete any comment or posting that is deemed inappropriate, pornographic, malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, insulting or grossly inaccurate."

As a result, your comment was permanently deleted from the page. As well, as this violation constitutes your third violation on the channel, you have now been blocked from the site for one (1) year.

During this time, you may still utilize City contact points including the City website, email, phone or printed publications to gain access to current information.

You may appeal this decision to City administration in writing to socialmedia@deerparktx.org.

Certain single egregious violations may result in immediate blocking of the user. Administrative review and approval will be required for ALL instances of immediate blocking from a City outlet without prior notification/written warnings.

If immediately blocking a user is deemed necessary, Information Technology and/or PR/Marketing – with administrative oversight – will:

1. Maintain screenshots of the violation(s) of the policy for permanent retention;
 2. Notify the page administrator, Director associated with the page, and administration that the user will be blocked;
 3. Send communication to the user notifying them that they will be banned from the individual channel for one (1) year; and
 4. Block the user and screenshot the updated list of banned users for the channel.
- Users blocked following a single violation will be brought to the attention of the City Attorney immediately following written notice. All communication with the user will be maintained indefinitely.

Immediate blocking notification

You are hereby notified that your account has been blocked from (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE).

Per the City of Deer Park's Social Media Policy, adopted by the Deer Park City Council on November 19, 2019, "The City of Deer Park reserves the right to hide and/or delete any comment or posting that is deemed inappropriate, pornographic, malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, insulting or grossly inaccurate." Further, "certain single egregious violations may result in immediate blocking of the user."

Your most recent violation - posted on (SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLET, PAGE HERE) on (DATE AND TIME) - was in violation of the City's Social Media Policy and deemed egregious by City administration. As such, you have now been blocked from the site for one (1) year.

You may still utilize City contact points including the City website, email, phone or printed publications to gain access to current information.

You may appeal this decision to City administration in writing to socialmedia@deerparktx.org.

Any user who is blocked from a social media platform may still utilize City contact points including the City website, email, phone or printed publications to gain access to current information.

8 DISCLAIMER

8.1 Each Official City of Deer Park Social Media Site/Page must include a Disclaimer that contains the following information:

"The City of Deer Park does not warrant or make representations or endorsements as to the quality, content, suitability, accuracy, or completeness of the information, text, graphics, links, and other items contained on a social media site's server or any other server. Such materials have been compiled from a variety of sources, and are subject to change without notice from the City. The City's primary and predominant internet presence shall remain the City's official website at www.deerparktx.gov and no other website or social media site can characterize itself as such.

Except to the extent required by law, commercial use of the materials is prohibited without the written permission of the City.

Some of the links on the City's social media pages may lead to resources outside the City of Deer Park municipal government. The presence of these links should not be construed as an endorsement by the City of these sites or their content. The City is not responsible for the content of any such external link. The responsibility for content rests with the third-party organizations that are providing the information.

Comments posted on this site by "friends," "fans," or "followers" or others will be monitored by City staff. Any posting or comment that is deemed inappropriate, pornographic, malicious, offensive, threatening, profane, insulting or grossly inaccurate- as well as content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, disability, national origin or sexual orientation – will be considered in violation of the City's Social Media Policy and may be hidden or deleted. The same will apply to commercial posting conducted by a spam account.

Users are advised that the City of Deer Park will employ a "three-strike" process for those users who violate the Social Media Policy. Violations will be retained indefinitely by the City of Deer Park Information Technology Department. Three violations on any one outlet – or in combination of multiple outlets – will result in the user being blocked from any and all impacted outlets.

Except to the extent required by law, communications made through e-mail and comments posted shall in no way be deemed to constitute legal notice to the City of Deer Park or any of its agencies, officers, employees, agents, or representatives with respect to any existing or potential claim or cause of action against the agencies, officers, employees, agents or representatives where notice to the City is required by any federal, state or local laws, rules or its regulations.

