

CITY OF VALPARAISO – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Amended May 23, 2025

Section 1: *Purpose.*

The City of Valparaiso (“City”) views social media as a tool to keep its residents and the general public informed as to matters impacting the City. This Social Media Policy (“Policy”) establishes procedures for the appropriate use of social media on City Social Media Accounts. The City has an overriding interest and expectation in protecting the integrity of the information posted on its Social Media Sites and the content that is attributed to the City, and its officials.

Section 2: *Applicability.*

This Policy applies to all City Boards, Commissions and Departments. This policy allows designated employees of the City the ability to post information on Social Media Sites and allow commentary from the public.

Section 3: *Definitions.*

“Social Media Sites” shall be defined as X (f/k/a Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok among other Social Media Sites.

“Social Media Account” shall be defined as an established account by the City on a Social Media Site. As of the adoption of this Policy, the following Social Media Accounts are maintained by the City: **Facebook:** Valparaiso Now, Valparaiso Fire, Valparaiso Police Department, Valparaiso Water Department/City Utilities, Valparaiso V-Line Bus Service, and Valpo Parks.

“Social Media Content” shall be defined as posting of information that includes but is not limited to pictures, video and text.

Section 4: *Rules for Use of Social Media*

4.1 The official City website (<http://in-valparaiso.civicplus.com>) is the City’s primary and predominant internet presence. Social Media Accounts can enhance this presence as a means of distributing information quickly and as a method to promote, engage, celebrate and support community wide efforts. When possible, Social Media Content should not be exclusive to any Social Media Account and should also be available on the City’s primary website. Social Media Accounts should contain links directing users to the City’s official website and this Policy.

4.2 Except for Social Media Accounts existing prior to the approval of this Policy (as noted above), no City Board, Commission or Department shall establish a Social Media Account without first discussing the matter with the City’s Communication Director and securing approval from the City Administrator. The City’s intent is to limit the number of Social Media Accounts to avoid public confusion. Any Department using a Social Media Account will be responsible for the content and maintenance of the Social Media Account. Each Department shall designate one (or more) employee who may post information and maintain the Social Media Site. Departments shall periodically contact the City’s Communication Director to ensure its postings are consistent with this Policy and other applicable City guidelines.

4.3 The content of any Social Media Account, including material posted by the City or communications received from the public, may be a public record as defined under the Indiana Public Records Act. All Social Media Content must be appropriately archived.

4.4 All Social Media Accounts are to be maintained in a professional manner, reflecting the City's values at all times. The City's Communication Director, working with City staff, shall monitor content on all Social Media Accounts to ensure adherence to this Policy. Comments may be removed or otherwise hidden if the content includes any of the following:

- Comments that are not topically related to the particular posting being commented upon and/or are factually inaccurate.
- Any personal information, except for the names of employees whose job duties include being available for contact by the public.
- 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.
- Sexual content or links to sexual content.
- Is threatening, harassing or discriminatory.
- Incites or promotes violence or illegal activities.
- Obscenity, profane language or material that appeals to the prurient interest.
- Contains information that reasonably could compromise individual or public safety.
- Advertises, solicits or promotes a commercial product or service, or any entity or individual.
- Promotes or endorses political campaigns or candidates.
- Defamatory or contains personal attacks.
- Conduct in violation of any federal, state or local law and encouragement of illegal activity.

4.5 The City encourages comments and feedback from the public on its Social Media accounts. Suspending or blocking any individual from offering comments should be rare and only taken as a last resort. Prior to hiding or removing a comment and/or temporarily suspending a person from posting comments, the City's Communication Director must be contacted and the matter discussed with the City Attorney.

4.6 The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this Policy or any applicable law. In addition, anonymous, fictitious or spam accounts may be blocked. Any account holder who believes he/she was improperly blocked has the right to contact the City's Communication Director to establish their identity. Any comment posted by a member of the public on any Social Media Account is the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and publication of a comment does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by the City, nor do such comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City.

4.7 A dedicated individual, per department, will maintain a list of the Department's Social Media Accounts, including login and password information. All such information shall be provided to the City's Communication Director.

