



## **WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2012, the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc launched a newly re-designed website, and at the same time became involved in the use of various social media to communicate with its residents. What follows is a policy statement for the use of these tools. It will include a statement of the Website purpose, a framework for the governance of these tools, a policy on updates to the Website – who has the authority to do what – and a policy governing the use of social media.

### **1. WEBSITE PURPOSE**

The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc maintains multiple websites. They are [www.strathroy-caradoc.ca](http://www.strathroy-caradoc.ca); and [www.strathroy-museum.ca](http://www.strathroy-museum.ca). For the purpose of this policy, the websites shall be collectively referred to as Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc website or websites unless the context suggests otherwise.

The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc website replicates, in an electronic manner, many of the services offered by municipal staff and officials. The primary purpose of municipality's website is to convey information to users; not to allow free and open dialogue between the users.

Communications made through e-mail and messaging systems shall, in no way, be deemed to constitute legal notice to the municipality of any of its agencies, officers, employees, agents or representatives, with any respect to existing or potential claims or cause of action against the municipality or any of its agencies, officers, employees, agents or representatives, where notice to the municipality is required by any federal, provincial, or local laws, rules, or regulations

#### **1. A) Website Goals**

The goals of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc's website are:

- To provide information about municipal programs, services, activities, amenities, and events.
- To promote the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc's economic, social, and cultural quality of life.
- To further the interests of local agencies, associations, and businesses that support the municipality's goals, policies and purposes.

## **1. B) Hyperlink Policy**

The purpose of the municipality's website is to provide information about its government, services, and attractions. The municipality's website may provide hyperlinks to websites outside the municipality's website that also serve this purpose. The municipality is not responsible for, and does not endorse, the information on any hyperlinked website unless the municipality's website states otherwise. The following criteria will be used by the municipality to decide whether to grant requests for hyperlinks from its website.

The municipality's website will provide hyperlinks to websites for:

- Government and educational institutions;
- Organizations with some economic or subject matter relationship to the municipality (including but not limited to those contracting with the municipality, those sponsoring municipal activities or programs, and those participating in municipal activities or programs);
- Generally recognized community or civic organizations;
- Organizations providing information about art, cultural, and sporting activities in the municipality;
- Organizations related to the municipality's tourism industry.

The municipality's website will not provide hyperlinks to websites for:

- Candidates for elected office;
- Political organizations or other organizations advocating a position on a local, provincial, or federal issue;
- Corporate or other for-profit organizations unless they fit the criteria stated above;
- Individual or personal home pages;

Hyperlinks will not be considered or approved by the municipality if the exhibition of the content within the browser would also exhibit one or more of the following categories:

- Content which graphically depicts or describes violence, or nudity and/or sexual activities in a way designed to evoke prurient interest;

- Content which facilitates or incites crime;
- A hyperlink that directly links to other content that when perceived within a browser is in violation of any of the prohibited content stated above;
- Discussion groups, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and other largely unedited content created by individuals who are not owners, operators, or agents of a Strathroy-Caradoc website;
- Websites containing information that violates any of the municipality's equal opportunity policies.

Websites that have been approved and linked from the municipality's website, but subsequently demonstrating any of the above categories of content, will be unlinked from the municipality's website without notice.

### **1. C) Privacy Policy**

The protection of individual privacy is a concern to the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc, and is governed by local and provincial laws. The municipality has created this privacy statement in order to demonstrate its commitment to privacy. The following discloses the municipality's information gathering and dissemination practices for its website.

No personally identifiable information is automatically collected about visitors who simply browse the municipality's website or who download information from it.

The municipality's web servers maintain logs of user activity in order to help manage the website. Information stored in these logs does not identify the user personally. The logs store such things as the domain name and IP address from which a user accessed the municipality's website; the type of browser and operating system they used; the date and time they accessed the website; the pages they visited; and the country or region of the world from which they accessed the website.

The municipality uses this information to learn how many visitors the website has, where they are coming from, which parts of the municipality's website are of most interest to visitors, and other facts that will help improve the website and the services offered.

The municipality values user feedback. If users participate in a survey or send an email, their email address and any other information they have volunteered will be collected. Visitors who request services through this website may be required to furnish additional information in order to provide the service requested. The additional information

collected will be no more specific than if the visitor were requesting the service by any other means, including by telephone or an in-person visit to a municipal facility. The municipality may share this information with another government agency or organization if that is required to provide the help you are requested.

