

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS

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VILLAGE COUNCIL

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JULIAN P. MANSFIELD, *Village Manager*

VILLAGE OF FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1. PURPOSE

The Village of Friendship Heights has established social media sites primarily in order to inform residents about Village programs, events, and other Village-related activities. The Village also seeks to increase its ability to broadcast its messages to the widest possible audience. The Village's social media sites are not intended to be traditional public forums for the general exchange of ideas and viewpoints. The purpose of the sites is to push information to the public, not to directly communicate with them (i.e., there will generally be no response to posts, and no answers to questions, comments, or concerns). Instead, for a response, the Village encourages residents to either submit their questions, comments, and concerns to info@friendshipheightsmd.gov, call the Village Center front desk at (301) 656-2797, or visit the Village Center in person at 4433 South Park Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815.

2. GOALS

Official Village of Friendship Heights social media accounts should:

- Deliver Village news, public information, and emergency notifications in an accurate and timely manner;
- Promote the Village and its services, programs, events, job opportunities, and staff;
- Increase transparency and efficiency;
- Create a strong sense of community;
- Provide coverage of public meetings, events, and programs;
- Promote involvement from all cultural groups; and
- Create a spirit of trustworthiness.

3. SUMMARY

New and emerging online platforms are fundamentally changing the way the world works, offering us new ways to provide information to the public. The Village of Friendship Heights encourages the use of social media to further the Village's mission to better inform our community. To ensure that communication through Village social media networks is consistent and in the best interest of the Village, this policy provides guidelines for the use of social media.

4. DEFINITIONS

- "Social media" for the purposes of this Policy refers to, but is not limited to, the following sites:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VillageofFriendshipHeights>.
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/village_of_friendship_heights/.
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/village-of-friendship-heights>.
- X (Twitter): <https://x.com/fhv1914>.
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@villageoffriendshipheights>.

- Any social network not on this list is considered unapproved and may not be used for Village purposes without first obtaining written approval from the Village Manager.
- The sites listed above are also linked on the Village’s website, www.friendshipheightsmd.gov, which shall remain the Village's primary and predominant Internet presence.
- “Village social media sites” for the purposes of this Policy refer to any social media application established by the Village for the purpose of communicating information to the public.
- “Posts” or “postings” mean information, articles, pictures, videos, or any other form of communication posted on a Village social media site.

5. SCOPE

Applies to all Village employees or contractors creating or contributing to www.friendshipheightmd.gov (and our related websites), social networks, or any other kind of Village-owned and operated social media.

6. ACCOUNTS SETUP

Employees shall not create a social media account for the Village of Friendship Heights. All official Village of Friendship Heights social media accounts are created and approved by the Village Manager.

Village of Friendship Heights social media accounts will clearly indicate that they are maintained by the Village and will have Village of Friendship Heights contact information available with a link to the Village’s website, www.friendshipheightsmd.gov.

7. STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

The Village Manager will determine who has administrative rights to their respective social media accounts. The Village Manager grants account access to approved publishers; no staff shall post to or access a Village social media account without prior approval. All staff who interact on social media will do so as representatives of the Village.

Publishers

Designated staff shall serve as social media account publishers and are responsible for composing content, posting on a regular basis, monitoring the account, and responding when necessary to comments and private messages according to these guidelines. Every account should have a lead publisher who will serve as the contact person for that account. The lead publisher monitors and maintains their account, ensures appropriate frequency of postings and guideline compliance, and keeps the account regularly updated.

Only Village staff may serve as publishers. Volunteers, interns, contractors, the Village Council, and Council members should not administer official accounts except as authorized by the Village Manager. Credentials to Village social media accounts must be protected and

limited to authorized personnel. In the event of a compromise or suspected compromise, the Village Manager must be notified immediately so that the password can be securely changed. Publishers must notify the Village Manager when staff leave the Village so they can be removed from Village social media accounts.

The Village Manager may:

- Request a message be posted on any Village social media account.
- Post, edit, and/or remove any content on any Village social media account.
- Coordinate and/or publish emergency communications on any Village social media account.
- Provide feedback about published content.
- Unpublish or delete Village social media accounts that may be inactive, unauthorized, or do not meet the goals of the Village.
- Manage Village-wide emergency communications.
- Remove publisher rights if procedures and guidelines listed in this document are not followed.

