



Social Media Policy

Boxborough Select Board
Town of Boxborough, MA

Intent and Purpose

This document lists guidelines and policies regarding use of social media for official Boxborough Town purposes and applies to all departments (including all boards, committees, and commissions). The intent of all social media is to provide one-way communication from the Town to the Residents and others.

Contents

Intent and Purpose	1
Social Media Definitions	1
Policy on Social Media	2
One-Way Communication.....	2
Creating Social Media Accounts.....	2
Adherence to Laws.....	3
Reasons for Deleting Content	3
Affiliation with the Town	4
Posting to Social Media Accounts.....	4
Endorsements	5
Legal and Other Content Restrictions.....	5
Interactions with the Public.....	5
Photography and Digital Recording Policy.....	6
Unaffiliated Accounts.....	6

Social Media Definitions

Social media sites and **social networking sites** refer to websites that facilitate communication. Social media, in general, includes tools such as: blogs, wikis, and microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter); social networking sites (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn); video sharing or streaming sites (e.g. YouTube); and bookmarking sites (e.g. Pinterest).

A **social media identity** or **social media profile** is a specific user identity or account that has been registered on a third-party social media site. For example, a specific town department or board.

A **blog** is a website with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video.

Social Media Policy – Town of Boxborough

BSB approved 01/06/2020

Page 1 of 6

An **administrator** is an official, board member, or employee who has been authorized by the Town Administrator or the relevant board who reviews, authorizes, and posts content to a Town of Boxborough social media site or sites.

For the purposes of this document, the term **board** shall be used to refer to boards, committees, and commissions.

The policies in this document apply to all social media tools and platforms.

Policy on Social Media

This policy sets forth guidelines for the use of social media sites for official Town purposes, interaction with official sites, and compliance with open meeting laws. Questions regarding use of this Policy should be directed to the Town Administrator. This Policy may be amended from time to time and is meant to be read in conjunction with all other applicable policies and procedures of the Town of Boxborough.

The Town of Boxborough permits departments and boards to utilize social media sites and social networking sites (collectively “social media sites”) to provide information to its residents and various stakeholders in support of Town goals and objectives and for outreach, education, and notification. All social media inquiries should be directed to the Town Administrator or relevant Department Head.

The Records Retention Law of the Commonwealth (G.L.c.4, § 7(26)) requires the Town to preserve records created or received by a Town employee and members of all Town boards. Pursuant to this retention requirement, any posts or messages sent or received via an official state agency page on a third-party website (such as an official agency profile on a social network) will be treated as state governmental records and may be permanently archived. Information submitted voluntarily through social media sites associated with the state agency (where such information is publicly available) must include the contributor’s name and city or town. The substance of anything posted may be disseminated further by being posted or shared on any social media website. Appointed and elected officials of a board may only publicly discuss posted information in an official, posted meeting.

One-Way Communication

In order to comply with various laws and statutes regarding Open Meeting Law, Records Retention, and more, any posts made by administrators on Town social media sites where comments are permissible should be posted with the **ability to comment disabled**. Note that some platforms do not allow comments to be disabled; for those platforms, see the section of this document titled [Interactions with the Public](#).

Any user who contacts the administrator should be given information about the next public meeting of the board so that they may attend and have their comments addressed.

Creating Social Media Accounts

Before becoming public, all new Town social media sites shall be approved by the Town Administrator, acting on behalf of the Boxborough Select Board (BSB). Any social media site for

a board or department must have an administrator who is approved by the Town Administrator. Only administrators may post to their respective sites.

Social media administrators must create a strong account password. The administrators shall give the password to the Town Administrator or the TA's designee, to ensure that all accounts can be accessed by the Town in the event of changeover in personnel or volunteers.

In addition to blogs and websites, approved social media platforms include:

- Twitter
- Instagram
- Facebook
- YouTube

The Town Administrator shall approve the creation of any Town social media site using a new platform.

All social media sites shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted is subject to public disclosure per the terms of the Open Meeting Law.

[Adherence to Laws](#)

All Town social media sites shall adhere to applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations, and policies, including the Public Records Law, Public Records retention schedules, Open Meeting Law, Copyright Law, and other applicable Town policies.

Public Records Law and e-discovery laws and policies apply to social media content. All social media posts are considered part of the permanent record of communication from the Town according to Open Meeting Law. As social media sites could go out of business, merge, change content retention policies, and so forth, posts must be preserved independently of the social media platform site. **Site administrators must comply with Massachusetts' Electronic Records Retention guidelines.**

[Reasons for Deleting Content](#)

The Town reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable law.

