

SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY

1. General Concerns

The Town of Warren recognizes the proliferation and, in some instances, usefulness, of online conversation between employees and the general public. However, due to the nature of social networking sites, there exists a risk, without care and planning, that the lines between one's professional life and personal life will be blurred. Our employees should always be mindful of how they present themselves to the world, online and otherwise. Should an employee "friend" a resident on Facebook, subscribe to a resident "twitter" account, regularly engage in email "chat" with a resident, exchange text messages with resident or engage in other electronic communication, the town of Warren is concerned, and the employee should be concerned, that such activities may undermine the employees authority to maintain discipline, encourage inappropriate behaviors and compromise the employees ability to remain truly objective with the general public.

In addition, any online communication using one's own personal resources, as opposed to the town of Warrens resources, compromises the employee's, as well as the town of Warren, ability to retain public records in accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth's public records laws. The law requires public employees who send, receive or maintain records in their capacity as public employees, to retain, disclose and dispose of such records in compliance with strict provisions of the public records law. This law applies whether or not the record is in the form of a paper document or an electronic communication. When town employees communicate through town-based resources, such as town email, such records are retained and archived through the town's information technology department (Google Email). If, however, an employee communicates outside of these resources, such information is not retained. The burden falls on the employee to comply with public records laws when using personal email or social network accounts to communicate with the general public.

2. Expectations of Town Employees

With these concerns in mind, the Town of Warren has instituted this "Social Networking Policy," and announces its expectations for town employees' use of social networks such as Facebook, Linked-in, Twitter, personal email accounts, text message features of cell phones, use of blogs, and other electronic or technologically based communication systems.

1. Before endeavoring to establish any social networking account, employees should familiarize themselves with the features of any account they choose to use. For example, Facebook requires account holders to take specific steps to "privatize" the information they place online. You must educate yourself to these features of Facebook or any other social networking site you select. You will be responsible should any information you intended to be "private" becomes "public" due to your own ignorance of the features of the social network you have decided to use or your failure to properly use such features.
2. You must also know that any information you share privately with a recipient could be re-distributed by such recipient, without your knowledge or consent. The same principles you apply to in person communication should be applied to online conversation: use discretion, and do not place your trust in individuals who have not proven themselves trustworthy. In essence, nothing you post online is ever truly "private."
3. At all times, and in the use of any form of communications, information that is protected by law from disclosure to third parties will not be communicated online in a way that unreasonably exposes such information to retrieval by those third parties.

4. Use of one's personal email account or social networking account to discuss town business with the general public is prohibited. It should be noted that, just because an employee uses his/her personal email as opposed to a town email account, this does not shield such email from the provisions of the public records law or from discovery in litigation. It only prevents the archiving of such messages through the towns automatic email archiving system. We again remind employees that information sent or received by them, even through personal email or social network accounts that are related to their capacity as a town employees are still subject to public records retention, exemption and disclosure requirements.
5. No matter what medium of communication an employee selects, he/she should adhere to appropriate conduct. You are an employee of the town and you should always conduct yourself in accordance with this understanding.
6. This policy is not intended to infringe upon an employee's right to speak publicly on matters of public concern, or to communicate with fellow members of their union on workplace issues, so long as such communication adheres to appropriate time, place and manner restrictions and does not interfere with the performance of your job duties. However, when you speak via social networking sites or tools on matters concerning your work, you are speaking as an employee and not as a citizen; restrictions may be placed upon your freedom to express yourself. Those restrictions are intended to preserve confidentiality and maintain professional standards established by the town.
7. Employees may not access their personal email accounts during their scheduled hours of work or private social network (i.e. Facebook) accounts using town's computer resources. If your behavior is inappropriate or is derogatory towards the town or its employees the town reserves the right to impose discipline for such behavior. An employee may also face individual liability for inappropriate on-line communications as well as exposing the town to vicarious liability in certain instances. At the same time, the town recognizes that, in limited cases, use of emails during scheduled hours of work may be reasonably necessary.
8. If you are communicating as an employee of the town in your online communications, you must be aware that readers will assume you **"speak for the town."** Therefore, all of your online communications, when you are actually acting on behalf of the town, or creating the appearance that you are doing so, must be professional at all times and reflect positively on the town .
9. In the use of any social networking site, you may not, without express permission from the Board of Selectmen, use the town's logo, likeness or any town photographs or other property that belongs to the town.
10. References to "Facebook" are not included to limit application of their policy to use of that program. All online, electronic or computerized means of communication are subject to this policy. Given the rapid pace of technological change it is not possible to identify all proprietary or commonly named or identified means of such communications.