



## ARTICLE XXX SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

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### I. POLICY:

The Town of Selma recognizes that employees may choose to express themselves by posting personal information on the Internet through personal websites, blogs, or chat rooms; by uploading content; or by posting comments on other websites or blogs. Blogging or other forms of social media or technology include, but are not limited to, video or wiki postings, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, chat rooms, YouTube, personal blogs or other similar forms of online journals, diaries, or personal newsletters not affiliated with the Town.

The Town respects the right of employees to use blogs and social media sites on their own time as a medium of self-expression and public conversation and does not discriminate against employees who use these media for personal interests and affiliations or for other lawful purposes. However, employees are solely responsible for what they post online and are encouraged to exercise sound judgment and discretion in contributing to social media sites where information is available to numerous users. This is especially encouraged on personal sites to ensure a distinct separation between personal and organizational views as inappropriate usage of social media may be grounds for disciplinary action. Employees are expected to follow the guidelines and policies set forth in this document to provide a clear line between themselves as an individual and as an employee.

Inappropriate postings that may include discriminatory remarks, harassment, and threats of violence or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct will not be tolerated and may subject the employee to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

### II. PURPOSE

The use of social media presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. This Social Media Policy is intended to provide guidance to Selma employees and contractors in the implementation of social media applications in order to (1) prevent violation of existing Town policies, public records retention policies, and confidential personnel information; (2) utilize technology to support the Town's communication needs; (3) ensure appropriate review by Town Management staff; and (4) protect against the inadvertent establishment of a public forum.

### III. PROVISIONS:

#### A. Required Disclaimer

Employees are legally responsible for content they post to the Internet, in a blog or otherwise, and can be held personally liable for defaming others and/or revealing confidential information.

If an employee chooses to identify himself/herself as a Town of Selma employee, some readers may view them as a spokesperson for the Town; thus, employees who choose to identify themselves in this way are required to clearly include the following statement, or substantially similar language, somewhere within the social networking page:

**“The views expressed on this page are my own and not those of the Town of Selma, nor of any person or organization affiliated or doing business with the Town of Selma.”**

#### B. Guidelines for Personnel Use

While the Town encourages its employees to enjoy and make productive use of their personal time, certain activities on the part of employees may become a concern if they have the effect of impairing the work of any employee or Town department; harassing, demeaning, or creating a hostile working environment for any employee; or disrupting the smooth and orderly flow of work within the organization.

In the area of blogging or social media (as defined above), employees may use such media in any way they choose as long as such use does not produce the adverse consequences noted above for the Town. For this reason, the Town of Selma advises its employees that the following guidelines apply in their use of social media on their own personal time and personal computer resources.

- (1) If an employee publishes any personal information about themselves, another employee of the Town, the organization or citizens, customers, suppliers, people working on behalf of the Town or competitors in any public medium that:
  - a. Creates a harassing, demeaning, or hostile working environment for any Town official, employee, or contractor.
  - b. Disrupts the Town’s smooth and orderly flow of work.

c. Disrupts the Town's delivery of services to citizens; THEN

the employee(s) responsible may be subject to counseling and/or disciplinary action, up to and potentially including termination of employment, depending upon the severity and repeat nature of the offense.

**(2)** Employees are prohibited from the following in connection with social media:

a. Using blogs or social networking sites to harass, threaten, intimidate, disparage, embarrass, or discriminate against Town officials, employees or anyone associated with or doing business with the Town.

b. Posting the logo of the Town on personal blogs or other sites, without prior approval from the Town Manager.

c. Posting town-related information, including Town issued documents, that is not a matter of public record.

d. Using a Town-issued work email address in social networking activities.

e. Posting pictures of children involved in any Town of Selma event on personal pages unless it is the employee's child(ren).

**(3)** Use of social media that involves any kind of criminal activity or harms the rights of others may result in criminal prosecution or civil liability to those harmed, or both. Individuals may be legally responsible for content they post and held personally liable for defaming others and/or revealing confidential information.

**(4)** Employees are reminded that personal postings may not only be read by friends and family but also by co-workers, supervisors, Town residents, and the media. An online identity can be discovered relatively easily even if posting anonymously or under a pseudonym, therefore employees should exercise caution when deciding what to include in a post or comment.

**(5)** The Town may require immediate removal of, and impose discipline for, material that violates the standards of this policy.

**(6)** Misuse of social media off-duty is grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

**(7)** Personal use of social media while on the clock is prohibited.

**(8)** This policy shall not be construed to prohibit any activities that constitute legally protected activities or constitutionally protected speech. Further, the First Amendment allows public employees broad, but not unlimited, discretion to speak on matters of public concern within the scope of their employment. Employees' speech is of public concern when it deals with issues of social, political, or other interest to the community at large and where the public is likely to be truly concerned or interested in the public employee's message. However, this protection is not absolute and must be balanced against the Town's interest in providing effective and efficient services to the public.

### **C. Employer Monitoring of Personal Use**

Employees should have no expectation of privacy while using the Internet. Postings can be reviewed by anyone, including Department Heads and contracted IT personnel. In addition, the Town reserves the right to lawfully and respectfully monitor social media postings and other online activities for compliance with Town policies. Monitoring can occur through multiple methods, such as staff "friending" one another or a citizen bringing inappropriate material from an employee's posting to the attention of the Town. The Town further reserves the right to use search tools and software to monitor blogs, other types of personal journals, and discussion forums.

### **D. Reporting Violations**

Employees are encouraged to report any violations, including possible or perceived violations, to supervisors, Department Heads, or Human Resources. Violations include but are not limited to the areas identified in this policy, discussions of the Town and its employees or vendors, discussion of proprietary information, and any other unlawful activity related to blogging or social networking. The Town of Selma prohibits taking negative action against any associate for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation. Any associate who retaliates against another associate for reporting a possible deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### **E. Discipline for Violations**

The Town will investigate and respond to reports of violations of the rules and guidelines set forth in this policy and other related policies. Violation of the Town's Social Media Policy will result in disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination. The Town reserves the right to take legal action where necessary against employees who engage in prohibited or unlawful conduct.

## **F. Scope of Social Media Use by the Town**

The Town of Selma's primary website ([www.selma-nc.com](http://www.selma-nc.com)) and Facebook Page will remain as the primary and predominant internet presence for the Town. The Town may engage in social media to achieve certain business and communication goals including disseminating time-sensitive information such as during public safety emergencies; marketing/promoting Town services and products; and encouraging public input for Town projects, programs, and initiatives. Whenever possible, content posted to these additional social media sites should also be available on the Town's main website or contain links directly to the Town's main website.

Policy adopted by Selma Town Council

Effective Date: May 11, 2021

*As of May 11, 2021, this policy replaces and supersedes any previous policies, or unwritten policies or practices covering the same subject.*