Further, comments on a social media site should not be utilized as a method of contacting the City in case of an emergency. Requests for City services or aid should be directed through channels which are monitored 24 hours a day, such as dispatch telephone lines. See respective pages/channels for 24-hour contact points.

Additionally, messages to social media outlets do not constitute open records requests – per the Texas Public Information Act, public information requests may only be submitted through US Mail, in-person delivery, via e-mail, via fax, via JustFOIA, as described on the City's website are <https://www.deerparktx.gov/Open-Records-Request>.

Finally, comments on social media sites such as the Parks and Recreation or Deer Park Public Library Facebook pages concerning reservations for one-time or ongoing programs are not considered acceptable alternatives to in-person or over-the-phone reservations or registration completed through online platforms such as ActiveNet.

Notice of any claim must be filed in writing to the City Secretary of the City of Deer Park, P.O. Box 700, Deer Park, TX 77536.

Contact Information:

Information Technology Services

City of Deer Park, Texas

P.O. Box 700, Deer Park, Texas 77536

Phone: 281-478-2028

E-mail: info@deerparktx.org

9 ENFORCEMENT

9.1 Violations of this policy may result in immediate revocation of any or all electronic communications access and user privileges and may be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination. Certain violations could result in civil or criminal liabilities for the user. Individual supervisors do not have the authority to make exceptions to this policy.

9.2 No employee or volunteer should have any expectation of privacy or confidentiality when using any City resource, including the city's public and private networks. The City

reserves the right to access, intercept, monitor and review all information accessed, posted, sent, stored, printed, or received through its communications systems or equipment at any time.

9.3 All social media access and use involving City equipment and resources are subject to the City's Internet, Intranet, and Email Use Policy.

10. CONTENT RESTRICTIONS

In keeping with the goals and objectives of the City of Deer Park to provide educational and governmental information, certain types of content are not allowed. These include, but are not limited to the following:

10.1 Political Use of Any City Website– Websites may not be utilized for the promotion or “use” of any elected official or candidate. Specific advertising messages on behalf of or opposing any political candidate or measure on any ballot shall not be permitted.

10.2 Position Advocacy – Any direct advocacy messages, including specific promotional messages on behalf of or opposing any ballot initiative, measure proposals, or items under consideration of the City Council, its commissions, or advisory bodies shall not be permitted.

10.3 Commercialism – There shall be no commercial advertising or other information which promotes the sale of any product or service offered, except for promotional announcements of City sponsored or sanctioned events, or approved sponsorship acknowledgments.

10.4 Lotteries – Advertising of other information concerning any lottery, gift enterprise, or similar promotion is prohibited.

10.5 Promotion of Religion – Programming which directly promotes religious beliefs or religious philosophies shall not be presented on the City's websites.

10.6 Promotions – Promotional announcement for City sponsored or sanctioned events will be permitted on the City of Deer Park's websites. However, promotional announcements for events, charities, or outside organizations in which the City has no official interest or sponsorship shall not be permitted.

10.7 Defamatory Material – Subject matter which is defamatory in nature (i.e., slander) shall not be presented on the City's websites.

10.8 Indecent or Obscene Content – There shall be no presentation of programming content which, in the opinion of the City Manager or his/her designee, is indecent, obscene, or illegal.

10.9 Copyright Restrictions – Programs containing copyrighted materials will not be posted on the website without proper copyright authorization. Outside agencies submitting content for posting are responsible for obtaining all necessary copyright clearance and shall hold the City, its officers and agents, harmless in any case of copyright infringement.

10.10 Liability – The City of Deer Park will not be responsible for the accuracy of any information posted on the website that was provided by outside sources.

11. REPORTING VIOLATIONS

The City urges employees to report any violations or possible perceived violations to their supervisor, department director, or the Human Resources Department. Violations include discussions of the City and its employees and patrons, any discussion of personal information and any unlawful activity related to blogging or social networking.