



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

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City Manager

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In response to Awaiting Report #26-25, the Communications and Community Engagement Office report the following:

Actions Taken on Discontinuing X Within 60 Days

Following the Council Order adopted on March 2, 2026, the City initiated a coordinated process to discontinue all official posting and engagement by departments on X. On March 3 and 4, the City's primary X account was updated with final notices informing followers of the transition and directing them to alternative communication channels, including the City's website, email notifications, SMS alerts, and other social media platforms. This message also provided context for the City's decision and outlined where residents can continue to access City information. At the same time, the City's Communications Office led a coordinated offboarding process across approximately 20 department and programmatic X accounts. This process included the development of consistent final messaging, guidance to account administrators, coordination on public records retention, and updates to City websites that removed references and links to the platform.

Social Media Platform Evaluation Framework

To address the Council's request regarding evaluation criteria, the City's Communications Office has formalized a Social Media Platform Evaluation Framework. This framework has been developed and refined over several years and has now been documented and standardized for consistent use across departments. Additionally, the City's updated social media policy, which is included with this response, further formalizes our governance approach and modernizes the original social media administration policy created in 2013.



This framework will help ensure that platform and account-level decisions are made consistently, transparently, and based on defined operational standards rather than primarily driven by individual program or departmental interest in creating new accounts. It also strengthens the City's ability to evaluate platform risk, content moderation considerations, and the City's capacity to effectively and safely engage residents. The framework includes the following core criteria:

1. Strategic Purpose: Alignment with City communications goals and measurable objectives
2. Audience Presence and Demographics: Whether the target audience is active on the platform
3. Content Fit: The City's ability to produce appropriate content consistently
4. Peer Use Analysis: How peer communities use and benefit from the platform
5. Resource Capacity: Sufficient staff availability to manage accounts effectively
6. Platform Algorithm and Discoverability: Organic reach potential and content visibility
7. Risk and Brand Considerations: Comment moderation, toxicity, and reputational concerns
8. Measurement and Return on Effort: Connection to measurable outcomes
9. Opportunity Cost: Whether resources could be better invested in existing platforms

This framework is not a scorecard model, but rather a decision-making tool that provides guidance for establishing new accounts or retiring existing ones. The Information Technology Department supports this process by evaluating platforms for security risks and supporting secure account management practices. The framework guidance clearly indicates that the City should withhold from launching or consider retiring a platform when it fails to align with the City's overall social media strategy, lacks a clear content strategy, administrators cannot maintain consistent posting, and/or measurable objectives cannot be established and monitored.

Rationale for Current Platform Use

Consistent with the framework described above, the City maintains a presence on multiple social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Bluesky, Threads, and Nextdoor. Each platform serves a distinct and complementary role in reaching different audiences and delivering different types of content.

- Facebook provides broad community reach with algorithm-driven content discovery and is used for general information sharing and community-wide updates.
- Instagram supports visual storytelling and short-form video content and is particularly effective for reaching younger audiences through engaging multimedia formats.
- YouTube is used for longer-form video content, including educational programming and City-produced content, supporting residents who prefer video-based information.
- LinkedIn supports professional communications, workforce recruiting and development, and organizational messaging for business and academic audiences.
- Bluesky and Threads provide additional channels for near real-time information sharing and allow the City to diversify its presence as the social media landscape evolves. These platforms have demonstrated adoption by peer municipalities and media organizations.

While these channels presently do not nearly have the same level of followers and reach as the City's discontinued X accounts, they offer similar capabilities in accommodating time-sensitive information and an overall higher frequency of messages than other accounts.

- Nextdoor supports neighborhood-level communication and is particularly useful for location-based updates such as public works projects, public safety information, and community-specific notices.

Each platform is evaluated based on its ability to reach specific audiences, support appropriate content formats, and advance the City's communications goals. While the parent companies that operate these platforms are not without concerns, the City does not currently observe the aggressiveness in content moderation policies, hate speech, algorithmic manipulation, or governance challenges that prompted the Council's decision regarding X. Moving forward, the City will continue to monitor platform practices and governance to ensure alignment with municipal values and resident trust.

