



## **Social Media and Media Inquiry Policy for the Town of Surfside**

### **Purpose and Scope**

Social media has drastically changed the world of media, news and communications. When it comes to government and civic engagement, digital outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, NextDoor and YouTube, make it possible for councils, commissions and public servants to communicate directly with their constituents and vice-versa. To expand on the importance of the medium, a Pew Research Center Study found that **69%** of the public uses some form of social media. Meanwhile, **62%** of adults receive the majority of their news from social media.

The Social Media Policy for the Town of Surfside establishes the official Town policy to provide guidance to all contracted agencies, administration and employees, and the Town Commission on the use of social media networks and personal websites. Social media includes all platforms used to communicate information on the Internet, including personal websites (including blogs), Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yelp, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, NextDoor and SeeClickFix. Employees have the right to maintain personal social media. However, the use of social media also represents certain risks and therefore carries with it certain responsibilities. It is not permissible to state or imply that personal social media in any way officially represents the Town of Surfside.

It's important the Town of Surfside abide by a professional, modern and efficient code of conduct on digital social platforms. This Social Media Policy also establishes the Communications Policy to provide guidance on working with and handling media requests and inquiries, as well as providing residents with accurate and objective information as it pertains to the Town.

The Social Media Policy for the Town of Surfside is to be made public on the Town's official website, following approval by Town Commission. A URL link also will be added to all social media channels.

### **Social Media Accounts**

The Town of Surfside's social media presence should be limited to one account per specific platform. For example, the Parks & Recreation Department for Surfside should not have a Facebook page that is separate from the Town. Instead, the Town's Facebook

page should, when appropriate, incorporate information pertaining to Parks & Recreation. By doing so, important public information becomes more organized and residents know where to find such information, thus eliminating any layer of confusion or public misinformation.

As of 2019, the Town website serves as the primary communication tool for the Town of Surfside. The Town also uses two social media platforms: NextDoor and SeeClickFix.

### **Best Practice and Standards for Use of Social Media**

The official use of social media by the Town of Surfside is to adhere to the below standards and practices:

#### ***Users, Posting and Account Activations***

- No Department or individual may establish, use, or terminate a social media identity or page without the approval of the Town Manager or designee.
- The Town of Surfside has authorized the Public Information Representative (PIR) to oversee and manage all social media administration, including, but not limited to, blogs, video sharing, business pages and social networking sites. The Town reserves the right to delegate to other individual(s) the authority to upload approved material to the Town's social media.
- To meet its purpose, the Town of Surfside's social media may contain links to other social networking sites or websites that are not owned, regularly reviewed or controlled by the Town. The Town of Surfside is not responsible for the content, photos and videos placed on these external social networking sites or websites. The Town's social media may not provide links to external sites that are political or religious in nature. The provision of direct links should not be construed as an endorsement or sponsorship of these external sites, their content or hosts.
- Social media sites must prominently display links to the Town's official website (<https://www.townofsurfsidefl.gov/>) or appropriate landing pages whenever possible.

#### **Ownership**

All social media communications messages that are composed, sent or received on the Town's IT equipment or used in official Town business or representing the Town of Surfside are the property of the Town of Surfside and subject to public records laws. The Town of Surfside reserves the right not to publish any posting or to later remove it.

## **Town Administration / Employee Conduct (refer to HR policy)**

- Social media accounts established by the Town of Surfside are to be used solely for the Town of Surfside and business pertaining to the Town. Any other content pertaining to other topics or promotions is not permitted.
- Employees, or the contracted agency managing the Town of Surfside's social media, are prohibited from using the Town's social media outlets for personal use, including posting personal content and/or opinions.
- Personal use of social media by Town employees is never permitted on working time by means of the company's computers, networks, and other IT resources and communications systems.
- Employees are expected to be attentive and careful in their use of social media. Employees should be aware that their use of social media may be perceived as representing the Town and Town government, and should tailor their use accordingly.
- Employees may not post anything on their personal blog or social media site/page, or on the blog or social media site/page of another individual or entity (other than the Town), in the name of the Town or in a manner that could reasonably be attributed as the official position of the Town without authorization from the Town Manager or designee.
- Employees are prohibited from engaging in inappropriate use of social media accounts established by the Town or a Town department. It is unacceptable for social media to be used in a manner that does not comply with federal, state and local laws and regulations, and Town policy. Employees are expected to abide by the following guidelines:
  - Respect copyright, trademark, or other intellectual property rights of any person or entity, or otherwise violates their legal ownership interest. Employees may not use the Town's logo, seal, slogan or trademarks on their personal blog or social media site or page in a manner that suggests that the posts express the opinions of the Town.
  - Refrain from the use of ethnic slurs, profanity, threats of violence, material that is harassing, defamatory, fraudulent or discriminatory.
  - Refrain from the use of sexually explicit images, cartoons, jokes, messages, or other material that violates the Town's policy or any federal, state, or local law prohibiting sexual harassment.
  - Refrain from posting material which contains confidential information that compromises the security of Town networks or information systems. Such

confidential information includes, but is not limited to, information that is protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) or other federal, state, or local laws and regulations (except as permitted under such laws and regulations), as well as social security numbers and other personally identifiable information.