4.8 Social Media Accounts shall be consistent with City branding and shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the specific City Department.

4.9 Social Media posts will use proper grammar, avoiding jargon and abbreviations.

4.10 The City Communication director is designated to be responsive to constituents who communicate via a Social Media Account; however, social media is not considered the City's primary method of communicating with the public.

4.11 City Social Media Accounts and Content shall comply with usage rules and regulations required by the Social Media Site.

4.12 City Social Media Accounts shall comply with the City's conflict of interest code and applicable ethics rules and policies.

4.13 Social Media Posts must abide by laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. Social Media Content should never include whole articles or publications without first receiving written permission from the publication owner. Social Media Content should never quote an excerpt of someone else's work without acknowledging the source, and, if possible, provide a link to the original.

4.14 Those posting Social Media Content should always consider the content and audience before posting. Although Social Media Content is often less formal than Press Releases, any information provided on a Social Media Account is perceived as official City communication. Social Media Sites will be sought out by mainstream media for City information—so thought needs to go into how best to use social media in a way that benefits both the City and the public.

4.15 Attached as **Exhibit A** to this Policy is an overview of the Policy that shall be placed on the City's webpage and linked to all Social Media Accounts. The City's Communication Director (with input from the City Administrator and City Attorney) is authorized to make minor changes to **Exhibit A** that are not inconsistent with this Policy and which provides greater clarity to the public.

4.16 It is acknowledged that elected officials associated with the City maintain their own Social Media Accounts that are used to convey information to the public. These Social Media Accounts are not established or monitored by the City and are the responsibility of the elected official. As noted in Section 4.3, the content of any Social Media Account may be considered a Public Record as defined under the Indiana Public Records Act. Elected officials who maintain their own Social Media Accounts must establish policies to retain records and to otherwise comply with federal and state law.

Exhibit A

The City of Valparaiso has adopted a formal Social Media Policy, which can be found here: <http://www.ci.valparaiso.in.us/.../9097/Social-Media-Policy>
Please find the **Social Media Guidelines** below:

The City of Valparaiso's official Facebook page, Valparaiso Now, is a space for the City to keep residents and the general public informed on matters impacting the City. The Valparaiso Now page complements the City of Valparaiso website at valpo.us, public meetings, press releases and other opportunities to engage with the City.

A social media team monitors the Valparaiso Now page during business hours to ensure adherence to the City Social Media Policy adopted by the Board of Works on January 13, 2023 (amended May 23, 2025), and the interests and goals of the City. The City is not responsible for content generated by users. User-generated content is the opinion of the user only and does not imply endorsement or agreement by the City. While Valparaiso Now allows comments, the page is not obligated to respond to comments. Further, the page is not a direct line to customer service requests or communication with individual departments, which should be directed to the appropriate departments. Find a listing of departments and phone numbers at valpo.us. For emergencies, contact 911.

Content posted on Valparaiso Now page is subject to the Indiana Access To Public Records Act. Those who choose to post a comment or send a message to Valparaiso Now or any City social media account should not expect or assume privacy. All posts, comments and messages, including edited, hidden or deleted content is captured, archived and subject to Indiana Public Records Act requests.

User-generated content may be rejected or removed if the content includes:

- Comments that are not topically related to the particular posting being commented upon and/or are factually inaccurate.
- Any personal information, except for the names of employees whose job duties include being available for contact by the public.
- Comments that promote, foster, or perpetuate 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.
- Sexual content or links to sexual content.
- Threatening, harassing or discriminatory language.
- Language that incites or promotes violence or illegal activities.
- Obscenity, profane language or material that appeals to the prurient interest.
- Information that reasonably could compromise individual or public safety.
- Content that advertises, solicits or promotes a commercial product or service, or any entity or individual.
- Content that promotes or endorses political campaigns or candidates.
- Defamatory information or personal attacks.
- Conduct in violation of any federal, state or local law and encouragement of illegal activity.

The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this Policy or any applicable law. In addition, anonymous, fictitious or spam accounts may be blocked.

Any account holder who believes he/she was improperly blocked has the right to contact the City's Legal Department at scamp@valpo.us.