Each platform above meets the criteria outlined in our framework: reaching specific audiences, supporting appropriate content formats, maintaining adequate resource capacity, and advancing measurable City communications goals. The City does not rely on any single platform, but instead uses a coordinated approach to ensure that information is accessible, timely, and responsive to how residents consume information.

Communications Approach and Use of Social Media

While the City has discontinued use of X, social media remains an important component of the City's broader communications strategy.

In the first quarter of 2026, approximately 30 City department social media accounts generated more than 13.8 million impressions and over 635,000 engagements across platforms. Of note, this data does encompass data from the City's discontinued X accounts and there is an expectation that overall impressions and engagements will decline year-over-year in the short-term due to the discontinuing of X, which had more than 530K impressions in Q1 2026. These metrics demonstrate the role social media plays in extending the reach of City information and supporting real-time communication.

For example, during a February storm event, a single post reached more than 680,000 people in one evening and generated nearly 14,000 engagements as residents shared time-sensitive safety information. This type of amplification is an important part of the City's communications infrastructure, particularly during urgent situations.

At the same time, the City recognizes that informing residents remains a high priority. In the 2024 Resident Opinion Survey, 44 percent of residents identified "informing residents about City issues" as extremely important. The 2025 Resident Communications Survey confirmed this priority remains consistent, with 44 percent of residents rating this as "extremely important."

This reinforces the need to maintain and strengthen a diversified communications approach that utilizes multiple channels to reach residents effectively.

Disseminating Information Across Communication Channels

The City's approach to disseminating information across multiple communications platforms is based on the recognition that residents access information in different ways and through different channels. No single communication method effectively reaches all segments of the community. Survey data from the 2025 Resident Communications Survey indicates that residents rely on a mix of information sources. Sixty-two percent of residents report using social media to receive City information, 59 percent use the City's website, and 68 percent use City printed mailers. Word-of-mouth remains the most widely used source at 88 percent.

However, when residents are asked to rate the value of these information sources, a different picture emerges. The 2024 Resident Opinion Survey shows that residents place the highest value on direct City communication channels such as email updates, printed materials, and the City website (47 percent "very valuable"), followed by word of mouth (37 percent "very valuable"). Social media ranks lower at 24 percent "very valuable," tied with television and radio.

These findings demonstrate an important distinction: while residents utilize social media as one of many information sources, they place greater value on direct City communications. This suggests that residents depend on a combination of digital, traditional, and interpersonal channels to stay informed, with a preference for official City channels.

In practice and aligned with these findings, the City uses a diversified communications strategy designed to:

- Reach residents across multiple platforms and formats
- Ensure equitable access to information
- Provide redundancy for critical and time-sensitive communications
- Support both broad awareness and targeted outreach

Social media plays a specific role within this broader system. It is most effective as a tool for distributing information and extending reach rather than as a primary method for receiving resident feedback. Our survey data indicates that only 31 percent of residents consider social media to be an effective way to provide feedback to the City, compared to significantly higher effectiveness ratings for other methods:

- In-person public meetings: 82% effective
- Emailing or calling a City department or City Manager: 78% effective
- Meeting with staff at City buildings: 74% effective
- Online surveys or polls: 73% effective
- Emailing or calling a City Councilor or the Mayor: 72% effective
- Telephone surveys or polls: 68% effective

- Online public meetings: 65% effective
- Social media postings: 31% effective

This distinction reinforces the City's approach. Social media platforms are used to complement core communication and engagement channels, including the City website, email and SMS systems, traditional media, and in-person engagement. By maintaining a strategic presence across multiple platforms while investing in high-effectiveness feedback mechanisms, the City can ensure residents have access to City information, while also creating meaningful opportunities for authentic civic participation.

Moving forward, the City will continue to apply this framework to ensure that its social media communications approach remains effective, inclusive, and aligned with community needs, while maintaining the flexibility to adapt as platforms evolve and resident expectations change. The City remains committed to transparent governance of its social media presence and to prioritizing resident trust and engagement across all communications channels.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi-An Huang' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager

Social Media Platform Evaluation Framework

This framework is intended to ensure that the City's use of social media platforms is strategic, sustainable, and aligned with organizational priorities. It provides guidance for evaluating whether the City of Cambridge should establish a presence on a new social media platform or continue operating an existing account. This tool is meant to assist staff with decision making process, and we have intentionally avoided creating a score card model.

