

**TOWN OF THURMONT  
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT POLICY**

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**Purpose:**

This policy sets forth guidelines for the Town of Thurmont's (the "Town's") use of social media sites as a means of conveying the Town's information to the public. The intended purpose behind the use of the Town's social media sites is to disseminate information from the Town, about the Town, to the public in a civil manner. This policy is in addition to and complements any existing or future Town policies regarding the use of technology, computers, smart phones, e-mail and the internet.

Nothing in this policy shall be applied to prohibit or infringe upon any communication, speech or expression that is protected or privileged under law. This includes speech and expression protected under state or federal constitutions as well as labor laws or other applicable laws.

**Definitions:**

"Social media" means the various web sites and activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation that is accessible through the Internet. By way of example, but not limitation, some commonly used social media sites are Facebook®, Twitter®, YouTube®, and LinkedIn®.

"Town's social media sites" means a website or social media tool which has been created, reviewed and approved for use by the Board of Commissioners.

"Administrator" means the individual designated by the Town of Thurmont to submit posts for official purposes and to review comments to assure compliance with this policy.

"Post" or "Postings" means a message/blog submitted by the Administrator including, but not limited to, text, videos, articles, photographs, website links, computer applications or other forms of communication posted on a Town social media account.

"Comments" means a visitor submitted statement, replying to a post or offering from an administrator post.

### General Social Media Guidelines:

1. The Town's website (www.thurmont.com) will remain the Town's predominant and primary means of internet communication. Wherever possible, content posted on the Town's social media sites must first be made available on the Town's website.
2. When practicable, content posted to the Town's social media sites must contain hyperlinks directing users back to the Town's official website for in-depth information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the Town of Thurmont.
3. The Administrator or his/her designee(s) will have sole access to update, manage and monitor all social media postings on the Town's approved social media platforms.
4. The Administrator will maintain a list of all Town social media sites, including login and password information.
5. The Town shall retain full permission or rights to any content posted by the Town, including documents, pictures, videos or any other electronic content of any type.
6. The Town's social media sites must comply with all appropriate Town policies and procedures as outlined in the Town Code and Employee Handbook.
7. The Town's social media sites are public record and subject to the Maryland Public Records Act.
8. The Town's social media sites are primarily used to disseminate information to the public regarding projects, news and events.
9. Any comments, posts, messages, or other methods of creating or sharing content or of messaging or communicating through the social media site shall not constitute notice to the Town of any condition or inquiry that requires a response.
10. The Town reserves the right to terminate Town social media accounts at any time without notice. The Mayor and/or Chief Administrative Officer may direct the deletion of a social media account that is not being utilized or is being underutilized.
11. The Town reserves the right to change, modify, or amend all or part of this policy at any time.
12. Any person posting to social media sites maintained by or representing the Town of Thurmont hereby consents to the authority of the Maryland state courts and venue in Frederick County, Maryland.
13. All Town social media accounts must fall into one of the two categories below: A. Social Media Accounts Intended to Invite Discussion, or B. Social Media Accounts Intended to Disseminate Information.

14. All Town social media accounts will follow the guidelines for Social Media Accounts Intended to Disseminate Information. The Town of Thurmont's Board of Commissioners must approve any request to change the status of an account to a Social Media Account Intended to Invite Discussion. No Board of Commissioner approval is required to change the settings to a Social Media Account Intended to Disseminate Information.

**A. Social Media Accounts Intended to Invite Discussion:**

A social media account intended to invite discussion, debate, or the free exchange of ideas must generally allow any user of the social media site to post, comment, or otherwise participate in all social media posts and discussions.

Any person posting to social media sites maintained by or representing the Town of Thurmont consent to the *Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy*, herein attached as Exhibit A, which will be posted on all Town maintained social media sites.

A social media account intended to invite discussion may not delete, block, or otherwise interfere with any user's participation unless the user's posts, comments, or contributions violate the Town's *Social Media Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy*, as defined in Attachment A.

The Town's *Social Media Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy* must be posted or otherwise linked to on every Town social media account intended to invite discussion.

In the event a user posts content on a social media account in violation of the Town's *Social Media Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy*, the Town shall notify the user that the posted content violates Town policies. The Town shall also report the post or content to the social media website.

