

TOWN OF GERMAN FLATTS
SOCIAL MEDIA/NETWORKING POLICY

I. Purpose and Policy:

The Town of German Flatts Social Media/Networking Policy describes the Town's rules and guidelines respecting the personal conduct by Town employees while engaging in social networking and utilizing social media and to eliminate any confusion concerning the use of social media. This Policy applies to all Town employees and its purpose is to:

1. Encourage the Town to permit the responsible use of social media by its employees; and
2. Establish minimum requirements for the use of social media in Town government.

II. Definition of Social Media/Social Networking:

This policy refers to the use of Internet forums, sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and photo-sharing sites and blogging sites, among others. Because new social media/networking sites are created regularly, this Policy is not limited to the sites named herein.

III. Use of Social Media/Networking:

To utilize social media for official Town purposes and during Town business hours, employees must receive the authorization of the Department Head. If authorization is obtained, the employee utilizing social media is required to be respectful to the Town, to other employees, community partners, elected and appointed officials and government agencies. All other use of social media/networking by Town employees during Town business hours is prohibited.

Outside the workplace, an employee's right to privacy and free speech protect online activity conducted on an employee's social networks with personal e-mail addresses. However, what an employee publishes on such personal online sites should never be attributed to the Town and should not appear to be endorsed by or originated from the Town. If an employee chooses to list his/her work affiliation on a social network, then the employee should regard all communication on that network as he/she would in a professional network.

IV. Identifying oneself as an employee of the Town:

Because most social networking sites have fields in the "user Profile" for work experience, job title, etc., by identifying oneself as an employee of the Town, a social networker becomes, to some extent, associated with the Town, and everything he/she posts has the potential to reflect on the Town and its image. Although the Town does not want to discourage this association, if an employee participates in social media/networking, the Town expects the following:

1. That each employee will exercise good judgment and proper taste in social media postings and photos;
2. As a Policy, employees are not permitted to identify themselves as representatives of the Town;
3. The Town prohibits employees from listing a job title or using the Town's logo without written consent from the Town Board; and
4. If a social network user identifies him/herself as an employee of the Town, then any personal blogs and other personal posts must contain disclaimers that make it clear that the opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of the Town. (An example for a blogger, "the posts on this site, including but not limited to images, links, and comments left by readers, are the author's own and do not represent the position or opinion of the author's employer.")

Please remember that an employee's online presence, actions, captured images, posts or comments reflect upon the Town. Each employee is personally responsible for any of his/her online activity conducted with a Town e-mail address or which can be traced back to the Town's domain or which uses Town assets. Utilizing a Town employment title or e-mail address implies that an employee is acting on the Town's behalf.

V. Making Recommendations for Others for Jobs and Other Roles:

Some social medial sites provide for members to write recommendations or referrals for friends or associates. If a Town employee does this as a representative of the Town, it may give the appearance that the Town endorses the individual being recommended, which may create a liability issue for the Town. It is for this reason that the Town prohibits employees (those who identify themselves on social media/networking sites as an employee of the Town) from making such recommendations or referrals.

VI. Referring to Others:

The Town's relationship with citizens, community groups and organizations and with other government agencies can be damaged through a thoughtless comment. Even a positive reference could be utilized in a negative manner and can damage these relationships. As such, this Policy restricts publishing photographs, videos or quotes of others without first obtaining their permission.

VII. Confidential Information:

Town employees must protect Town information that is considered to be non-public in nature, in accordance with Town polices pertaining to confidential information and disclosure.

VIII. Complying with Terms of Service for Social Networking Sites:

Most social networking sites require that users, when they sign up, agree to abide by a Terms of Service Agreement. In particular for certain employees who may have been assigned a job related duty to use a social network, the employee is responsible for reading, knowing and complying with the Terms of Service Agreement of the sites used.

IX. Copyright and Other Legal Issues:

The Town requires employees to comply with copyright laws. Plagiarism (the posting of someone else's work) without permission/citation is also not allowed. Other relevant laws include those related to libel, slander and defamation of character and can result in litigation against the author/speaker of the statement. If this involved a Town employee, at the very least it could bring bad publicity to the Town.

X. Consequences to Employee for Policy Violations:

Violations of this Policy may result in disciplinary action, including termination. Where no policy or guidelines exist, employees should use their professional judgment and take the most prudent action possible. Consult with your Department Head if you are uncertain or need clarification about this Policy.