1. Strategic Purpose

Before the City chooses a platform or evaluates whether to continue using one, the City should first clarify the purpose of the account.

Key Questions

- What communications or operational objective would the platform support?
- How does the platform align with the City's overall organizational social media strategy?
- What would success look like?
- Is there an existing City platform where this information could be shared instead?

Examples

- Providing public information
- Reaching specific audiences
- Supporting community engagement
- Publishing critical communications, including emergencies
- Driving interest to City services or programs
- Reaching audiences not effectively served through existing channels

Key Metric

- Alignment with measurable goals (reach, engagement, traffic to City services, customer service response, or reaching a specific audience)

Guidance

If a platform cannot clearly support a strategic goal, set measurable objectives, or align with the overall organizational social media strategy, the City should hold off on creating an account or consider sunsetting existing accounts.

The City's Communications Office encourages all departments, who operate and don't operate platforms, to share ideas and content for publishing consideration on the City's primary accounts.

2. Audience Presence and Demographics

A platform's value is largely determined by whether the City's intended audience is active there.

Key Question

- Do platform users match the City's intended target audience (for example: age distribution, geographic location, interests, and behavioral patterns)?

Metrics to Examine

- Percentage of the target audience using the platform
- Active users in the City's geographic region
- Engagement rates among relevant audience segments
- Average time users spend on the platform
- Website traffic to key program or service-based pages.

Guidance

If the intended audience is not active on the platform or engagement is limited, it will likely have low strategic value. In those cases, the City should withhold in creating an account or consider sunsetting existing accounts.

3. Content Fit

Different platforms reward different types of content. The City should evaluate whether it can effectively produce content that aligns with the platform's format, expectations, and posting cadence.

Key Questions

- Can the City consistently produce content that performs well on this platform?
- Can administrators develop an initial set of proposed content (e.g., at least 10 posts) prior to establishing the account?
- Can the City produce a mix of content formats required for the platform (e.g., static posts, short-form video, photography, and branded graphics)

Metrics

- Engagement rates by content format
- Reach
- Website traffic from a platform
- Production cost by content type (e.g., text, images, graphics, video)
- Ability to maintain a regular posting cadence and respond to valid questions/concerns and to correct misinformation.

- Established benchmarks and growth targets (weekly, monthly and quarterly)

Guidance

If the City cannot consistently produce platform-appropriate content, manage engagement, and evaluate performance, it should hold off on creating an account or consider sunsetting existing accounts.

4. Peer Use Landscape

Understanding how peer communities use a platform can provide insight into its potential value.

Key Questions

- Are peer cities or comparable communities active on the platform?
- How are they using the platform?
- What type of content are they posting (subject matter and format)?
- Are they achieving meaningful engagement?

Metrics

- Peer community follower growth
- Average engagement per post
- Content formats performing well for peer organizations
- Relative visibility or share of voice

Guidance

If peer communities demonstrate strong engagement on a platform, the City may consider pursuing the platform, if it aligns with the City's overall strategy and other evaluation criteria are met.

If peer communities experience low engagement or are leaving a platform, the City should carefully evaluate whether it still aligns with other considerations.

5. Resource Capacity

Operating a social media account requires ongoing staff capacity. The City should evaluate whether sufficient resources exist to manage the account effectively.

Activities to Consider

- Staff training
- Content creation and workflows
- Posting and scheduling
- Monitoring comments and feedback

- Responding to messages
- Reviewing analytics and performance
- Occasional evening and weekend coverage

Metrics

- Estimated staff hours required per week
- Staff availability
- Content production costs
- Ability to maintain consistent posting and visibility into comments

Guidance

If staff cannot maintain consistent activity, the City should hold off on creating an account or consider sunsetting existing accounts. Dormant accounts can negatively impact credibility and public trust.

6. Platform Algorithm and Discoverability

Platforms vary in how easily content is discovered by new audiences.