While no website can protect itself against all eventualities, every effort is made to protect any sensitive personal information provided by users. The municipality will not rent, sell or give away any information identifying users individually (name, address, phone number, etc.) to third parties for marketing or mailing list purposes

As a governmental agency, the municipality is governed by Ontario's Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. It is important for users to understand that most business they conduct with the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc, as well as with provincial and county governments, becomes a public record. Public records, as defined by provincial law, and not made confidential elsewhere in the Ontario law, may be posted for electronic access through the website. This includes most municipal permits applied for, or requests for a municipal service. These same records have long been open for public inspection by anyone requesting them in person, by mail or by telephone at the appropriate government office. All information on the municipal website is public information.

#### **1. D) Disclaimer of Liability**

The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc shall not be held liable for any improper or incorrect use of the materials or information contained on the website and assumes no responsibility for any user's use of them. In no event shall the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc be liable for any damages, whether direct, indirect, incidental, special, exemplary or consequential (including, but not limited to, business interruption or loss of use, data, or profits) regardless of cause, and on any theory of liability, whether in contract, statute, strict liability, or tort (including negligence or otherwise) arising in any way out of the use of this website or the materials and information contained on this website, even if advised of the possibility of such damage. This disclaimer of liability applies to any damages or injury, including but not limited to those caused by any failure of performance, error, omission, interruption, deletion, defect, delay, computer virus, communication line failure, theft, or destruction of data, whether for breach of contract, tortious behavior, statutory liability negligence, or under any other cause of action.

Users are encouraged to consult with appropriate and accredited professional advisors for advice concerning specific matters before making any decision, and the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc disclaims any responsibility for positions taken by individuals or

corporations in their individual cases or for any misunderstanding and losses, directly or indirectly, on the part of any user.

### **1. E) Disclaimer of Warranties / Accuracy and Use of Information**

The materials posted on the municipal website are provided "as is" and without warranties of any kind expressed or implied. To the fullest extent permissible under applicable law, the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc disclaims all warranties, expressed or implied, including but not limited to, implied warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose and title to any of the materials provided on this website. The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc does not represent or warrant that the functions contained in the materials will be uninterrupted or error-free, that defects will be corrected, or that this website or the server that makes it are free of viruses or other harmful components. The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc does not warrant or make any representations regarding the use or the results of the use of the materials in this website, or through links to other websites, in terms of their correctness, accuracy, reliability or otherwise. The user (and not Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc) assumes the entire cost of all necessary servicing, repair, or correction.

Changes are made periodically to many municipal documents, including municipal by-laws, regulations, guidelines, and schedules, and these changes may or may not be reflected in the materials or information present on the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc's website. Additionally, because the website is frequently under development, materials and information may be deleted, modified or moved to a different part of the website by the municipality without advance notice.

## **2. GOVERNANCE**

The governance structure for the maintenance and updating of the municipal website will include a Website Steering Committee and a Website Maintenance Team.

### **2. A) Website Steering Committee**

#### **Composition:**

The Website Steering Committee will be composed of the Director of Corporate Services, the Community Development Manager, the Manager of Information Systems, the Assistant Director of Corporate Services, the Museum and Communications Assistant, and a member of Strathroy-Caradoc Council.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

- To provide strategic direction for all matters concerning the development of the municipal website and the current governance structure;
- To consider requests for changes from the staff and the public to enhance web activities, and to make specific proposals on such enhancements to council;
- To approve website structure, including design headings and frames, established design standards, web hierarchical structure including web subheadings and site maps, external links, and navigation;
- To enforce policies for website content, including external links;
- To monitor and evaluate website usage and content quality;
- To ensure appropriate integration of calendars, surveys, and social media tools into the website in keeping with appropriate policies, directives, and municipal design standards.

**2. B) Website Management Team****Composition:**

The Website Management Team will be composed of the Community Development Manager, the Assistant Director of Corporate Services, and the Museum and Communications Assistant.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

- To provide day-to-day maintenance of the municipal website;
- To encourage all municipal department heads to pass on all emergency and non-emergency notices and information intended for public dissemination to the team so it may be posted on the municipal website, and to make the postings;
- To provide web analytics reports on website usage;
- To refer any change requests to the Website Steering Committee for approval;
- To advise the Website Steering Committee on any technical matters related to the municipality's website;
- To implement any approved change requests on the municipality's website.

**2. C) Administration and Permissions**

Approval authority for all changes to the municipal website will rest with the members of the Website Management Team, consisting of the Community Development Manager, Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Museum & Communications Assistant.

### **3. ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

#### **Background**

Every day, people discuss and debate municipal services and issues in online conversations. The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc recognizes the vital importance of engaging in these online conversations and is committed to engage in online social media the right way. Our policy will be comprehensive and will take the following approach:

1. Start small. Do things well. Grow from there.
2. Centralize responsibility and accountability for site technical maintenance.
3. Reallocate existing resources to monitor content and respond appropriately.
4. Support staff with a policy, guidelines and rules of conduct.

