

# **TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN**

*Approved by Burgess and Commissioners on March 11, 2019*

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

### **Purpose:**

This policy establishes guidelines for the establishment and use of social media sites (including but not limited to Facebook and Twitter) by the Town of Middletown as a means of conveying information to its residents, businesses, and guests.

The intended purpose of establishing and using the Town of Middletown's social media sites is to disseminate information about the Town of Middletown's events, news, and information that is pertinent to the Town of Middletown's residents, businesses, and visitors.

### **Definitions:**

**Social Media:** the various web sites and activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. By way of example, but not limitation, some commonly use social media sites are Facebook and Twitter.

**Town email account:** an email account provided or approved by the Town of Middletown, which is used for official business.

**Town Social Media/Networking Site:** a website or social media tool which has been created, reviewed and approved for use by the Burgess and/or designee.

**Post:** a message/blog submitted by the Administrator including, but not limited to text, videos, photographs, graphic links, computer applications, etc.

**Administrator:** the individual designated by the Town of Middletown to submit posts for official purposes and to review comments to assure compliance with this policy.

**Comments:** visitor submitted statements, replying to a post or offering.

### **General Policy**

The official Town of Middletown web site found at <http://www.middletown.md.us> will remain the Town's predominant internet presence for official information. Whenever possible, social media sites should link back to the Town of Middletown web site for information to conduct business and communicate with the Town of Middletown.

The establishment and use by the Town of Middletown of social media sites are subject to approval by the Burgess or his/her designees. All Town of Middletown social media sites shall be administered by Town of Middletown staff.

Social media sites maintained by the Town of Middletown should make clear that they are maintained by the Town of Middletown, that they follow the Social Media Policy and adhere to applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and policies. These guidelines must be displayed to users or made available by hyperlink.

A staff member of the Town of Middletown will monitor content on social media sites to ensure adherence to the Social Media Policy and the Purpose of the Town of Middletown's social media sites. This page is monitored weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., excluding holidays and during emergency incidents

Any content maintained in a social media format that is related to the Town of Middletown business, including a list of subscribers, posted communication, and communication submitted for posting, may be a public record subject to public

disclosure. Freedom of information Act laws and policies apply to social media content and therefore content must be able to be managed, stored and retrieved to comply with these laws. Blocking anyone on an official site may be a First Amendment violation

The Social Media Policy may be revised at any time.

## **Comment Policy**

The Town welcomes your comments to the Town of Middletown's social media sites. Please note that these sites are moderated; prior to posting, all comments will be reviewed for adherence to the Social Media Policy, Monday through Friday, 8 am to 4 pm, excluding holidays. Comments or questions on social media do not serve as formal requests for Town service and responses have to be general. If you need immediate assistance please call the Town office at 301-371-6171 and/or visit the Town of Middletown's website at <http://www.middletown.md.us>

As a public entity, the Town of Middletown must abide by certain standards to serve all its constituents in a civil and unbiased manner. Comments containing any of the following inappropriate forms of content shall not be permitted on the Town of Middletown's social media sites and are subject to removal and/or restriction:

- a. Comments containing vulgar or profane language;
- b. Defamatory, threatening or personal attacks of any kind;
- c. Comments or 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 intellectual disability or sexual orientation;
- d. Spam or links to other sites that are inappropriate;
- e. Comments not related to the original topic, including random or unintelligible comments
- f. Comments which encourage or advocate illegal activity;
- g. Promotion of particular services, products or political organizations or candidates for office;
- h. Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party, such as infringement on copyrights or trademarks;
- i. Comments which include personally identifiable medical information;
- j. Information that may compromise the safety, security or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations

Comments that violate the social media policy will be removed from the site and will be retained with the reason for the removal.

Those who provide content to this site agree to have no expectation of privacy in the information provided. The Town is not responsible for and does not endorse any links embedded in comments posted to this site by third parties. This site does not circumvent or supersede the Town's normal business practices or processes. For example, responses to requests for proposals, invitations for bid, or other competitive procurements are not properly submitted via this site. Content submitted to this site is not legal notice to the Town.

Comments expressed on this site do not necessarily reflect the opinions and position of the Town of Middletown or its elected officers and employees.

## **Employee Conduct**

Every effort will be made to keep interactions on Social Media factual and accurate and strive for transparency and openness in any interaction. When possible, links to credible sources of information will be provided.

Any communication that is later found in error will be publicly corrected.

Comments posted by Town of Middletown employees on their personal social media sites regarding Town of Middletown matters must specify the following statement "the postings on this site are my own and do not reflect or represent the opinions of the Town of Middletown for which I work".

## **Elected/Appointed Official's Guidelines**

Elected and Appointed officials who choose to have a social media presence should have separate social media accounts for:

1. Personal use.
2. Public use in representing the Town of Middletown.
3. Campaign use in elections.

Elected/Appointed officials also need to be aware that participation of a quorum of members in a social media posting may constitute a meeting and could be a violation of the Open Meetings laws.

Blocking anyone on an official site may be a First Amendment violation

## **Ethics Compliance**

Employees/Elected and Appointed officials representing the Town through social media outlets or participating in social media features on agency websites must maintain a high level of ethical conduct and professional decorum. Failure to do so is grounds for revoking the privilege to participate in Town social media sites.

Town employees/Elected and Appointed officials recognize that the content and messages they post on social media sites are public and may be cited as official Town statements. Town employees/Elected and Appointed officials may not publish information on Town social media sites that include:

- Confidential information
- Copyright violations
- Profanity, racist, sexist, or derogatory content or comments
- Partisan political views
- Commercial endorsements or SPAM

**If you would like to learn about the Town of Middletown, Maryland, please visit our website:**

**[www.middletown.md.us](http://www.middletown.md.us). If you have specific questions or concerns, please contact the Town Office at 301-371-6171 or e-mail [office@ci.middletown.md.us](mailto:office@ci.middletown.md.us).**