Evaluation Factors

- Organic reach potential
- Content ranking and delivery
- Algorithm-driven discovery
- Search and hashtag behavior
- Availability and cost of paid promotion (if the platform prioritizes paid promotion).
- Ability to leverage available platform features and tools

Metrics

- Average organic reach
- Discovery versus follower engagement
- Viral potential
- Advertising cost metrics (e.g., the cost to read 1,000 advertisement impressions - CPM)

7. Risk and Brand Considerations

Some platforms present higher reputational or operational risks.

Evaluation Factors

- Comment moderation requirements
- Platform toxicity or harassment levels
- Brand safety concerns
- Regulation, ownership, or governance risks
- Potential for misinformation or misuse
- Public record retention

Guidance

The City should consider whether these risks can be effectively managed before establishing or continuing a presence on a platform.

8. Overall Measurement and Return on Effort

The City should evaluate whether meaningful performance metrics can be collected.

Key Metrics

- Engagement rate
- Reach
- Follower growth
- Click-through rate
- Conversion to City services or information

Guidance

If a platform cannot reasonably connect to measurable outcomes, it may not represent an effective use of City resources.

9. Opportunity Cost

Every additional platform requires time and resources.

Key Question

- Would improving performance on existing platforms produce greater impact than launching a new account?

Guidance

In many cases, focusing resources on a smaller number of well-managed platforms produces better results than maintaining many low-activity accounts, particularly when there are more established platforms with significant followers and consistent engagement. Resident feedback also indicates a preference for receiving information in fewer, more centralized locations.

General Guidance for Platform Decisions

The City (or a Department) should generally **avoid launching or consider retiring a platform when:**

- The platform does not align with the City's overall social media strategy
- The platform lacks a clear content strategy
- Administrators cannot maintain consistent posting and engagement
- The City's target audience is not active on the platform
- Content formats do not translate well to the platform
- Staff or production resources are limited
- Measurable objectives cannot be established or monitored
- Platform risks outweigh potential benefits

Departments proposing a new social media account may be asked to provide a brief justification demonstrating alignment with the criteria outlined in this framework for review by the Communications Office.



City of Cambridge

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YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

I. Purpose

This City of Cambridge ("City") policy (the "Policy") establishes guidelines for the creation and use by the City, its departments, boards, commissions, divisions and/or employees ("City Representatives") of the City's social media networks for work-related purposes as a means of conveying City information to and interacting with members of the public, including but not limited to its residents, businesses, and visitors (the "City's Social Media Networks").

For purposes of this policy, a social media network is understood to be any online tool, platform, or application that allows users to create, share, or interact with content, including blogs, microblogs, social networks, video/photo sharing networks, forums, and messaging applications.

For purposes of this policy, content includes comments, information, articles, pictures, videos or any other form of communicative content posted on the City's Social Media Networks ("Content").

The purpose of establishing the City's Social Media Networks is to disseminate information from the City and about the City, as well as to collect feedback and information from the public related to the City.

The City has an overriding interest in what is said or shared on behalf of the City on the City's Social Media Networks. The City, through the Policy, seeks to establish how the City's Representatives shall use the City's Social Media Networks to communicate with members of the public.

The Policy applies to the dissemination and use of all existing and future Content.

II. General Policy

- A. The establishment and use by any City Representatives of any of the City's Social Media Networks are subject to prior approval by the City's Chief of Communications and their designee. The City's Communications and Community Engagement Office shall have primary oversight responsibility for all of the City's Social Media Networks.

The City's Social Media Networks may be administered and monitored by individual social media managers designated by the head of any City department, division, board or commission and approved by the Chief of Communications and his/her designees. Only approved social media managers shall have the authority to create new accounts and/or publish Content on the City's Social Media Networks.

- B. The City's Social Media Networks shall make clear that they are maintained by the City and that they follow the Policy.
- C. Wherever possible, the City's Social Media Networks shall link back to the official City website, main City Social Media accounts, or department web pages for forms, documents, online services, and other information necessary to conduct business with the City.
- D. The City's Communications and Community Engagement Office will monitor Content to ensure adherence to the Policy and the interests and goals of the City.
- E. The City reserves the right to restrict or remove any Content that is deemed in violation of the Policy or any applicable law, rule, regulation, or policy. Any Content removed based on the Policy should be retained by the social media managers who removed it for a reasonable period of time in accordance with any applicable federal, state or local laws, rules and regulations, as well as information about the time, date, and identity of the poster, when available.

