



WHERE TRADITION MEETS TOMORROW

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# CITY OF HANFORD

**LIMITED PUBLIC FORUM  
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

## **I. PURPOSE AND APPLICATION**

Social media is an increasingly important form of communication, information sharing, and community engagement for the City of Hanford. It should be approached and utilized in combination with other communication channels, both digital and non-digital, and in keeping with the City's branding and professional standards.

The purpose of this policy is to establish and maintain general standards and responsibilities for the acceptance and effective use of the City's social media platforms.

This policy applies to members of the public who comment or otherwise interact with the City through its social media channels.

### **A. Terms & Definitions**

“Administrator” means the City Manager or the City Manager’s designee, who is responsible for the City’s social media use, management, oversight, and compliance.

“Social media” means Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation, and allow for content publication, social interaction, and online community development across a large platform. These include but are not limited to social networking sites, mobile apps, microblogging sites, photo-based and video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, news sites, and Internet-based messaging sites. For the purposes of this policy, the terms “social media account,” “social media channel” and “social media site” are used interchangeably.

“Visitor” or “public user” means members of the public who read and otherwise use City social media accounts and channels.

## **II. SOCIAL MEDIA STANDARDS**

### **A. General**

1. The City’s official website (<https://www.hanfordca.gov>) is and will remain the primary online source for all City information. Social media platforms shall be used in conjunction with the City’s website whenever appropriate and generally shall be used to complement and extend the distribution of public information rather than serve as the primary source.

2. Social media is not acceptable as a primary method of information dissemination during an emergency. In matters of emergency, social media may be used to complement and extend the broadcast of information but only after adherence to standard emergency public information protocols.
3. No City department or City agency may establish or terminate a City social media identity, account, profile, page, or site without approval of the Administrator. All new social media tools proposed for City use shall require the same approval.
4. All official City social media profiles must clearly identify the pages as created and managed by the City and, if applicable, the individual department, agency, or division of the City.
5. When possible, posts to City social media accounts should include links directing users back to the City's official website for further information, online services, or official statements from the City (e.g., news releases, newsletters, and project and program webpages).
6. Only authorized users identified by the Administrator shall have permission to create, publish, post on, or remove a public post or comment from any official City social media channel. The Administrator will maintain a roster of approved users and shall have the authority to remove a user from said roster.
7. Public users of City social media channels should immediately encounter links to the City's official website and, when appropriate, links to the City webpage(s) of the specific agency or department related to the social media channel.

## **B. Mandatory Notices**

The following disclaimer or a link to this policy shall appear on every social media official City account.

*This account is intended to be a limited forum for communication and discussion between the City of Hanford and members of the public about specific topics. The City of Hanford reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments, including, without limitation, those comments that are not topically related, comments that are not protected speech under federal or state law, including, without limitation, profane or obscene language, sexual content, threats, defamatory statements, the encouragement of illegal activity, violations of the legal ownership interests of another party, solicitations of commerce, statements in support or opposition to political candidates or ballot propositions, content that promotes,*

*fosters, or perpetuates discrimination, information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems, or other statements violating the City of Hanford Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy.*

*Any content posted may be subject to public disclosure upon request.*

*Activity on this account is subject to all applicable federal, state, and local laws regulations and policies.*

*The City disclaims any and all responsibility and liability for any statements posted by a public user to any City social media account. The public is advised that: (i) comments posted by a member of the public are the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and the posting of comments does not imply the City's endorsement or agreement, nor do public comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City; and (ii) the posts of public users that contain defamatory statements may result in injury to others, which may result in personal liability to the party posting a defamatory statement.*

*The City neither guarantees the authenticity, accuracy, appropriateness nor security of external links, websites, or content linked thereto.*

*All use of and comments on City social media sites by members of the public are governed by the City of Hanford Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy and may be hidden or removed if determined to be in violation of the Policy or otherwise warranted.*

*Statements posted by members of the public to the City's social media sites in no way constitute a form of statutory notice to the City. All statutory notices to the City must be provided and delivered to the City in the manner described by applicable law.*

### **III. ADMINISTRATION**

A full inventory of the City's official social media accounts shall be maintained by the Administrator.

The Administrator shall also maintain an up-to-date list of login and password information for all official City social media accounts and provide a copy of the same to the City's IT Division.

The Administrator may establish guidelines for password security for all social media accounts in addition and consistent with platform-specific password guidelines. All City accounts not in compliance with such password guidelines shall develop new, compliant passwords.

The Administrator may immediately edit or remove content from any of the City's social media accounts if it is determined by them that the content violates the policies in this document or represents a security risk (e.g., malware).

#### **A. Editing and Removing City-Generated Posts from City Pages.**

It is never the City's preference to remove City-generated content from its social media pages. In certain circumstances, however, it may be necessary to remove posts to ensure the provision of up-to-date and accurate information and compliance with this Policy. Whenever possible, City-generated posts should be edited rather than deleted. Any questions should be directed to the Administrator.

