



City of East Grand Rapids Social Media Policy

Overview

Local government significantly impacts the daily lives of residents and community members, which is why the City of East Grand Rapids (the City) is committed to keeping these audiences and other stakeholders regularly informed of its activities and services.

Social media plays a key role in amplifying City news and reaching key audiences. The City utilizes social media to share updates on official City matters, raise overall awareness of City services, promote community engagement opportunities and City job openings, celebrate City staff and community members and share pertinent information from community partners.

The City currently utilizes three primary social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Its focus on each of these platforms is:

- **Facebook:** To inform and connect with residents and community members by providing resources, reminders and opportunities that will enhance their experience.
- **Twitter:** To inform residents, community members and the media on timely news and events.
- **YouTube:** To engage with residents and community members through livestreamed City Commission meetings and educational videos, including those that feature safety tips.

The City will evaluate new social media platforms as they evolve, with primary consideration given to the platforms' abilities to help it reach a significant number of stakeholders. New platforms will be added on a case-by-case basis after reviewing:

- The City's ability to successfully manage the platform without investing in additional resources
- Other municipalities or forms of government that are on the platform
- Demographic reach of the audience
- Additional costs associated with the platform

Responsibilities

The City Manager's Office and Sabo PR have oversight of the City's social media accounts serving as administrators. Day-to-day responsibility for account management can be shared with other department directors and team members at the discretion of the City Manager.

These responsibilities include:

- Evaluating potential content to be shared
- Posting new and engaging content on a consistent basis at the most advantageous times
- Monitoring posts and responding to comments and questions in a timely fashion
- Short- and long-term planning to ensure timely messages
- Alerting the Mayor and City Commissioners about content and comments as needed
- Building and engaging with audiences
- Amplifying social media content from community partners such as the local Kent District Library branch, EGR Public Schools and Foundation, EGR Community Foundation and Gaslight Village Business Association, as well as the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds, Michigan Department of Transportation, National Weather Service and other government organizations.

- Tailoring content/language appropriately when posting on multiple platforms to match each platform's audiences, uses and restrictions
- Identifying problematic issues or content and conferring with the City Manager before posting or sharing
- On rare occasions, hiding or removing content that violates the City's professional standards or other widely accepted community standards as outlined in its commenting policy

Note: Social media administrators should avoid hiding comments as it stops notifications about said comment to the administrators, which can lead to unaddressed additional comments. Rather, consider deleting comments. In the case of a first offense, commentors should be publicly warned their continued language may have their account blocked from the page. A link to the social media commenting policy on the City's website should also be provided. Repeated violations of the policy will cause the commentator to be permanently blocked from the City's Facebook page without additional notice. The following is a sample response to a commentor violating the City's social media policy:

NAME, per our social media commenting policy, we do not tolerate this language/behavior and ask you to delete your comment. If you continue to comment in this manner, you will be permanently blocked from our page. Social media commenting policy: [LINK](#).

Additionally, administrators must be cautious when sharing outside information. To avoid crowding its page, the City will not share information from other business in attempt to advertise/publicize on their behalf. For example, the Turkey Trot and Resolution Run are annual 5Ks that take place in but are not organized by the City. It's appropriate to share details on the races regarding road closures as they will impact resident and community members. However, the City will not encourage or discourage individuals to participate in these races, otherwise, other organizations may ask for such posts from the City as well.

Commenting Policy

The following can be used as an official commenting policy for the City's social media platforms and posted on the City's website:

Thank you for visiting an official City of East Grand Rapids social media account. Social media plays a key role in how the City connects with residents, community members and visitors. We utilize social media to share updates on official City matters, raise overall awareness of City services, promote community engagement opportunities and City job openings, celebrate City staff and community members and share pertinent information from community partners. We encourage you to take part in our discussions.

