



# **CITY OF BIG LAKE**

## **COMPUTER USE**

## **SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

## **CITY ISSUED DEVICES**

## **POLICIES**

**Adopted by Big Lake City Council – January 21, 2026**

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# COMPUTER USE

## General Information

This policy serves to protect the security and integrity of the City's electronic communication and information systems by educating employees about appropriate and safe use of available technology resources.

Computers and related equipment used by City employees are property of the City. The City reserves the right to inspect, without notice, all data, emails, files, settings, or any other aspect of a city-owned computer or related system, including personal information created or maintained by an employee. The city may conduct inspections on an as-needed basis as determined by City Administrator or Council.

Beyond this policy, the City Administrator or Information Technology Consultant may distribute information regarding precautions and actions needed to protect City systems; all employees are responsible for reading and following the guidance and directives in these communications.

## Personal Use

The City recognizes that some personal use of City-owned computers and related equipment has and will continue to occur. Some controls are necessary, however, to protect the City's equipment and computer network and to prevent abuse of this privilege.

Reasonable, incidental personal use of City computers and software (e.g., word processing, spreadsheets, email, Internet, etc.) is allowed but should never preempt or interfere with work. All use of City computers and software, including personal use, must adhere to provisions in this policy, including the following:

- Employees shall not connect personal peripheral tools or equipment (such as printers, digital cameras, disks, USB drives, or flash cards) to City-owned systems, without prior approval from the Information Technology Consultant. If permission to connect these tools/peripherals is granted, the employee must follow provided directions for protecting the City's computer network.
- City equipment or technology shall not be used for personal business interests, for-profit ventures, political activities, or other uses deemed by the City Administrator or Council to be inconsistent with City activities. If there is any question about whether a use is appropriate, it should be forwarded to City Administrator for a determination.

## Hardware

In general, the city will provide the hardware required for an employee to perform his or her job duties. Requests for new or different equipment should be made to your supervisor, who will forward the request to the City Administrator.

Only City staff may use City computer equipment. Use of City equipment by family members, friends, or others is prohibited.

Employees are responsible for the proper use and care of City-owned computer equipment. City computer equipment must be secured while off City premises; do not leave computer equipment

in an unlocked vehicle or unattended at any offsite facility. Computer equipment should not be exposed to extreme temperatures or humidity. If a computer is exposed to extreme heat, cold, or humidity, it should be allowed to achieve normal room temperature and humidity before being turned on.

## **Software**

In general, the city will provide the software required for an employee to perform his or her job duties. Requests for new or different software should be made to your supervisor, who will forward the request to City Administrator.

Employees shall not download or install any software on their computer without the prior approval of the Department Director and/or City Administrator. Exceptions to this include updates to software approved by Information Technology consultants such as Microsoft updates, Adobe Reader, and Adobe Flash. The City Administrator or Department Director may, without notice, direct the Information Technology consultant to remove any unauthorized programs or software, equipment, downloads, or other resources.

***Electronic Mail:*** The city provides employees with an email address for work-related use. Some personal use of the City email system by employees is allowed, provided it does not interfere with an employee's work and is consistent with all City policies.

Employee emails (including those that are personal in nature) may be considered public data for both e-discovery and information requests and may not be protected by privacy laws. Email may also be monitored as directed by the city authorized staff and without notice to the employee.

Employees must adhere to these email guidelines:

- Never transmit an email that you would not want your supervisor, other employees, members, city officials, or the media to read or publish (e.g., avoid gossip, personal information, swearing, etc.).
- Use caution or avoid corresponding by email on confidential communications (e.g., letters of reprimand, correspondence with attorneys, medical information).
- Do not open email attachments or links from an unknown sender. Delete junk or "spam" email without opening it if possible. Do not respond to unknown senders.
- Do not use harassing language (including sexually harassing language) or any other remarks, including insensitive language or derogatory, offensive, or insulting comments or jokes.

***Electronic Calendars:*** A shared calendar environment is provided as part of the City's email software program. All employees are required to keep their electronic calendar up to date and, if there is a purpose, grant staff the ability to view their calendar.

***Personal Devices:*** Employees may choose to use their own equipment to read or compose email or other City data as governed in this policy. Employees understand that by connecting their personal equipment to the City's email server, their personal devices could be searched during an e-discovery or other court-ordered scenarios and agree to grant access to their personal devices should such a situation arise.

## Security

**Passwords:** Employees are responsible for maintaining computer/network passwords and must adhere to these guidelines:

- Password requirements are 10 characters with complexity and may be changed as necessary, as determined by the Information Technology consultant, and/or City Administrator.
- Passwords should not be shared or told to other staff. If it is necessary to access an employee's computer when he or she is absent, contact your supervisor or the City Administrator; Information Technology consultant will not provide access to staff accounts without approval of the Department Director or City Administrator.
- Passwords should not be stored in any location on or near the computer or stored electronically such as in a cell phone or other mobile device.
- Employees must change passwords every 60-180 days when prompted, or on another schedule as determined by the Information Technology Consultant, and/or City Administrator.
- After 10 failed password attempts account will be locked, staff must contact Information Technology consultant to unlock or change password.