When it is not possible for a post to be edited or updated, City-generated social media posts may be removed from City pages under the following circumstances:

1. Information in the post is incorrect, contains spelling or grammatical errors, or is misleading.
2. The act of posting a separate retraction or update would not be a sufficient solution.
3. The post does not meet the requirements of this Policy.

Archiving shall occur before a comment is hidden or deleted.

When removing a post is warranted, a corrected version should be posted as soon as possible after deleting the original content.

#### **B. Monitoring Public Comments.**

Social media accounts encourage the exchange of information and ideas, allowing public users of City social media accounts to ask questions and voice their opinions. Some of these comments may be inappropriate and violate the terms of this Policy. The Administrator has the authority and ability to hide or remove a comment, post, photo, etc. and/or block visitors or public users, though this is not the City's preference and should only be done in a manner consistent with this Policy.

In cases where comments are hidden or removed, the individual commentator will receive a direct message explaining the relevant terms of this Policy and the reasons behind the removal. In such circumstances, public users should be invited to repost their comment in accordance with the City's policies.

The City will attempt to monitor comments on social media channels during work hours as time permits. Comments may only be hidden or removed if they violate this Policy. Before hiding or deleting a comment, the Administrator should verify the violation. If necessary, they will confer with the City Attorney. Once a violation is confirmed, the comment can be hidden/deleted, and the public user can be contacted.

Comments in violation of the City's policy should be hidden from the page to the extent feasible. If a social media platform does not offer a "hide" option, comments in violation of this Policy will be deleted. Archiving shall occur before a comment is hidden or deleted.

A public user may be blocked from the City's social media accounts for a period of thirty (30) calendar days if the user violates this Policy on three (3) separate occasions during a ninety (90) calendar day period. For purposes of counting violations, the Administrator will notify the user of a violation of this Policy. If a public user is blocked and is subsequently reinstated, the public user may be blocked for a period of one hundred eighty (180) calendar days if the public user violates this Policy on three (3) separate occasions within one (1) year of the user's reinstatement. If a public user is blocked twice and is subsequently reinstated, the public user may be blocked for a period of one (1) year after the user's second reinstatement if the user violates the Policy on three (3) separate occasions within one (1) year of the user's second reinstatement. A public user may be blocked for successive one (1) year periods if the user violates this Policy on three (3) separate occasions within one (1) year of a user's reinstatement.

Public users shall not be blocked and content on the City's social media accounts shall not be deleted simply because they are critical of the City or its officials or employees, or because the City or an authorized user dislikes what the content says or represents. Content may be deleted only when it violates this Policy.

### **C. Documentation.**

The Administrator will have the authority to create the following, which are consistent with and complement this Policy, for each authorized social media channel to ensure threshold levels of activity, content quality, message uniformity, and brand integrity:

1. Channel-specific standard operating procedures.
2. City and departmental branding standards.
3. Overarching design standards.
4. Outline of intended purpose and use for each channel.

### **D. Approved Social Media Platforms.**

Facebook

Instagram

X (formerly Twitter)

YouTube

Nextdoor

LinkedIn

TikTok

#### **E. New Accounts Proposals.**

Requests to develop new social media accounts, pages, or profiles or to employ a new social media platform that has not yet been approved should be made in writing to the Administrator. Proposals should outline the following information clearly and succinctly:

1. Name of channel and/or platform.
2. Rationale for development.
3. Proposed departmental manager for the channel.
4. Summary of the intended use, including types of content to be disseminated, proposed account name or handle, tentative posting schedule, standards for monitoring of comments, etc.

### **IV. SOCIAL MEDIA POSTING AND COMMENTING POLICY**

The following governs all posts and comments on City social media sites.

#### **A. Generally**

Any individual accessing, browsing, and using a City social media site, whether as a visitor or an administrator, unequivocally accepts the policies (“Policies”) set forth in this document.

The City maintains the right to modify these Policies in any way without notice. Modification may include, without limitation, elimination of the public comment function from the City’s social media accounts. Any modification is effective immediately upon posting the modification on the City’s Social Media Policy webpage unless otherwise stated. Continued use of a City social media site following the posting of any modification signifies acceptance of such modification.

The City operates and maintains its social media sites as a public service to provide information about City programs, services, projects, policies, issues, events, and activities. The City assumes

no liability for any inaccuracies that associated social media platforms may contain and does not guarantee that City social media sites will be uninterrupted, permanent, or error-free.

## **B. Posting and Commenting**

Although posts and comments are encouraged on City social media sites that allow posts and comments, these sites are limited public forums and are moderated by the Administrator. All posted content (e.g., comments, photos, links, etc.) must be related to the subject of the original post being commented upon.

