Social Media Terms of Use Policy

Effective Date: January 2020

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish terms of use with regard to Cobb County (County) social media sites and to advise the public of the procedures governing public comment on County social media sites.

2. DEFINITIONS

Social Media – Social media refers to any Internet-based software or service that allows users to interact with others via the posting of messages, files, or other content. Currently, the County (including its Agencies and Departments) maintains social media sites on Facebook, Instagram, NextDoor, Twitter, and YouTube. The absence of or lack of explicit reference to a site does not limit the extent or the application of this policy.

Social Media Account – A personalized presence inside a social networking channel, initiated at will by an individual. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and other social networking channels allow users to sign-up for their own social media account, which they can use to collaborate, interact and share content and status updates. When a user communicates through a social media account, the user's disclosures are attributed to his or her User Profile.

3. POLICY

3.1 The County supports the use of social media to communicate directly with the public, stakeholders, partners, and the media about County matters of public interest.

3.2 Official County use of social media is intended to broaden the reach of communication and engagement with the community.

3.3 The County uses social media as a form of public communication designed to:

    3.3.1 Enhance and encourage external communications;

    3.3.2 Educate the public regarding County services, programs, meetings, and events;

    3.3.3 Increase government transparency and efficiency;

    3.3.4 Engage the public in community dialogue;

    3.3.5 Respond to inquiries regarding County services and government in a timely manner;

    3.3.6 Share posts from County social media sites to help promote County programs, events, and services;

    3.3.7 Communicate with the public during inclement weather, emergencies, and man-made disasters; and

    3.3.8 Expand public interactivity and participation through online services and resources.

3.4 A person who posts or comments on any County social media platform does so by personal choice and takes personal responsibility for the comments, username, and information provided. Posting of any content on any County social media site by any visitor, follower, subscriber, or fan constitutes acceptance of the terms of use described in this Policy.

4. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON OFFICIAL COBB COUNTY SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

4.1 The purpose of maintaining a Cobb County presence on social media platforms is to present matters of public interest to Cobb County, including its many residents, businesses, and visitors. Cobb County encourages members of the public to submit questions, comments, and concerns on Cobb County social media sites, but please note that these sites are moderated discussion sites, and not public forums. Comments are generally monitored only during business hours, and, therefore, comments that are made after business hours may not be seen by Cobb County Social Media Administrators until the following business day. Commenters should be aware that posts and comments are subject to public disclosure as required by law, including, but not limited to, the Georgia Open Records Act, O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70, et seq.

4.2 All social media platforms used by the County are designated as Limited Public Forums. The County welcomes a person's right to express his or her opinion and encourages commenters to keep comments relevant to the topic in question.

4.3 The County, including its Agencies and Departments, actively monitors the social media platforms used by the County. Cobb County social media administrators may remove inappropriate content as defined in 4.6 below, without prior notice.

4.4 Comments will not be removed solely because a commenter expresses disagreement with a County policy or action; however, comments on any topic are subject to removal based on the criteria set forth in section 4.6.

4.5 A comment posted by any member of the public on any County social media site is the opinion of the commenter or poster only, and publication of a comment does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by the County, nor do such comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the County.

4.6 **Criteria for Removal of Public Comments**
Once posted, the County reserves the right to remove from public view the following types of public comments:

    4.6.1 Vulgar language;

    4.6.2 Personal attacks of any kind;

    4.6.3 Obscene, pornographic, or other illegal materials;

    4.6.4 Sexual comments about, or directed to, anyone;

    4.6.5 Comments or content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, genetics, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or intellectual disability, or sexual orientation;

    4.6.6 Spam or unrelated links to other sites;

    4.6.7 Comments that are unrelated to the County topic that is the subject of the post;

    4.6.8 Comments that advocate illegal activity;

    4.6.9 Comments that promote particular non-County services or products;

    4.6.10 Comments that promote political organizations or campaigns;

    4.6.11 Comments that infringe on copyrights or trademarks;

4.6.12 Comments that disclose personally identifiable information that may compromise an individual's financial or personal security, including social security numbers, passwords, or credit card information;

4.6.13 Comments that contain information that may compromise the safety, security, or proceedings of public systems or any criminal or civil investigations.