**Network access:** Non-City-owned computer equipment used in the City's building should only use the wireless connection to the Internet. Under no circumstances should any non-City-owned equipment be connected to the City's computer network via a network cable. Exceptions may be granted by the City Administrator.

Personal computer equipment may not be connected to the City's network without prior approval of the City Administrator and/or Information Technology Consultant. Personal equipment may be subject to password requirements or other electronic security measures as determined by the Information Technology Consultant and City Administrator.

**Remote Access to the Network:** Examples of remote access include but are not limited to: Outlook Web Access (web mail), virtual private network (VPN), Windows Remote Desktop, and Windows Terminal Server connections. While connected to City computer resources remotely, all aspects of the City's Computer Use Policy will apply, including the following:

- With the exception of Outlook Web Access, remote access to the City's network requires a request from a supervisor and approval from the City Administrator. Remote access privileges may be revoked at any time by an employee's supervisor or the City Administrator.
- If remote access is from a non-City-owned computer, updated anti-virus software must be installed and operational on the computer equipment, and all critical operating system updates must be installed prior to connecting to the city network remotely. Failure to comply could result in the termination of remote access privileges.
- Recreational use of remote connections to the City's network is strictly forbidden. An example of this would be a family member utilizing the City's cellular connection to visit websites.
- Private or confidential data should not be transmitted over an unsecured wireless connection. Wireless connections are not secure and could pose a security risk if used to transmit City passwords or private data while connecting to City resources. Wireless connections include those over cellular networks and wireless access points, regardless of the technology used to connect.

## **Internet**

The following considerations apply to all uses of the Internet:

- Information found on the Internet and used for City work must be verified to be accurate and factually correct.
- Reasonable personal use of the Internet is permitted. Employees may not at any time access inappropriate sites. Some examples of inappropriate sites include but are not limited to adult entertainment, sexually explicit material, or material advocating intolerance of other people, races, or religions. If you are unsure whether a site may include inappropriate information, you should not visit it.
- If an employee's use of the Internet is compromising the integrity of the City's network, Information Technology consultant staff may temporarily restrict that employee's access to the Internet. If Information Technology Consultant staff does restrict access, they will notify the employee, the City Administrator, and the employee's manager as soon as possible, and work with the employee and manager to rectify the situation.
- The city may monitor or restrict any employee's use of the Internet without prior notice, as deemed appropriate by the employee's supervisor and/or the City Administrator.

## **Artificial Intelligence**

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidance for the responsible and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies within the City of Big Lake. AI has the potential to improve efficiency, enhance service delivery, and support informed decision-making; however, its use must remain transparent, accountable, and aligned with public trust. This policy applies to all employees, contractors, elected officials, and third-party vendors who use, or manage AI systems on behalf of the City of Big Lake.

It is assumed that any data used on AI platforms like ChatGPT, Google Bard/Gemini, or Microsoft Bing are going to be retained by the service. Removing or correcting data is very difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, the following must be adhered to:

- Employees may use low-risk data with Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to perform their work. Low-risk data is defined by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13 as "public" and is intended to be available to the public. If you are unsure whether the data you enter into AI applications is classified as public data, consult your city's responsible authority or designee prior to using AI technologies. All data created with the use of AI is to be retained according to the City's records retention schedule.
- Employees must prevent improper access to or dissemination of all moderate or high-risk data. Using moderate or high-risk data in AI applications could result in a data breach and corresponding civil or criminal penalties for violations.
- When using GenAI, subject matter experts must verify that any work generated is accurate, complete, appropriate, not biased, not a violation of any other individual or entity's intellectual property or privacy, and consistent with City policies and applicable laws.
- Employees shall inform consumers when work has been generated by AI. It is at the discretion of the employee to determine when this is appropriate. Some considerations include the extent to which AI is used and whether a citation would be needed if the content was generated by another non-AI source. An example of a notification is: "The preparation of this content was aided by AI [cite the specific platform such as ChatGPT] version [cite the version such as 4.0]".

- Employees must receive specific written permission from a department director and the Information Technology consultant before integrating any GenAI tool with internal City software.

## **Data Retention**

Electronic data should be stored and retained in accordance with the City's records retention schedule.

***Storing and Transferring Files:*** If you are unsure whether an email or other file is a government record for purposes of records retention laws or whether it is considered protected or private, check with your supervisor. If you are unsure how to create an appropriate file structure for saving and storing electronic information, contact the City Clerk.