Our primary rule is to be courteous and respectful of everyone who engages with us on social media. We reserve the right to hide or delete comments containing any of the following forms of content: profanity; misinformation; content that promotes, fosters or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation; personal attacks; sexual content or links to sexual content; conduct or encouragement of illegal activity; information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; inappropriate comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures; misinformation regarding elections; content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party. First-time offenders will be publicly warned their language is not tolerated by the City and that continued behavior may lead to their account being blocked from the page. Repeated violations of the policy will cause the commentator to be permanently blocked from the City's Facebook page without additional notice.

We cannot guarantee the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of any third-party comment or post.

While the City does actively monitor posts, its administrators are not responsible for content other than its own. A third-party post expresses the views of its author and does not represent the views of the City. Following individuals or organizations is not an endorsement by the City but intended as a means of communication.

Although social media is a 24/7 medium, our moderation capabilities are not. We may not see comments, including those that violate our policy, right away. We encourage community members to ignore personal attacks and negative speech or respond politely. If an individual posts a comment that requires a response, it will be answered within one business day during business hours (8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday). Additionally, City social media platforms are not monitored for emergencies or urgent matters – users are advised to call 911 for emergencies and the City at 616.949.2110 for time-sensitive matters.

By submitting content to the City, you agree to follow these terms and verify you are the owner of the content and are not infringing on anyone else’s rights of ownership or privacy. Please note the City’s page is owned and operated by individual social media platforms, which have their own additional policies and standards regarding what may or may not be posted and the actions they may take with regard to unauthorized posts.

Questions? Give us a call at 616.949.2110.

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Policies & Best Practices

Barring the absence of any state or federal guidelines, the City will follow best practices and community standards for social media. The social media administrators will:

- Strive for both **accuracy and fairness** in all public content including that on its website and social media platforms. Work to correct factual errors as quickly as possible.
- Always be **transparent** in providing residents the information they need and not allow politics, anywhere from local to national, to inform content or agenda.
- Approach social media with **professionalism, respect and civility**, recognizing social media does not always lend itself to productive conversations. Pledge not to sink to the depths that social media is known for, even when other users behave unprofessionally
- Follow best practices for social media and **post regularly** on Facebook and YouTube. Utilize Twitter for more urgent or timely news. Strive to maximize the potential reach of content by sharing posts during higher-traffic times on each platform, recognizing that sometimes compelling news will prevent us from doing so.
- Use **person-first language** in social media posts, believing people should not be defined by any single characteristic.
- Will take good care of the City’s accounts and passwords, changing them as needed and keeping them **safe** from the general public.
- Will work to **correct any typographical or content errors** as quickly as alerted to them, understanding mistakes occur and information changes.

Voice

The City’s voice on social media should echo the City’s voice in its other communication forms, including the website, printed collateral materials and other client communications. These characteristic include:

- Authoritative but never authoritarian
- Knowledgeable but never a know-it-all
- Open and engaging
- Trusted resource

Rules for Administrators

Social media administrators must represent the City and not their own interests or agendas. Care should be taken to avoid appearing partisan when it comes to politics or issues that have the potential to be divisive or polarizing or to let personal feelings show through in the text used to introduce or comment on posts. This applies not only for content being shared by the City but on all the engagements, comments and shares being done on its behalf.

The City's accounts will be monitored 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The account managers will strive to respond to all questions within one business day. Those received outside of regular business hours may not be answered until the following business day. For simple informational inquiries, account managers can respond on their own, drawing on appropriate City resources if needed. Should the inquiry have the potential to be controversial, divisive or provocative, the account manager should coordinate all responses through an internal vetting process involving the City Manager and/or any appropriate subject matter experts.