4.7 **Procedure for Removal of Public Comments**

4.7.1 Cobb County Social Media Administrators may remove from public view any comment that falls within the criteria set forth in Section 4.6 of this Policy. The social media administrator will retain a copy of the comment in County files, along with a description of the basis for removal of the comment.

4.7.2 When a commenter repeatedly posts comments that fall within the criteria for removal set forth in Section 4.6, the Cobb County Social Media Administrator may ban such person from future participation on social media platforms that permit organizations to ban users.

4.7.3 Commenters should be aware that some social media platforms do not allow removal of posts, and, therefore, the County may not have the ability to remove content that is inappropriate as defined in the criteria set forth in section 4.6. Commenters should be aware that all comments posted to any social media platform are bound by that platforms' standards, rules, and/or guidelines, and the County reserves the right to report any violation of such standards, rules, and/or guidelines to the social media entity with the intent that such entity will take appropriate and reasonable responsive action.

4.7.4 A commenter who believes that his or her comment was improperly removed can e-mail govpio@cobbcommunications.org to voice his or her concerns and/or to request additional information as to the basis for the removal of the comment.

5. APPLICABLE LAWS AND POLICIES

5.1 All County social media sites shall adhere to applicable federal and state laws and regulations and County ordinances, policies, and standards, including, but not limited to, legal requirements governing use of copyrighted materials, retention of records, and compliance with the Georgia Open Records Act, O.C.G.A. § 50-18-70, et seq., federal and state privacy laws, and County Human Resources and Information Services' policies.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA FAQs

6.1 Why do we moderate readers' comments?
Our goal is to provide information for a general readership which may include children. By screening comments, we have created a space where readers may exchange intelligent and informed commentary that enhances the quality of information exchange between the public and County Government.

6.2 What kind of comments are we looking for?
We value thoughtful comments representing a range of views that make their point quickly and politely. We emphasize respect for others. A few things we won't tolerate: personal attacks, obscenity, vulgarity, profanity (including expletives and letters followed by dashes), commercial promotion, spam or bot posts, impersonations, political campaigning, and off-topic posts. Please see section 4.6 of our Terms of Use for guidance on comments that are not appropriate on County social media sites and, therefore, are subject to removal.

6.3 Do we edit or remove comments?

We do not edit public comments, but as noted above in 6.2, we will remove comments if they contain material that is inappropriate according to the criteria set forth in section 4.6 of our Terms of Use. For example, we would remove a comment that was vulgar, defamatory, or contained copyrighted material. We encourage commenters to review section 4.6 of the Terms of Use for guidance on comments that are considered inappropriate and, therefore, subject to removal. We may from time to time remove one of our own posts in order to correct typos or to improve clarity. Depending upon the site, when this occurs, any attached comments may also be removed.

6.4 When and where will my comment be displayed?

The County currently uses social media sites including (but not limited to); Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and NextDoor. Although comments are usually reviewed during regular business hours, be aware that comments may be monitored at any time. We reserve the right to limit comments on specific posts.

6.5 Should I use my real name when making a comment?

Yes, definitely. We have found that people who use their names carry on more engaging, respectful conversations. However, we recommend against revealing personal contact information on security grounds. A reminder: Once your comment is published, it may be found in search results on Web sites like Google and Yahoo.

6.6 What about criticism of Cobb County?

Yes, we respect and value all opinions, including those that contain constructive criticism and thoughts about what the County could do better! Comments will not be removed solely because they criticize the County (see section 4.4); however, a comment could be removed if it contained material that fell within the criteria set forth in Section 4.6.

6.7 What if I see an error in a post?

We appreciate it when readers point out errors in any County post, and we will attempt to correct any confirmed errors or inaccuracies.

6.8 Why was I blocked, or my comment removed?

If allowed by a social media platform, we might respond to violations of our Terms of Use by blocking a user from further use on that platform or removing a comment from public view. Users can email govpio@cobbcommunications.org with any questions that they might have regarding actions to block future use and/or removal of comments. We will review your situation, and if necessary, confer with the County Attorney's office.

Version ID	Date of Change	Author	Rationale
v.1.0-2020		County Attorney's Office	