- Refrain from circulating or posting commercial, personal, religious or political solicitations, chain letters, spam, or promotion of outside organizations unrelated to Town operations are also prohibited [unless otherwise protected or required by law].

The policy, however, does not prohibit or discourage employees from engaging in speech as independent citizens on matters of public concern, or to prohibit or discourage employees from engaging in any protected activities under the State of Florida's Public Employee Relations Act (Chapter 447, F.S.)

All employees are required to sign a written acknowledgement that they have received, read, understand and agree to comply with the Town's social media policy.

### **Town Commission Conduct**

It is advisable that Town Commission strictly follow the code of ethics set forth by the Miami-Dade County – Commission on Ethics and Public Trust, as well as compliance with the Florida Sunshine Law.

- Commission members must not communicate amongst themselves in a social media exchange or discussion regarding any matter that is before the board/commission for action.
- Commission members may not utilize the Town's social media outlets for personal use, including posting personal content and/or opinions.
- Without prior authorization from the Town, Commission members should refrain from positing on social media in a manner that would suggest that they are representing the official position of the Town and Town government.
- In the event of an emergency, Town Commission is encouraged to "share" posts created by Town's PIR. It is not advisable to copy & paste a post or paraphrase content to ensure accuracy of information to public.

### **Resident Conduct on Town Social Media Pages**

While social media sites promote an open forum, the Town requests that residents endeavor to make their comments respectful and appropriate. Inappropriate comments, comments not related to the purpose of the page or comments not related to the specific

post are subject to deletion by the PIR or Town designee. The PIR will not engage in a negative conversation on social media. If residents fail to comply with the posting guidelines, the PIR or Town designee may contact the resident and their message may be removed. If the resident posts inappropriate content a second time, the PIR or Town designee will contact the resident and he/she will be blocked from posting to the site.

This forum is monitored on a regular basis. However, residents should NOT use this forum to report emergency situations or time-sensitive issues.

Residents are encouraged to keep the following guidelines in mind when posting:

- Graphic, obscene or explicit comments or submissions are prohibited, as well as comments that are abusive, threatening, hateful or intended to defame anyone or any organization, or comments that suggest or encourage illegal activity.
- 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, gender identity or sexual orientation will not be tolerated.
- Content posted by persons whose profile picture or avatar, username or e-mail address contains any of the aforementioned prohibited content will not be tolerated.
- Content should be related to the subject matter of the social media site where it is posted.
- Solicitations or advertisements are prohibited. This includes promotion or endorsement of any financial, commercial or non-governmental agency. Similarly, attempts to defame or defraud any person or financial, commercial or governmental agency are not permitted. Information intended to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems is prohibited.
- Residents' participation is voluntary and taken at residents' own risk. Residents maintain personal responsibility for their comments, their username and/or any information provided.
- All comments are subject to Florida's public records law.
- The appearance of external links on this site does not constitute official endorsement on behalf of the Town of Surfside.

### **Management of Social Media Applications**

Using the established Public Information Program as a guide, the Town of Surfside's PIR is responsible for overall social media administration and management of Nextdoor's

public agency page and social media channels, as well as the oversight of SeeClickFix to ensure directors are responding on a timely basis to resident submissions and receive the tools needed in order to form an appropriate response.

The PIR is responsible for the following:

- Maintain social media pages, including the look and feel of the pages and descriptions;
- Draft and review content for posts on social media platforms;
- Draft content calendars and receive approvals of scheduled content;
- Regularly respond to, and follow-up on, resident questions that abide by Town's social media policy;
- Coordinate the review of any legal matters with the Town's attorney.

### **Content, Tone and Interactions**

- A content calendar for the month is to be drafted by the person responsible for the Town's social media and turned in to the Assistant Town Manager for approval before posting. If more than one person is in charge of social media management, the PIR is required to ensure that the team is on the same page and in-line with the Social Media Policy. The Town's goal is to maintain "one voice" when managing the social media for The Town of Surfside.
- Content must be relevant to the Town of Surfside's mission. It can reflect current news, feature polls or open ended questions to measure resident consensus on community issues, explain future or current Town projects, or highlight Town achievements. It can also include photos, graphics and/or videos associated with the content.
- Responses to residents on social media must always be professional, respectful and diplomatic. Residents should be thanked for taking the time to provide their feedback or ask a question, and also thanked for any positive acknowledgements in their comments. Residents' concerns should be addressed, and/or the residents should be advised that the Town is working on finding a solution to their problems (if applicable). The following provides an outline for recommended steps to respond to residents on social media:
  - Inform the resident that the Town of Surfside is more than happy to address the problem. Identify the steps taken to fix the problem and (if applicable) clearly and professionally explain why a specific problem cannot be fixed and/or refer the resident to a Town administrator who may be able to help.