Town social media posts containing any of the following shall not be allowed for posting:

- Content not topically related to that particular site, post, or blog article
- Profane, obscene, or vulgar language or content
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, gender identity, national origin, religion, ancestry, age, sexual orientation, disability, maternity leave, genetic information, or active military status
- Content that is threatening or harassing
- Sexual comments and content, or links to sexual content
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems

- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party
- Protected health information
- Personnel information (such as information about an employee's performance)
- Personally identifiable information (such as address, email, or social security number)
- Other information that is not public record or is otherwise privileged from public disclosure

In order for the social media identity or site to achieve transparency, the Town cannot change content that has already been published without making the changes clearly evident to users. Once something is posted on behalf of the Town, it should stay posted. Only spelling or grammar corrections should be made without making the change evident to users. Any modification of an earlier post must note that the change has been made.

Affiliation with the Town

Each Town social media site shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and topical scope of the blog and social media site. Where possible, social media sites should link back to the official Town site for forms, documents, and other information.

Contact information for the chair or the board responsible for the content of the social media site should be clearly provided.

Each Town social media site shall indicate to users that the site is subject to the host platform's Terms of Service. Furthermore, each Town social media site shall indicate that:

- The social media site provider or platform, e.g., Twitter, could collect personal information through a user's use of the social media site.
- This personal information may be disseminated by a third party.
- It's possible such dissemination may not be governed or limited by any state, federal, or local law or policy applicable to the Town.

All social media sites shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the Town of Boxborough and shall have the Town of Boxborough contact information prominently displayed.

Posting to Social Media Accounts

Where appropriate, Town IT security and/or computer use policies shall apply to all social media sites and articles.

Only the administrator of the account or profile may post to the site. No other members may post or comment. Discussion between two or more members of a board can be considered a violation of Open Meeting Law. Administrators should not engage in dialog with residents or other commenters.

Officials (elected or appointed) and employees representing the Town via social media sites must conduct themselves at all times as a representative of the Town and in accordance with all applicable rules, regulations, and policies (including personnel policies) of the Town of Boxborough.

Endorsements

No Town or department social media site may endorse (either with approval or disapproval) vendors, suppliers, clients, citizens, co-workers, or other stakeholders.

Posts may not endorse or comment on a warrant article, candidate, ballot question, fundraiser, third party activity, or other types of political endorsements. A post may address logistics of a meeting, election procedures, or other activity to encourage participation, as long as the post does not attempt to influence impending decisions.

For example:

Permitted: *At Monday's Town Meeting, a vote on Article X will take place. Please come to Town Meeting to vote on this important issue.*

Not Permitted: *Come to Monday's Town Meeting to vote Yes on Article X.*

Posts may not comment about rumors, political disputes, or personnel issues.

Legal and Other Content Restrictions

Copyright Law. Posts must abide by laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. Reprinting of articles or publications is illegal without written permission from the publisher. An excerpt of someone else's work must acknowledge the source, and, if possible, provide a link to the original.

Conflict of Interest. Town officials or representatives are prohibited from using social media to engage in any activity that constitutes a conflict of interest for the Town or any of its employees, as defined by G.L. c. 268A.

Protect Confidential Information. Never post legally protected personal information that you have obtained from the Town (e.g., information that is not public record under the Public Records Law, G.L. c.66, §10 and G.L. c. 4, §7(26), or whose dissemination is restricted under applicable Federal or State privacy laws or regulations. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that occur within the Town. Employees should never post information about policies or plans that have not been finalized by the Town without receiving explicit permission from their Department Head to post draft policies or plans on the department's social media sites for public comment has been received.

Interactions with the Public

Handling Negative Comments. For social media sites that do not allow disabling of comments, administrators may receive some negative feedback.

Do not engage in any discourse with commenters or posters. If a complaint is made, the administrator should only respond by telling the user the date and time of the next public meeting at which the complaint could be addressed, if necessary or appropriate.

Use Respectful language. Do not use ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, threats of violence, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the department's workplace, or board meetings.

Use the Social Media Site or Identity Only to Contribute to the Department or Board’s Mission. Contributions to a department or board’s social media site should provide worthwhile information and perspectives that contribute to the department or board’s mission of serving the public. What is published reflects on the Town.

Media Inquiries. Direct all reporters or other media representatives to the Town Administrator.

Photography and Digital Recording Policy

Town staff and officials often take photographs and videos at public events to use on social media sites. Attendees and parents/guardians of children who do not wish to be in posted photos are asked to inform the officials in charge of the event. Every effort should be made to avoid photographing people who do not wish to be photographed. Attendees of Boxborough public events are asked to use discretion in photographing and especially in posting photographs of other people’s children.

If a photograph of a person or child is inadvertently posted when a parent or guardian does not want it posted, the photo should be removed as soon as the error is noticed. The Town may also request that an internet site remove a photo or video of people at a Boxborough public event should those people (or their parents or guardians) ask that the item be removed.

Unaffiliated Accounts

All boards and departments representing the Town in an official capacity must adhere to these guidelines. Any non-official Town group wishing to use social media may not use the Town Seal.

This policy revokes and replaces all previous policies on this topic.