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Board of Commissioners Policy

External Communications Adopted Sep 5, 2012

The Town of Nags Head seeks to inform its residents, businesses, and visitors by engaging in pro-active and interactive communications.

This policy establishes guidelines for the Town of Nags Head's communications with media outlets and for the use of social media sites as a means of conveying significant information to its citizens. Media refers to traditional or mainstream media such as newspapers, television, and magazines. Social media includes web-based and mobile based technologies used to turn communication into interactive dialogue between organizations, communities, and individuals. For policies regarding the Town's web site, please see the Town's Administrative Web Site policy.

Communicating with the Media

Inquiries from media outlets are welcomed by Nags Head and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate. For Town wide inquiries, the spokesperson will most often be the town manager and/or the designated public information officer (PIO). For department-related (routine) issues, the spokesperson will most often be the respective department head. Department heads, or their specifically identified designees, do not have to obtain prior approval before talking with a member of the media.

For all sensitive or controversial issues relating to Town activities, the town manager, his designee, or the PIO, will act as the spokesperson.

In a crisis situation the town manager or the PIO is responsible for releasing information to news media.

All news releases for the Town will be handled through the town manager's office or, in the case of red flag/no swimming news releases, by Nags Head's Fire and Rescue Department.

Responding to Media Inquiries

First, get the reporter's name and the publication or station represented. When answering questions, be fair, friendly, and factual. Please also remember that there is no such thing as an

off-the-record comment. Never speculate. Do not give a personal opinion on any subject, because it may be misconceived that you are speaking for your colleagues or the Town.

You should not assume you will see the reporter's story before it is published or broadcast. The media representative is under no obligation to allow viewing of copy or video.

If technical data is involved, you may offer to help the reporter check the story for accuracy, particularly if the reporter is not a writer specializing in the field. Some reporters are willing to check their technical data back with the source, if time permits. If you are offered the opportunity for this type of review, remember that time is critical to the journalist facing a deadline.

Social Networking

Official sites for the Town of Nags Head through social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, and other digital applications, carry the same weight as the Town's official website and must be treated with the same respect. The purpose of the sites is to inform the public about pertinent Town information, events, public service announcements, emergency-related items, and other public affairs activities. All information is posted by the Town's public information officer.

Where possible, the Town's social media sites shall clearly indicate they are maintained by the Town and shall ensure that contact information is prominently displayed.

Where possible, social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Town of Nags Head.

Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the Town reserves the right to restrict or remove:

- Profane, obscene or pornographic language or content or links to such language or content;
- Solicitation of commerce, including but not limited to advertising of any business or product or sale;
- Comments that are political in nature;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Defamatory or personal attacks;
- Threats to any person or organization;
- Conduct that violates any federal, state or local law;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, age national origin or ancestry, physical or mental disability, veteran status, parentage, marital status, medical condition, sexual identity, sexual orientation as well as any other category protected by federal, state or local laws.
- Comments on topics or issues not within the jurisdictional purview of the Town of Nags Head.

The Town of Nags Head reserves the right to restrict or remove any content deemed to be in violation of this policy or any applicable law. Those who post more than three comments that are removed because they meet one or more of the descriptions above, can be banned from commenting on the Town's social networking sites.

Comments, relating to the topic at hand, should remain on the site, regardless of whether they are favorable or unfavorable to the Town as a business entity.

Like e-mail, communication via the Town's social networking sites is a public record. In other words, both the posts of the site administrator and any feedback by other employees or non-employees, including citizens, will become part of the public record. Because others may not be aware of public records laws, Town sites should include the following statement (or some version of it) somewhere on the social networking site: "Representatives of the Town of Nags Head's government communicate via this site. Consequently, any communication via this site, whether by a Town employee or the general public, may be subject to monitoring and disclosure to third parties."

No confidential information shall be posted/transmitted; including statements about the guilt or innocence of any suspect or arrestee, or comments concerning pending prosecutions, or information relating to an emergency medical incident.

The town manager has the authority to terminate social media accounts and pages.

Records Management and Preservation

In the spirit of transparency in government, account administrators who receive messages through the private message service offered by the social media site should direct the user to contact them at a public e-mail address maintained by the Town. Alternatively, account administrators must reply to the inquiry using their Town e-mail account. Again, comments expressing an opposing view point must be allowed. Comments should only be removed if they are spam or comments that would not be acceptable in a public forum such as a commissioner's public hearing.

All comments or posts made to the Town's sites are public and are considered a public record under NCGS 132, and will be managed as such.

Nags Head must assume responsibility for public records and comply with the retention period set forth in their approved retention and disposition schedule. The Town must assign their own schedule of collection and disposal for social networking sites according to the administrative value of the record and permanently retain records with historical value. Refer to Web Site Guidelines policies on North Carolina Government Records Web site. (<http://www.records.ncdcr.gov/erecords/default.htm>).