In keeping with the City's commitment to professionalism, respect and civility, social media administrators should address negative behavior by first engaging publicly so those following the conversation see the City's response and then quickly taking the conversation offline to see if the issue can be resolved amicably but out of public sight either via direct message or a phone call. The account manager should bring in City resources as needed to address and resolve the issue. If appropriate and with permission, they should share the private resolution on the same post that highlighted the initial issue, indicating how the issue has been resolved. If the attack continues, they should acknowledge the City's community standards of engagement and share a first warning, asking for the behavior to be corrected. If the attack still continues, the administrator will discuss the issue with the City Manager before taking steps to block access and report the offending account holder.

Employee Use of Personal Social Media Platforms

Team and City Commission members who engage with, comment on and share the City's content from their personal accounts are certainly welcome to do so, but must also abide by the City's commenting policy and the following items to avoid a blur between professional and personal interactions and help ensure they do not inadvertently compromise the City's professional, legal or ethical standards. Additionally, as representatives of the City, team and board members are cautioned to exercise discretion and common sense when using social media for personal purposes, as well as follow these guidelines:

1. Be aware of your association with the City on online social networks. If you identify yourself as a City employee or have a public-facing position for which your association is known to the general public, make clear that all opinions or positions expressed are your own and not those of the City. Make sure your profile and related content – even when of a personal nature – is consistent with how you wish to present yourself as a City professional and is appropriate for the public trust associated with your position. Employees cannot have expectations of privacy when using social media. Employees should make sure that their personal use of any type of social media does not negatively reflect on the city's reputation, policies or employees.
2. Employees who are not administrators of a City social media account should seek approval from their director, the City Manager's office or Sabo PR before commenting on posts with the exception of providing public information.
3. Employees and Commissioners should never provide a statement on behalf of the City on any of its social media platforms or in community Facebook groups, especially regarding public safety matters.
4. City Commissioners should consult with the City Manager, the appropriate subject matter expert and Sabo PR before providing a statement. They should always maintain transparency when

posting about City matters by using a given name and title and being clear about their role in regard to the subject.

5. Do not use City email addresses to register on social networks, blogs or other online tools used for personal use.

During Emergencies/Investigations

Social media can be an effective tool to communicate with key stakeholders, including the media, during an emergency. In the event of a City, community, state or national emergency, the account administrators will connect with the City Manager, Public Safety Chief and other appropriate directors to determine accurate information about the incident or situation and get approval on all text and images before posting on social media. Once posted, the account administrators will monitor social media, responding to comments and questions in real-time. Once the emergency or investigation has ended, the account administrators will update the original post and potentially include a thank-you message for the appropriate first responders or key stakeholders.

As is the case with media statements, race should not be included in any social media post unless there is a public safety issue where the department is asking the community for help in looking for a suspect AND race is not the only descriptor known/provided. Additionally, when sharing incident details, calls to action beyond asking followers to provide any known information with the Public Safety Department or Silent Observer should be avoided. For example, in the event of sexual assault, the City's post should not include a warning on how to avoid sexual assault so as to not inadvertently place blame on the survivor.

Misuse of Accounts

The penalty for intentional misuse of the City's social media accounts by page administrators or team members will be determined by the City Manager and/or Human Resources.

From time to time, unofficial accounts are opened in the City's name. When an unsanctioned account is identified, it should be reported to the City Manager's Office and/or Sabo PR, who will report the unofficial account and have it removed.

Facebook Away and Automatic Response Messages

Instant Reply (during regular hours): Hi, NAME. Thank you for your message. We try to be as responsive as possible but may not see your note right away. We'll get back to you soon. If this is an emergency, please call 911. For time-sensitive matters, please call the City at 616.949.2110 as this account is not monitored 24/7. You can find resources and answers to frequently asked questions at eastgr.org.

Away Message (outside of regular hours): Hello, NAME. Thank you for your message. We may not see your message outside of business hours (8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday), but we'll get back to you as soon as we can. This account is not monitored for emergencies or urgent matters. If this is an emergency, please call 911. For urgent matters, please call the City at 616.949.2110 during normal business hours.

Approved by the
East Grand Rapids City Commission
May 16, 2022