This document serves as a framework for the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc Social Media Policy. The policy is categorized into the following sections:

- Recommended Social Media Tools
- Guiding Principles for Online Social Media
- Online Social Media Contributors
- Monitoring

This policy is being developed to help empower the corporation to participate in this widely-used communications channel.

#### **Social Media Channels**

The corporation will make use of three highly visible, popular, and readily accessible social media tools: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Each municipal social networking site will include an introductory statement to clearly specify the purpose. Where possible, the social networking site should link back to the official Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc website for more in-depth information. In addition to the introductory statement, the social networking site must clearly define the rules of conduct on the site or link back to the municipal site for a detailed explanation of these rules.

#### **Proposed Facebook Introductory Statement**

We welcome your Facebook postings! Before posting to this Facebook page, please note the information on this page is for the purpose of sharing municipal-related information only. The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc is not responsible for the comments made by fans or members of this page and reserves the right to remove any content that is inappropriate, as outlined in our rules of conduct. Posting on this Facebook page by fans or members is not considered “official” notice to the Municipality.

### Proposed Facebook Rules of Conduct

Content, posts, photographs, and comments containing any of the following content will not be allowed and will be removed at the discretion of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc:

- Comments unrelated to the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc;
- Profane language or content;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination (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;
- Commercial advertising;
- Content encouraging illegal activity;
- Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
- Violation of legal ownership interest of any other party (copyright and intellectual property infringement);
- Content for the purposes of promoting a candidate for municipal, provincial, or federal election;
- Content that is believed to be inappropriate in the opinion of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc's Website Management Team.

### Twitter Introductory Statement and Rules of Conduct

Our goal is to provide a service that allows you to discover and receive content from Municipal sources that interest you. We respect the ownership of the content we share. The Municipality, in addition to the bulleted items listed in the Proposed Facebook Rules of Conduct above, will follow "The Twitter Rules" which can be reviewed at: <http://support.twitter.com/entries/18311-the-twitter-rules>.

### YouTube Introductory Statement

The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc will create a corporate YouTube channel for posting all videos showcasing Strathroy-Caradoc. This channel will be managed by the Website Management Team. Content will be published only at the discretion of the Municipality.

The Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc will develop and implement a full communications and marketing plan focused on encouraging staff, citizens, and other stakeholders to create and submit video material for posting on the Municipality's YouTube channel.

### **Guiding Principles for Online Social Media for Municipal Staff**

These online social media principles are intended to outline how Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc values should be demonstrated in the social media space and to guide staff participation in this area, both when staff are acting on behalf of the Corporation or participating personally.



## Principles and Values Specific to the Online Social Media Community

- **Transparency in social media engagement:** The Municipality does not condone manipulating the social media conversation by creating “fake” posts designed to mislead followers and control a conversation. Every website, “fan page,” or other online destination that is ultimately controlled by the Municipality must make that fact known to users and must be authorized according to applicable internal protocols in order to track and monitor the Municipality’s online presence.
- **Protection of our citizens’ privacy:** We should be conscientious regarding any personally identifiable information that we collect, including how we collect, store, use, or share that information, all of which should be done pursuant to applicable municipal freedom of information acts and privacy policies.
- **Respect of copyrights, trademarks, rights of publicity, and other third-party rights in the online social media space, including user-generated content:** In our situation, we will control this area by defining the Municipality’s online social media contributors whose responsibility will lie in speaking/responding on the Municipality’s behalf. They will work with other departments to make informed and sound responses.
- **Utilization of best practices:** We will listen to the online community, and comply with applicable regulations to ensure that the Online Social Media Policy remains current and reflects the most up-to-date and appropriate standards of behaviour.

### **Online Social Media Contributors**

Just as with traditional media, we have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to effectively manage the Corporation’s reputation online and to selectively engage and participate in the hundreds of online conversations that mention us every day.

The recommendation is to begin with a single corporate account for each of the approved social media channels. (Note: Museum Strathroy-Caradoc is an exception)  
The primary benefits are:

- Allows for efficient use of time and money to build followers to a single account;
- Minimizes credibility risk;
- Provides consistency with information shared through other sources;
- Provides customers with a one-stop shop for Municipal information;
- Minimizes legal risks through dedicated oversight of content;
- Allows allocation of existing staff resources to an online social media contributor;
- Provides transparent coverage to the account.

It is important to emphasize the difference in speaking “on behalf of the Municipality” and speaking “about” the Municipality. The individual(s) speaking “on behalf” are

ultimately responsible for online social media content and policy enforcement on approved social media channels as outlined below:

On Behalf of the Municipality

- All corporate communications (e.g. ,press releases, front page news approvals, etc., for website and social media sites);
- Specific projects (e.g., snow removal, waste, public works) – individual representatives from departments across the corporation must work with the designated social media contributor.

