

Social Media Use Policy, Township of Lower Merion



Published by:

Lower Merion Public Information Office

Last amended: August 15, 2014

Purpose

To address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet, and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, Lower Merion Township is using social media tools, such as Twitter (launched February 2013) and Facebook (launched February 2014) to reach a broader Township audience.

The Township encourages the use of social media to further Township goals and missions. However, it has an overriding interest and expectation in ensuring that what is communicated on the Township's behalf on social media sites is appropriate. To that end, over the past several years, the Township Public Information Office, in close consultation with the Township Manager, has adopted a very deliberate approach to instituting social media tools, choosing to observe the experiences of other Townships (neighboring, and around the country) and observe what works – and what does not work. This policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media and may be amended at any time by the Township.

Social media at this time refers to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, FourSquare, LinkedIn, Vine, Tumblr and many other sites – along with any other form of online communication that is open to response or comment. Rules are necessary to ensure that communications made on behalf of the Township are properly authorized and in correct form; that communications to the municipality by means of social media which can be viewed by the public are appropriate and pertinent; that all communications to the municipality are directed to the proper recipient; and that the outside sender is clearly and fully informed that a message to the Township or its elected Commissioners received by means of social media is **not** a substitute for required reporting procedures.

General

All social media sites to be used by the Township will be subject to approval by the Township Manager or his/her designee.

The official Lower Merion Township website (www.lowermerion.org) will remain the Township's primary and predominant Internet presence. When possible and/or appropriate, content posted to Township social media sites will also be available on the Township's website. Also, wherever possible, content posted to the Township's social media sites should contain links directing users back to the Township's official website for in-depth information, meeting agendas, forms, documents, or online services necessary to conduct business with the Township.

The best, most appropriate Township social media tools fall generally into two categories:

- As channels for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible (i.e., emergency information, road closures, power outages, cancellations, or re-schedulings).
- As marketing/promotional channels that increase the Township's ability to broadcast its messages to the widest possible audience.

As is the case for the Township website, the Township Manager or Public Information Officer (or his/her designee) will be responsible for the content and upkeep of any social media sites, and will approach the use of social media tools as consistently as possible:

- 1) **The Township reserves the right to restrict or remove ANY content or ANY comment, at ANY time.**
- 2) In administering the Township's social media sites, the Township Manager's Office and Public Information Office will maintain a list of social media tools which are approved for use by the Township, maintain a list of all Lower Merion Township social media sites, including login and password information, and ensure, at all times, that the Township, if necessary, is able to immediately edit or remove content from social media sites.
- 3) Posting on social media sites of information protected by the copyright laws, without proper authorization by the copyright owner, is prohibited. Copyright protection applies to any document, photograph, video, software, or information unless it is specifically marked as public, not copyrighted, or "freeware." In the absence of any specific copyright markings, material or information should be considered copyright protected. The Township assumes no responsibility for reviewing, ascertaining or policing copyrighted material that may be posted on social media sites by employees or other persons.

Facebook Comments Policy

The purpose of the Township's Facebook page is to present matters of public interest in Lower Merion Township, including its many residents, businesses and visitors. The Township encourages residents to submit questions, comments, and concerns, but stresses that Facebook is a moderated online discussion site maintained by a separate company. As such, **the Township's Facebook page is not an official Township public forum.** However, since it is moderated and maintained by

Township staff, once comments or other content are posted, **staff reserves the right to delete any submissions that contain:**

- a) vulgar language, obscene or sexually explicit comments;
- b) personal attacks of any kind;
- c) comments or content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on any basis;
- d) spam or links to other sites;
- e) clearly “off topic” posts;
- f) advocating of illegal activity;
- g) promotion of particular services, products, or political organizations;
- h) infringement on copyrights or trademarks;
- i) personally identifiable medical information;
- j) information that may compromise the safety, security or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations;
- k) intentionally provoking or argumentative comments

While the Facebook page is available 24/7, the Township will generally only monitor comments and postings during regular business hours, or when the administrator is in the office.

Facebook’s “profanity filter” will always be set to “strong” for the Lower Merion page, but this filter does not limit the discretion of the moderator to delete remarks that are deemed offensive. **The Township reserves the right to BAN users for any violation of the above terms.**

Residents’ postings on any social media site affiliated with the Township do not serve as formal requests for service from the Township. Any citizen needing a response from the Township should call, email or visit the appropriate department.

Comments by the public on the Township’s sites do not reflect in any way the opinions and position of the Lower Merion Township government, or its officers, elected officials, staff and/or employees. Residents with any questions about the operation of any online moderated discussion site are encouraged to contact the Township at staff@lowermerion.org.

Applicability

This policy shall apply to all Township representatives, agencies and departments as well as any affiliated government or non-government agency or official permitted by the Township to post on Township social media sites; and any person, business or organization that interacts with Lower Merion Township via any of its social media platforms.

—*End*—