- The tone on the Town’s social media should never be dramatic, sarcastic, condescending or defensive.
- Interactions with residents on social media should be as transparent as possible. Provide residents with honest feedback and a realistic timeline of when a specific problem or issue may be addressed.
- Follow-up is essential, especially in government-civic affairs. Once a specific matter has been resolved, provide the resident with an update. In the case of SeeClickFix, mark the conversation “closed.”

**Emergency Communications on Social Media**

Surfside’s Police Department and acting PIO are to immediately communicate with the PIR in writing or via a phone call whenever major incidents occur that could potentially impact residents or local businesses. Examples include:

- Major incidents that involve fatalities or shootings;
- Serious felony crimes (murder or rape);
- Major damage to infrastructure;
- Extensive traffic congestion, road closures due to an accident or construction;
- Incidents at Town facilities;
- Any other incident that using reasonable judgement may be newsworthy;
- Conversely, if a violent threat is made on our social media channels, it must be recorded and reported to the appropriate Town personnel.

The PIR will use this information to share with residents on social media. This is in addition to various other communication channels used by the Town including CodeRed alerts, website, Town notifications, etc.

**Media Inquiries**

***Town Spokespeople:***

Only authorized spokespeople are permitted to speak to the press. The spokespeople for the Town of Surfside are as follows:

- Primary Spokesperson – Town Manager*
- Secondary Spokesperson – Mayor*
- Town Matters - Public Information Representative*

*Police Matters* – Public information Officer

The Town Manager reserves the right to delegate his/her authority as authorized spokesperson for the Town.

***Elected Officials:***

Elected officials are encouraged to share interview requests with the Town Manager/PIR in order to create consistency in messaging

***Media Inquiries via Town Employees:***

When a member of the press contacts the Town of Surfside, please follow these steps:

1. Ask the journalist for the *purpose* of his or her call.
2. Record the journalist's *name, media outlet, phone number and email address*.
3. Inform the journalist that someone will follow-up with him or her as soon as possible.
4. Contact the Town's Public Information Officer –or- Public Information Representative within one hour of receiving request via email, text message or phone call. Do not send journalists directly to the Town Manager or Mayor for comment.
  - If it's a police-related matter, reach out to Public Information Officer Marian Cruz at 305-861-4862 Ext. 224 or [macruz@townofsurfsidefl.gov](mailto:macruz@townofsurfsidefl.gov)
  - *Examples include:* Pending investigation, arrests, murder, crimes such as a burglary or unlicensed practice.
  - If it's a Town matter, reach out to Public Information Representative Rachel Pinzur at 305-725-2875 or [Rachel@pinzurpr.com](mailto:Rachel@pinzurpr.com). *Examples include:* Town development stories, events, ordinances, resolutions, new businesses in Surfside, etc.
5. Please do not attempt to answer the journalist's questions. Simply tell the journalist that the PIO or PIR will follow-up with him or her.

***Press Policy for Employees***

Employees are not authorized to provide any information to the press – with the exception of the name and telephone number and/or email address for the PIR or PIO.

It is every employee's responsibility to inform his/her supervisor or the designated spokesperson if he/she observes members of the press asking questions or taking pictures or if they are contacted by the press.

Employees are not permitted to share sensitive/confidential information pertaining to the Town, an investigation, etc. on their own personal social media pages. Employees who violate the Town's social media policy (refer to Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual) may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

***PIR and PIO Policy for Media Responses:***

In order to create seamless communication and consistent messaging, it's important that the PIR and acting PIO's efforts are aligned. It is the responsibility of both parties to keep

each other copied and informed of media requests and anything of sensitive nature. When working with the press, the PIR and the acting PIO are to follow these steps:

1. Respond to journalist in timely manner, within one to two hours.
2. Confirm journalist's purpose for call and ask journalist for his or her deadline and anticipated questions.
3. Research answers to questions and draft media talking points or press statement.
4. Prepare spokesperson(s) in advance of media interview.
5. If sensitive issues arise, such as a pending legal investigation, run draft media response and statements by Town attorney for approval first. (Refer to crisis communications plan on how to address press in the event of a crisis.)
6. Alert mayor and elected officials and keep them abreast of the situation, along with messaging in case they receive questions from residents and/or businesses.
7. Tailor messaging and provide to Town's human resources director, to be shared with dispatch for example in the event they receive questions from the public.