All Village of Friendship Heights social media platforms, as defined above, will be created by Village staff subject to approval by the Village Manager or his/her designee, when required.

a. Emergencies/Closings

Village-wide closures and cancellations due to weather or other emergencies must be communicated by the Village Manager, who will then communicate the updates to staff. This ensures that emergency communications are consistent and posted across all platforms. When possible or foreseeable, emergency messages should be written, communicated, and approved in advance, prior to posting. This will allow a more efficient and timely response in times when it is most critical.

b. Images/Photos/Videos

Any copyrighted images and materials must have proper prior approval from the content's creator, including physical documentation. Proper credit must be given if required. Publishers are advised to avoid posting videos or photographs of minors, unless there is proper permission granted or subjects are part of a group photo at a public event at which there was no expectation of privacy.

c. Updating from Mobile Devices

Approved publishers who use social media apps to administer Village accounts on mobile devices must password-protect any device that is used to access Village social media accounts. If a user's phone is lost and is not password protected, then an official Village resource is at risk. If a user loses a device, the Village Manager must be notified immediately, and administrative rights to that account will be temporarily disabled. Please be aware that these apps may not provide the full set of management features found on the desktop browser version.

8. ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

a. Public Postings and Comments

Public postings and comments are **not permitted** by the Village due to limited

resources available to provide monitoring and interaction services.

Open Meetings Act. Maryland Law, Md. General Provisions Code Ann., §3-101 et seq. (“Open Meetings Act”), imposes on the Village specific requirements regarding the notification and conduct of all public meetings. Please be cautioned that members of a board, committee or Council are not advised to engage in an active online discussion of Village business via any Village or other social media account, as such discussions may be interpreted as simultaneous discussion of public business and thus the effective conduct of a board, committee or commission meeting, which should be part of the open public meeting to which the public are invited and may attend. As such, this could also be interpreted as a violation of the Open Meetings Act. Online discussion of business by board, committee, or Council members also could violate prohibitions on ex parte communications, public record requirements for certain matters, and public hearing requirements as well.

All postings may be subject to the Maryland Public Information Act and records retention requirements. As a result, the Village may be obligated to retain any user postings/likes in its custody and to produce them for inspection upon request. By virtue of providing content to any of the Village’s social media accounts, users agree that they have no expectation of privacy in the information provided. The Village is not responsible for and does not endorse any links posted to any of the Village’s social media accounts by third parties. The Village’s social media accounts also do not circumvent or supersede the Village’s normal business practices or processes. Furthermore, any form of content submitted to any of the Village’s social media accounts does not constitute a legal notice to the Village. For example, notice may NOT be given to the Village under the Local Government Tort Claims Act through any of the Village’s social media accounts.

b. Keep all Social Media Records Open and Public

The Village of Friendship Heights is required to keep all social media records open and public. **Village staff may not delete anything they post or block an individual from an account.**

c. Replying to Private Messages

Most social media applications have a private message feature where the user can directly message the Village. It is important to note that commenting as an official Village social media account is similar to serving as an official spokesperson for the Village, so be mindful of what you say. All content posted to Village social media sites represents the Village’s point of view and not those of individual employees. Publishers may appropriately reply to private messages. Share only honest, factual, and accurate information. Follow the posting guidelines as specified above. Publishers should coordinate responses with appropriate staff to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Although social media is often very informal and can lend itself to informal conversation, it is important to remember that interactions with users on social media are representative of the Village and will be seen as such by those users, so staff must be respectful and considerate.

9. OPINIONS OF VILLAGE/ENDORSEMENTS

Unless specifically indicated otherwise, social media content expresses the author's views only and not necessarily those of the Village, or its officials or staff. Retweets, follows, or likes by Village social media accounts should not be construed as an endorsement of any individual, group, or entity by the Village, its officials, or staff.

10. LEGAL

Village staff who use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and county laws, regulations, and policies.

This includes adherence to:

- Established laws and policies regarding the use of Village Information and Technology resources.
- Copyright laws.
- Records retention laws.
- Maryland Public Information Act (PIA), Md. General Provisions Code Ann., §3-101 et seq.
- Maryland Open Meetings Act, Md. General Provisions Code Ann., §4-101 et seq.
- First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
- Federal and state privacy laws.
- Village of Friendship Heights Personnel Policies and Procedures (revised January 11, 2021).

11. TERMS OF SERVICE

Social media sites are third-party sites and have terms of service and policies that are not governed by the Village of Friendship Heights. The terms of service for the social media sites used by the Village can be found below:

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/legal/terms.
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/legal/terms.
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/legal//service-terms>.
- X (Twitter): <https://x.com/en/tos>.
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/t/terms.

Approved by the Village Council on January 12, 2026.