



GIG HARBOR FIRE & MEDIC ONE

Organizational Policy

Title: External Use of GHFMO Social Media

Reference:

Applies to: Users of Social Media (Predominantly External)

Approved by: Fire Chief Dennis Doan

1.0 PURPOSE

Because many of our citizens and other stakeholders utilize social media for news and communications, Gig Harbor Fire & Medic One (the District) has developed its own social media accounts to share important public safety messages, keeping the public informed of our work and mission and delivering content related to the fire service. We rely on our own free speech rights to communicate our selected messages. Comments left on our social media sites reflect the views of the commenters, not the views of this agency.

The District is committed to fully complying with the freedom of speech clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and other similar legal obligations surrounding free speech. Since we follow the law, there may be times when what some people perceive to be offensive comments left by members of the public will remain visible on our social media posts, if such comments are legally protected speech.

The District has an important interest in assuring the accuracy and consistency of information associated with our social media sites. These terms and conditions establish guidelines for the public's use of our social media sites in a way that balances these values.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 "Social media" means digital content created by us and communicated on platforms that allow sharing, commenting, and engagement by the public. Examples of social media accounts we may use are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn.
- 2.2 "Comments" include any digital content, information, links, images, videos, or any other form of communicative content posted in reply or response to a social media account

post posted by us on one of our social media sites.

- 2.3 “User” means a member of the public who views or interacts with one or more of our social media accounts.

3.0 **EXPECTATIONS**

- 3.1 The leaders of the District believe that honest, civil, and productive discussions provide the best environment for citizens and other stakeholders to understand the work of their government.
- 3.2 We ask commenters to consider that our social media feeds may be viewed by children and other impressionable people. Please avoid profanity, slurs, personal attacks, bullying, or the use of false information.

4.0 **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The District commits to regularly train its employees on this policy and relevant freedom of speech case law and also commits to holding employees accountable if they violate policy or law.

5.0 **GUIDELINES**

- 5.1 These terms and conditions apply to all our social media sites. Where possible, a link to these terms and conditions will be made available as a hyperlink or posted as text somewhere on our social media accounts.
- 5.2 Users should know that social media posts we make, comments, and replies to those posts, and any direct or private messages sent to us may be public records subject to applicable public records release.
- 5.3 Our social media accounts are not monitored 24/7 and no one should utilize our social media accounts to seek emergency services. Anyone in need of emergency help should call 9-1-1.
- 5.4 We do not guarantee we will respond to comments or messages sent on our social media accounts. If you need a response, please reach out by telephone at (253) 851-3111 or through our website: <https://www.gigharborfire.org/>

6.0 **CONTENT MODERATION**

- 6.1 **Limited Public Forum.** Our social media accounts are created and maintained as limited public forums under the case law pertaining to the freedom of speech clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We invite members of the public to view and, where possible and permitted, provide comments or other engagement on our social media posts. However, the law permits us to hide and/or delete comments that are not

protected speech under the First Amendment and relevant case law. As a general rule, we will not hide and/or delete comments solely because such comments are critical of the District or its officials.

6.2 Prohibited Content. As indicated above, we may hide or delete:

- a. Comments expressly advocating direct violence or other illegal activity;
- b. Comments containing or linking to obscenity, which is defined as sexually explicit and/or pornographic content that is patently offensive, appeals to prurient interest, and lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value;
- c. Comments that are harassing, aggressive, purposefully incomplete, overtly misleading or promote discrimination on the basis of race, age, religion, gender, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, veteran status, or other protected class;
- d. Comments containing links to malware and/or malicious content that affects the normal functioning of a computer system, server, or browser;
- e. Duplicate comments posted repeatedly within a short period;
- f. Comments containing actual defamation against a specifically named person or organization, either as determined by a court or when the comments are patently defamatory by reference to easily discovered facts;
- g. Comments that contain images or other content that violate the intellectual property or copyright rights of someone else, if the owner of that property notifies us that the property was posted in a comment on our social media account.
- h. Comments that contain a hyperlink to any website other than those controlled by the District. This will be done without regard to the viewpoint of the comment containing such a link or the content of the site to which the link redirects.

6.3 Retention. When a comment containing any of the above content (section 6.2) is posted to our social media account, a copy or electronic record of that content may be retained or archived pursuant to our records retention policy, along with a brief description of the reason the specific content was deleted. Once documented, the content will be removed, where possible, from our social media account.

7.0 APPEAL


7.1 If our staff hides or deletes a user's comment pursuant to these terms and conditions, the user has the right to appeal that decision by sending an email or letter to the District within five (5) business days.

7.2 Upon receipt of an appeal, our attorney will determine whether the comment at issue contained content protected by law. If the appeal is successful, the comment may (if possible) be restored for public view, or the user may be permitted to repost the comment. Upon a determination that the comment was not protected by law, the user will be notified that the appeal was denied.

7.3 *Blocking or Banning a User.* When we determine that a user has violated these terms and conditions on three (3) or more occasions within a twelve (12)-month rolling period, we may block or ban the offending user from the social media account where the violations occurred.

If we block or ban a user, we will (a) reasonably attempt to notify the user; (b) describe the violation(s); and (c) explain the appeal process.

If the appeal is successful and the user has not violated this policy three (3) times within a rolling twelve (12)-month period, we will unblock or unban the user from the social media account. If the appeal is not successful, our decision will stand.

Approved by:  _____
Fire Chief, Dennis Doan

September 14, 2023
_____ Date