The following principles guide how our online social media contributors must represent the Municipality in an online, official capacity when they are speaking “on behalf” of the Municipality:

- **Be recognized as an official social media contributor:** All employees who wish to officially represent the Municipality must be recognized by senior management prior to beginning or continuing these activities.
- **Follow our corporation’s policies:** As a representative of Municipality, you must act with honesty and integrity in all matters. This commitment is true for all forms of social media.
- **Be mindful that you are representing the Corporation.** As a Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc representative, it is important that your posts convey the same positive, informative spirit and tone that the Municipality instills in all of its communications. Be respectful of all individuals, races, religions and cultures; how you conduct yourself in the online social media space not only reflects on you – it is a direct reflection on the Corporation.
- **Fully disclose your affiliation with the Municipality:** All employees who are communicating on behalf of the Municipality should always disclose their name and their affiliation. It is never acceptable to use aliases or otherwise deceive people. Your relationship with the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc must be stated from the outset.
- **Keep records:** It is critical that we keep records of our interactions in the online social media space and monitor the activities of those with whom we engage. Because online conversations are often fleeting and immediate, it is important for you to keep track of them when you’re officially representing the Municipality. Remember that online statements can be held to the same legal standards as traditional media communications. Keep records of any online dialogue pertaining to the Municipality.
- **When in doubt, do not post:** Employees are personally responsible for their words and actions, wherever they are. As an online contributor, you must ensure

that your posts are completely accurate and not misleading, and that they do not reveal non-public information about the Corporation. Exercise sound judgment and common sense, and if there is any doubt, DO NOT POST IT. In any circumstance in which you are uncertain about how to respond to a post, discuss with senior management.

- **Give credit where credit is due and don't violate others' rights:** DO NOT claim authorship of something that is not yours. If you are using another party's content, make certain that they are credited for it in your post and that they approve of you utilizing their content. Do not use the copyrights, trademarks, publicity rights, or other rights of others without the necessary permissions of the rights-holder.
- **Remember that even the smallest posts can have large ramifications:** The way that you answer an online question might be accurate but can be misinterpreted or misconstrued. Keep that "comprehensive view" in mind when you are participating in online conversations.
- **Know that the Internet is permanent:** Once information is published online, it is essentially part of a permanent record, even if you "remove/delete" it later or attempt to make it anonymous. If your complete thought, along with its context, cannot be squeezed into a character-restricted space (such as Twitter), provide a link to an online space where the message can be expressed completely and accurately.

### About the Municipality

The following principles guide how our employees (including the Mayor and Council) must represent the Municipality in an online, official capacity when they are speaking "about" of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc:

- **Follow our corporation's policies:** As an employee and a representative of the Municipality, you must act with honesty and integrity in all matters. This commitment is true for all forms of social media. These principles are to guide your actions at work and are also applicable to your personal activities online.
- **You are responsible for your actions:** Anything you post that can potentially tarnish the Municipality's image will ultimately be your responsibility. We do encourage you to participate in the online social media space, but urge you to do so properly, exercising sound judgment and common sense.
- **Be a "scout" for compliments and criticism:** Even if you are not an official online spokesperson for the Municipality, you are one of our most vital assets for monitoring the social media landscape. If you come across positive or negative remarks about the Municipality or its brands online that you believe are

important, consider sharing them by forwarding them to our official online social media contributors.

- **Let the subject matter experts respond to negative posts.** You may come across negative or disparaging posts about the Municipality or its activities, or see third parties trying to spark negative conversations. Unless you are an official online social media contributor, avoid the temptation to react yourself. Pass the post(s) along to our official online contributors who are trained to address such comments
- **Be conscious when mixing your work and personal lives.** Online, your personal and business personas are likely to intersect. The Corporation respects the free speech rights of all of its employees, but you must remember that citizens, colleagues, and supervisors often have access to the online content you post. Keep this in mind when publishing information online that can be seen by more than friends and family, and be aware that information originally intended just for friends and family can be forwarded on. Remember: NEVER to disclose non-public information about the Corporation (including confidential information), and be aware that taking public positions online that are counter to the Corporation or political interests might cause conflict.
- **For Individuals who hold elected positions** or who work in politically sensitive areas, a policy of this nature does not by itself exempt them from special responsibility when posting online. By virtue of their position, these individuals should consider whether personal thoughts they publish may be misunderstood as expressing the positions or opinions of the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc, and/or its staff. For individuals in positions like this, caution is advisable, and it is best to check with the Municipality's communications specialist when in doubt.

### **Monitoring**

The Strathroy-Caradoc Website Management Team in consultation with the Strathroy-Caradoc Website Steering Committee will maintain the policy.