

Social Media Policy for Members of Council and Local Boards

Presented To:	City Council
Meeting Date:	June 28, 2022
Type:	Managers' Reports
Prepared by:	Eric Labelle Clerk's Services
Recommended by:	General Manager of Corporate Services

Report Summary

This report provides a recommendation for the adoption of a Social Media Policy for Members of Council and Local Boards.

Resolution

THAT the Council for the City of Greater Sudbury direct staff to present a bylaw to amend the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards to include a social media policy as outlined in the report entitled "Social Media Policy for Members of Council and Local Boards", from the General Manager of Corporate Services, presented at the City Council meeting on June 28, 2022.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)

This report refers to operational matters and has no direct connection to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Background

Effective March 1, 2019, the *Municipal Act, 2001* (the "Act") was amended to include provisions requiring all municipalities in the Province to establish Codes of Conduct applicable to members of Council and Local Boards and appoint an Integrity Commissioner responsible for, among other duties, the oversight of such Codes.

Pursuant to the requirements of the Act, the City of Greater Sudbury appointed an Integrity Commissioner and adopted By-law 2019-16 being a Code of Conduct (the "Code") applicable to members of Council and Local Boards. The Code's purpose is described as follows:

“A legislated Code of Conduct helps to ensure that the members of Council and members of Local Boards, as defined in section 1(1) and 223.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001, share a common basis of acceptable conduct in the individual conduct of their Official Duties. The Code of Conduct promotes public confidence that the City’s elected representatives operate from a base of integrity, transparency, justice and courtesy.”

Social media has become an important way for governments and elected officials to communicate and interact with the public. It permits messaging to be shared quickly and efficiently, it is less costly than traditional media and furthers engagement with residents. It does, however, require regular attention and oversight to ensure that new content is being shared and to avoid inappropriate usage.

The City currently uses social media extensively to communicate information concerning its services to residents. These social media accounts are monitored and overseen by City staff and are not used for political purposes. A number of Council members use Social Media to communicate with their constituents. On December 14, 2021, City Council passed a Members’ Motion directing staff to present a report for the potential adoption of a Social Media Policy for Members of Council and Local Boards. The preamble of the motion states that Council wishes to have a policy that would provide clear guidelines to support openness, transparency and proper conduct.

With respect to the use of social media, section 17 of the Code currently provides the following:

“Social Media

17. Every Member shall:

- (a) adhere to any and all City policies and guidelines, regarding social media use; and
- (b) always identify themselves without any attempt to cover, disguise or mislead as to their identity or status as an elected representative of the City when using social media.”

It is important to note that the entirety of the Code applies to the conduct of members regardless of the medium of communication being used. That would, of course, include conduct of members when interacting with others using online resources commonly called social media.

Staff conducted research to determine whether other Ontario municipalities have implemented specific policies or guidelines regarding social media use by their elected officials. Approximately 40 of the larger municipalities in Ontario were consulted and only 4 were found to have enacted specific policies or guidelines for social media. The City of Guelph, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent and the Town of Oakville have adopted brief guideline documents whereas the City of Peterborough has a brief policy that applies broadly to staff and elected officials using social media for City business. The guideline documents reviewed consisted mainly of tips or helpful suggestions for members using social media such as: Maintain privacy, Be authentic, or When in doubt, do not post.

Responses from the Cities of Ottawa and Toronto disclosed that, while they have not enacted specific policies for social media, their respective Integrity Commissioners have issued Interpretation Bulletins regarding the application of their Codes of Conduct to social media use. More specifically, those bulletins provide clarity that the Code applies to all types of communications including those made through the use of social media.

With the benefit of the above information and the discussion at City Council which led to the direction to staff, staff have prepared a draft Social Media Policy for Members of Council and Local Boards for Council’s consideration which draft policy is appended as Schedule “A” to this report. While the subject matter of the policy is generally already dealt with in the Code, it provides some specificity regarding the use of social media and recognizes the importance of highlighting appropriate conduct by members using that method of communication.

The draft policy has been reviewed by the City's Integrity Commissioner and his comments have been taken into consideration. Should Council approve the resolution in this report, a by-law would be presented to amend the Code to include the draft policy as an Appendix.

Resources Cited

1. Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Local Boards: <https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/open-government/code-of-conduct/>