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Social Media Policy for Members of Council

Policy

The purpose of this policy is to clarify how the Town of Prescott's Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards ("Code of Conduct") guides a member's use of social media.

Failure to follow the guidance set out in this policy could lead to a finding that a member has contravened the Code of Conduct. Members can seek advice from the Integrity Commissioner with respect to specific situations that may arise.

Objective

To provide guidance on how the how the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards ("Code of Conduct") guides a member's use of social media.

Definitions

In this policy, the following terms have the meanings set out below:

"Member" includes the elected Head of Council and elected members of Council.

"Municipality" means the corporation of the Corporation of the Town of Prescott.

"Social Media" refers to freely accessible, third-party hosted, interactive Internet technologies used to produce, post and interact through text, images, video, and audio to inform, share, promote, collaborate, or network. A non-exhaustive list of examples of social media in in include: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

Policy Requirements

1. Guiding Principles

- 1.1 Social media provides Members with a valuable and convenient tool to communicate, inform, and engage constituents about Town Council work and Member's activities. Social media allows for efficient and direct engagement between Members and constituents. When used in accordance with the Code of Conduct, social media enables Members to showcase their diligent and conscientious service to their constituents and can help improve trust and confidence in Town Council and the Town of Prescott.
- 1.2 As with any other activity, members of Council must ensure that their use of social media is mindful of, and consistent with, the Code of Conduct and Town policies.

2 Use of Title and Town Resources

- 2.2 Use of a Member's title on social media profiles provides legitimacy – from the perspective of social media providers and the public – and authority and influence similar to use of letterhead or other incidents of office. A Member's title can only be used for Town purposes and not for campaign purposes.
- 2.3 A social media account is identified as a Member's social media account if it:
 - (a) uses any prescott.ca email address as a point of contact;
 - (b) identifies the Member as a current member of Prescott Town Council in the handle name, the user name, or the profile description;
 - (c) uses the logo or any other proprietary mark of the Town of Prescott;
 - (d) contains contact information for the Member at Town Hall or any other official contact information; and

3 Required Practice

- 3.1 In order to keep a Member's personal life and role as a Member of Council separate, if Member's choose to utilize social media in their official capacity of a Council Member, they shall create an additional social media account which members of the public can 'like' or 'follow', rather than using their personal accounts.
- 3.2 It is acknowledged that as a part of their representative duties, Members regularly participate and engage in local events and activities with constituents,

including local businesses, and Members will use social media to publicize these kinds of activities. Members also use social media to inform residents about federal, provincial, and Town programs. A Member may therefore post the following types of content on their official accounts, as long as it is voluntary, unsolicited, and otherwise in accordance with the Code of Conduct:

- (a) content that raises awareness of local events and activities;
 - (b) content that raises awareness of federal and provincial government programs;
 - (c) content that publicizes the Member's attendance at a ceremony, event, or activity that is otherwise permissible under the Code of Conduct; or
 - (d) content that publicizes a Member's interactions with constituents, including local businesses.
- 3.3 A member must not post the following content using any social media account that, at the time of posting, is identified as a member's social media account or uses publicly-funded resources:
- (a) content that promotes or appears to promote any third-party interest including events, products, services, or goods that are not in relation to the duties and responsibilities of a member of Council.
 - (b) content that promotes or appears to promote any candidate or political party in any election at the municipal, federal, or provincial level, including leadership campaigns.
- 3.4 When Members are asked questions on social media regarding Town services (garbage collection, snow removal, etc.) and do not have the answers, Members shall acknowledge the question and refer it on to the Town's official customer service channels.
- 3.5 Members shall not "block" users from their official social media accounts unless the users have engaged in harassing behaviour, or have made discriminatory or inappropriate comments towards a Member. Each instance must be handled on a case by case basis. Using social media is a way to communicate with constituents and blocking users could be seen as a refusal to provide services.

4 Confidential Information

- 4.1 The Code of Conduct prohibits Members from disclosing or releasing confidential information acquired by virtue of their office. Members shall not post content on social media that discloses information or conduct during meetings that were

closed to the public, or disclose any documentation circulated to Members that is marked confidential. The obligation to keep information confidential applies even if the Member ceases to be a Member for any reason.

5. Respecting Staff, Each Other, and the Public

- 5.1 The Code of Conduct requires Members to be respectful of the role of staff to provide professional and politically neutral advice. Members shall not use social media to engage in criticism of Town staff. The public nature of social media can increase the risk of harming the professional and ethical reputation of Town staff.
- 5.2 Members shall not use social media as a platform to treat members of the public, one another, or staff without respect. Members shall not engage in or encourage bullying or shaming of any other social media users. These types of interactions on social media misplace the focus of interaction on attacking individuals rather than engaging in constructive discussion. This manner of communication is inconsistent with the Code of Conduct.

6. Specific Election Year Requirements

- 6.1 To comply with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the Code of Conduct, and the Town's *Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes Policy*, Members must take affirmative steps to clearly distinguish between use of social media for personal or election purposes on the one hand, and use of social media in his or her capacity as a Town official on the other hand. To take such affirmative steps, Members must adopt one of the following two approaches:
 - (a) *Maintaining Separate Election Accounts*: Establish separate and distinct social media accounts for re-election purposes that are clearly labelled as election accounts and that are not identified as a Member's official Council account. Members who establish separate and distinct social media accounts for re-election purposes may continue to use social media accounts described in section 2.3 of this policy throughout the election campaign period, as defined in s. 88.24 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.
 - (b) *Maintaining a Single Account Subject to Restricted Use*: Members who choose not to maintain separate and distinct election accounts and who intend to use a social media account that has been identified as a Member's social media account within the meaning of

this policy, for any purpose relating to their re-election must (as applicable):

- (i) on May 1 of the election year until the end of the election campaign period defined in s. 88.24 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, cease producing and distributing any publication paid by the Town, including business cards, that includes account information (i.e. user names, handle names) for the social media account;
- (ii) for the duration of the election campaign period as defined in s. 88.24 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*:
 - remove any reference to the Town of Prescott, the Town logos or images proprietary for the Town of Prescott, and reference to a Member's title from the account handle name, the user name, and/or the profile description;
 - ensure that the account's registration information does not include any prescott.ca email addresses or Town of Prescott phone numbers;
 - expressly notify followers or friends on the social media platform that the account will be used for purposes related to re-election, provide an alternative source of information for followers interested in constituency services, and label the account appropriately.

Monitoring

The Integrity Commissioner shall receive all complaints under this policy related to Members and investigate in accordance with the process as set out in the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards. Where there is a discrepancy between this Policy and the Code of Conduct, the Code of Conduct shall prevail.