The following limitations and restrictions apply to both the administration of City social media accounts and public user content (e.g., posts to pages, comments, etc.). The following activities are unacceptable and are prohibited on all of the City's social media accounts and shall be promptly hidden or removed:

1. Any use of social media that does not comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, or with the Policies set forth herein or elsewhere.
2. Profane, obscene, violent, or pornographic content or language, including, without limitation, sexually explicit images, cartoons, and jokes, that are not protected speech under federal or state law.
3. Any content that is fraudulent.
4. Content that is discriminatory on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental health disability, sexual orientation, or any other classification protected under state or federal law.
5. Political statements, messages, symbols, or other images, including, without limitation, content in support or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures, except when sharing or otherwise communicating a formal action, endorsement, or policy position of the Hanford City Council.
6. Religious statements, including, without limitation, comments that endorse or oppose any type of religious opinions or activities.
7. Defamatory or personal attacks that are not protected speech under federal or state law.
8. Threats to any person or organization.
9. Encouragement of violence.

10. Solicitations of commerce, including, but not limited to, advertising of any business or product for sale except as allowed in City marketing plans or determined by the City to be essential to economic development.
11. Encouragement of illegal conduct.
12. Harassment or content that constitutes and/or facilitates stalking.
13. Conduct in violation of any federal, state, or local law.
14. Posts and comments not related to the original posted topic, including, without limitation, random or unintelligible comments.
15. Repetitive content.
16. Anything that contains confidential information or information that compromises the security of City networks or information systems.
17. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of City employees or facilities or the public.
18. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of another party, including, without limitation, intellectual property rights.
19. Content that violates the right to privacy.
20. Comments which may reasonably interfere with, inhibit, or compromise law enforcement investigations, police tactics, police responses to incidents, and/or the safety of police staff and officers.
21. Content that violates the terms of use governing the social media platform.
22. Hyperlinks to content prohibited under this Policy.

Additionally, the City is prohibited from doing any of the following:

1. Posting content that could reasonably be foreseen as creating a negative impact on the credibility of the City or its employees or which inhibits the City in carrying out its purpose or attaining its objectives.
2. Posting any personal grievance about the internal operations of the City or the specific conduct of supervisors or peers that may disrupt the workforce or interfere with the working relationships or efficient workflow.

Comments posted by public users are the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and the posting of comments does not imply the City's endorsement or agreement, nor do public comments

necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City. The City is not responsible or liable for any statements or content posted to a City social media account by a public user. Each public user shall be solely liable for the content that they post to the City's social media accounts.

The City does not claim or assert any ownership interest in any of the material posted by a public user, but, by posting or submission of any materials to a social media page of the City, a public user is granting the City a royalty-free, non-exclusive, and perpetual license to display it on the City's social media page in the City's sole discretion.

Public user communications made through City social media sites in no way constitute a form of legal or official notice or comment to the City. All statutory notices to the City must be provided and delivered to the City in the manner described by applicable law.

All content posted to the City's social media pages are bound by the Terms of Service of the corresponding service provider, and the City reserves the right to report any violation of such Terms of Service to the service provider for purposes responsive action.

### **C. Interacting with Other Social Media Accounts**

Interacting with other social media accounts can be a useful tool in informing residents about City activities, policies, and issues. However, the Administrator should utilize sound judgment when interacting with non-City social media accounts because those interactions may be misinterpreted. "Interacting," as used herein, includes, but is not limited to, "like(s)," "post(s)," "comment(s)," "tweet(s)," or "following" on social media platforms. For example, "liking" or "re-posting" on Facebook and "following" or "re-tweeting" on X (formerly known as Twitter) can be perceived as an endorsement of that person, account, message, or thing. Similarly, "un-liking" or "un-following" can be perceived as a rejection of that person or thing. "Liking," or other connections between the City and another person or organization does not imply endorsement of that person or organization or that person's or organization's actions or comments

The City must do the following when interacting with non-City social media accounts:

1. Read all information in the original post and any other relevant post thoroughly before interacting with it to ensure that it enhances community knowledge about City activities, issues, policies, and priorities.
2. Interact with information that is consistent with the City's goals.
3. Clearly identify the external source of the information (e.g., post, tweet, link, etc.).

#### **D. Links and Embedded Content**

**Links to other sites from City social media sites:** The City may provide links to other websites or social media profiles as a resource to public users. However, once public users click on such links and leave the City's site, the Policies in this document no longer apply, and the City is not responsible for the content that appears on such pages.

**Links by other entities to City social media sites:** Advanced permission to link to City social media sites is unnecessary. However, entities or individuals linking to official City social media sites may not, in any way without advanced approval, suggest a relationship or affiliation with the City or that the City endorses, sponsors, supports, or recommends their organization, opinions, causes, events, products, services, or site content.

**Embedded content from City social media sites on other sites:** Use of material and information from the City's social media sites is subject to the intellectual property provisions below. Content embedded from any City social media site shall not be misrepresented in any way. The use of content embedded from City social media sites on third-party sites will not, in any way, imply the City's endorsement, support, sponsorship, or approval of the site without explicit City approval.

#### **E. Intellectual Property Policy**

Materials made available via City social media sites, including, without limitation, City seals, emblems, and logos, are the property of the City and are intended for informational purposes only. Any re-use, transmission, duplication, or distribution of any material found on an official City social media site may occur only with the City's written consent. Commercial use of material found on City social media sites is prohibited without the express written consent of the City. Material available on City social media sites may not be used for any non-governmental purpose.