- F. The Policy will be made available by hyperlink at www.CambridgeMA.gov/SocialMedia.
- G. The City will use social media and employ social media management tools as consistently as possible, citywide. New accounts created by department social media managers should add their accounts to the social media management tools upon receiving approval. Department social media managers shall make all account information (e.g. username and passwords) to the City's Communications and Community Engagement Office within seven days of the department social media manager creating the Social Media Network. Passwords should be updated regularly for safety purposes. Department social media managers shall provide the City's Communications and Community Engagement Office within seven days of any password changes.
- H. The City's website at www.CambridgeMA.gov will remain the City's primary and predominant Internet presence.
- I. All of the City's Social Media Networks shall adhere to applicable federal, state, and local laws, rules, regulations and policies.
- J. The City's Social Media Networks are subject to Massachusetts public records and record retention laws, rules, regulations and policies. Any Content maintained in a social media format that is related to City business, including a list of subscribers, posted communication, and communication submitted for posting, may be a public record subject to public disclosure. Department social media managers will maintain records in accordance with Massachusetts and the City's public records and record retention laws, rules, regulations and policies.
- K. City Representatives using the City's Social Media Networks shall conduct themselves at all times in accordance with all City rules, regulations, and policies.
- L. City Representatives are expected to be attentive and careful in their use of personal social media.

M. The Policy may be updated from time to time and amended at the discretion of the City Manager.

III. Content Policy.

A. City Representatives shall conduct any activities relating to the City's Social Media Networks in a manner that reflects the mission and values of the City of Cambridge.

B. Content related to public safety incidents or concerns should be initially disseminated by the City's public safety agency's social media networks and/or the City's Social Media Networks. It will be a violation of this policy for other City Representatives to disseminate content about public safety incidents or concerns without approval by the Chief of Communications or their designee.

C. Only social media managers designated by City departments and the Communications and Community Engagement Office may post Content on the City's Social Media Networks. Inappropriate Content shall not be permitted on the City's Social Media Networks and are subject to removal and/or restriction. Such inappropriate forms of Content include, but are not limited to:

1. Content not related to the business of the City, including random or unintelligible comments;
2. Profane, obscene, violent or pornographic Content and/or language;
3. Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender, physical and mental disability, sexual orientation, religion, age, family status, military status, or source of income;
4. Defamatory or personal attacks;
5. Threats to any person or organization;
6. Content in support of, or opposition to, any political campaigns or ballot measures;
7. Solicitation of commerce, including but not limited to the advertising of any business or product for sale;

8. Conduct in violation of any federal, state, or local law, rule, regulation or policy;
 9. Encouragement of illegal activity;
 10. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
 11. Content that violates a legal ownership interest, such as, but not limited to a copyright, of any party; or
 12. Any other Content deemed inappropriate by the City.
- D. Content posted by a member of the public on any of the City's Social Media Networks shall be the opinion of the commentator or poster only, and publication of such Content by the City does not imply endorsement of, or agreement by the City, nor does such Content necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the City.
- E. The City reserves the right to delete comments or other Content that the City, in its sole discretion, determines that the Content makes a threat of violence to any person or organization, incites others to violate the law, contains obscene language, or for any other reason deemed appropriate by the City that does not abridge the commentator's First Amendment rights. The City will not edit or delete portions of Content, it will delete the Content in its entirety. Social media managers shall not delete content without conferring with the Law Department.
- F. Social media managers shall monitor the City's Social Media Networks for Content requesting responses from the City. Social media managers may direct such requests to the appropriate City department for response.
- G. Social media managers shall monitor Content posted on the City's Social Media Networks for violations of the Policy.
- H. When a City Representative responds to a comment, in his/her/their capacity as an Administrator, the City Representative should do so in the name of the City department, division, board or commission. The City Representative shall not share personal information about himself or herself, or other City employees except as required for City business.

- I. Content posted to any the of City's Social Media Networks must comply with that site's terms and conditions, and the City reserves the right to report any violation of those terms to social media managers, City's Communications and Community Engagement Office and/or the Chief of Communications, so they may take appropriate responsive action.



Yi-An Huang,
City Manager

Dated: 5/28/2026