The Town may delete any post, comment, or participation from a user that violates the Town's *Social Media Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy*. Before deleting any content, however, the Town must save and archive the post.

**B. Social Media Accounts Intended to Disseminate Information**

A social media account intended to disseminate information shall not permit user participation of any kind under any circumstance.

A social media account intended to disseminate information will not allow users to post, comment, or otherwise contribute to any of the account's content.

**Guidelines for Using Personal Accounts in an Official Capacity**

The Town strongly disfavors any individual using a personal social media account page in an official capacity.

An individual uses her or his social media account in an official capacity when the personal account addresses the individual's official responsibilities, when the account owner communicates

with constituents about upcoming meetings, public safety issues, uses the account for community outreach, or solicits input from constituents on policy issues.

When an individual uses her or his social media account in an official capacity, and the user wishes to allow users to post, comment, or otherwise interact with the user's individual account, the user may not ban a user or delete the posts or comments from a user whose post or comment mentions or relates to any Town matters or issues.

A Town employee using her or his social media account in an official capacity who believes that another user has violated the *Social Media Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy* shall report the content to the social media website itself. The Town employee may not delete the post or block the user unless and until receiving permission from the Board of Commissioners.

## ATTACHMENT A:

### **Town of Thurmont Social Media Visitor Guidelines and Commenting Policy**

As a public entity the Town must abide by certain standards to serve all its constituents in a civil and unbiased manner. While the Town of Thurmont welcomes comments and feedback, please be advised there are certain guidelines users must abide by that are listed below.

1. Comments or content containing any of the following inappropriate forms of content shall not be permitted and are subject to removal and/or restriction by the Town:
  - a) Profane, obscene, violent, or pornographic language and/or content;
  - b) Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, sex, gender identity or expression, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, covered medical condition, sexual orientation, military or veteran's status, or any other basis protected by federal, state, or local law;
  - c) Sexual content or links to sexual content;
  - d) Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
  - e) Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems or employees;
  - f) Sensitive information such as social security numbers, telephone numbers, home addresses;
  - g) Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party or that infringes upon copyrights or trademarks;
  - h) Threats of violence or any other harmful act directed to any person, or persons, group, or organization; or
  - i) Conduct that is in violation of any federal, state, or local law.
2. The Town reserves the right to restrict or remove any content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable law. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Town of Thurmont is not obligated to take such actions, and the Town disclaims any and all responsibility and liability for any materials that the Town deems inappropriate for posting, which cannot be removed in an expeditious and otherwise timely manner.
3. The Administrator has sole authority to authorize the removal or deletion of content based on these guidelines. Any content removed or deleted will be retained as screenshots, including the time, date, and identity of the poster (when available) by the Town for a reasonable period of time. Upon removal of the content, the Administrator shall notify the commenter that their response has been deemed inappropriate and removed due to inconsistency to the Town's content requirements.
4. The Town of Thurmont's social media pages are not monitored 24/7. If there is an emergency, please call 911.
5. This page is not intended for use as official communication with the Town. Content submitted to the Town's social media sites is not considered legal notice to the Town and

should not be relied on for communication regarding requests for proposals, invitations for bid, or other competitive procurements. In addition, any requests for records, assistance, information, claims, or any other questions and concerns should be directed to the Town Office at **[Insert contact information]**

6. A comment posted by a member of the public on any Town of Thurmont social media site is the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and the publication of a comment does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by, the Town, nor do such comments necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the Town.
7. By posting a comment, users agree to indemnify the Town of Thurmont, its officers and employees from and against all liabilities, judgments, damages, and costs (including attorney's fees) incurred by any of them which arise out of or are related to social media usage or content posted by users. If a user does not agree to these terms, the individual should not use the Town of Thurmont's social media sites as a violation of these terms may lead to legal liability.
8. The Town does not guarantee the authenticity, accuracy, appropriateness nor security of external links, websites or content linked thereto.
9. Each type of Social Media organization (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) maintains a "Terms of Use" agreement. All comments posted to any Town social media site are bound by these organization's Terms of Use and the Town reserves the right to report any user violation to the Social Media organization with the intent that the social media organization will take appropriate and reasonable responsive action.

**Media Inquiries:**

Questions or media inquiries regarding the Town of Thurmont's social media activity should be directed to the Town of Thurmont at **[Insert contact information]**.