Employees must adhere to these guidelines when transferring and storing electronic files:

- All electronic files must be stored on network drives. The city will not back up documents stored on local computer hard drives and holds no responsibility for recovery of documents on local computer hard drives should they fail. Files may be temporarily stored on a laptop hard drive when an employee is traveling/offsite; however, the files should be copied to network as soon as possible.
- Electronic files, including emails and business-related materials created on an employee's home or personal computer for City business, must be transferred to and stored on the City's network. City-related files should not be stored on an employee's personal computer, unless otherwise defined in this policy.
- All removable storage media (e.g., CD-ROM, flash or USB drive, or other storage media) must be verified to be virus-free before being connected to City equipment.
- Email that constitutes an official record of City business must be kept in accordance with all records retention requirements for the department and should be copied to the network for storage.
- Email that is simple correspondence and not an official record of City business should be deleted (from both the "Inbox" and the "Deleted" box) as soon as possible and should not be retained by employees for more than three months. The city will not retain emails longer than one year on the network or in network back-ups.
- Electronic files or emails that may be classified as protected or private information should be stored in a location on the City's network that is properly secured.
- Any files considered private or confidential should not be stored anywhere other than the City's network. If there is a need to take confidential information offsite, it must be stored on encrypted media; Information Technology consultant, City Clerk or City Administrator can assist in the encryption of media.

# SOCIAL MEDIA USE

## **Purpose**

Social networking in government serves two primary functions: to communicate and deliver messages directly to citizens and to encourage citizen involvement, interaction, and feedback. Information, which is distributed via social networking, must be accurate, consistent, and timely and meet the information needs of the City's customers. Since social media is used for social networking, this policy seeks to ensure proper use of the City of Big Lake's social media sites by its representatives.

The City has limited control of social media accounts with third parties (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, etc.). At the same time, there is a general expectation by the public that this City have a social media presence by which to share information about current city projects and city business. For municipal purposes, the City's social media accounts will be used for incidental, non-vital communication and general information only. It is not the purpose of the city's social media accounts to be a medium for transactions of city business. The one exception is in the case of a natural or man-made disaster, if it is determined by the city that the best means of communicating with the public is through the social media account(s).

The City of Big Lake wishes to establish a positive and informative social media presence. City representatives have the responsibility to use the City's social media resources in an efficient, effective, ethical and lawful manner pursuant to all existing City and departmental policies. This policy also provides guidelines and standards for city representatives regarding the use of social media for communication with residents, colleagues and all other followers.

## **Policy**

The City of Big Lake will determine, at its discretion, how its web-based social media resources will be designed, implemented and managed as part of its overall communication and information sharing strategy. City social media sites may be modified or removed by the city at any time and without notice, as described in this document.

City of Big Lake social media accounts are considered a city asset and administrator's access to these accounts must be securely administered in accordance with the City's Computer Use policy. The City reserves the right to shut down any of its social media sites or accounts for any reason without notice.

All social media web sites created and utilized during the course and scope of an employee's performance of his/her job duties will be identified as belonging to the City of Big Lake, including a link to the City's official web site. The City of Big Lake does not create or maintain social media accounts for its elected officials.

## **Scope**

This policy applies to any existing or proposed social media web sites sponsored, established, registered or authorized by the City of Big Lake. This policy also covers the private use of the City's social media accounts by all City representatives, including its employees and agents, Council members, appointed board or commission members and all public safety volunteers to the

extent it affects the City. Questions regarding the scope of this policy should be directed to the City Administrator.

## **Definition**

Social media are internet and mobile-based applications, websites and functions, other than email, for sharing and discussing information, where users can post photos, video, comments and links to other information to create content on any imaginable topic. This may be referred to as “user-generated content” or “consumer-generated media.”

Social media includes, but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and online dating services/mobile apps
- Blogs
- Social news sites such as Reddit and BuzzFeed
- Video and photo sharing sites such as YouTube, Instagram, SnapChat, and Flickr
- Wikis, or shared encyclopedias such as Wikipedia
- An ever-emerging list of new web-based platforms generally regarded as social media or having many of the same functions as those listed above

As used in this policy, “employees and agents” means all City representatives, including its employees and other agents of the city, such as independent contractors or councilmembers.

“Social media manager” means any city employee or agent with administrator access who, when posting or responding to a post, appears to be the City social media account owner.

## **Rules of Use**

City social media managers are responsible for managing City social media accounts or websites.

Facilities or departments wishing to have a new social media presence must initially submit a request to the City Administrator or designee in order to ensure social media accounts are kept to a sustainable number and policies are followed. All approved sites will be clearly marked as the City of Big Lake site and will be linked with the official City website ([www.biglakemn.org](http://www.biglakemn.org)). No one may establish social media accounts or websites on behalf of the City unless authorized in accordance with this policy.

The City’s social media page must conspicuously display or link to a public notice that informs the public of the purpose of the social media presence and the terms one agrees to in accessing, using or posting to the City’s social media page.

Administration of all social media web sites must comply with applicable laws, regulations, and policies as well as proper business etiquette.

City social media accounts covered by this policy will not be used by social media managers for private or personal purposes or for the purpose of expressing private or personal views on personal, political, or policy issues or to express personal views or concerns pertaining to City employment relations matters.

No social media website may be used by the City or any City employee or agent to disclose private or confidential information. No social media web site should be used to disclose sensitive information; if there is any question as to whether information is private, confidential or sensitive, contact the City Administrator.

Outside of situations of disaster, no City social media account will be used for transactions of city business. In the event a user initiates a request, application, or question through social media that affects city business or requires another city policy or process to be followed, follow up with that user by phone, email, or other channels. If comments are allowed, in the event of a question of general interest, a response may be given in comments, the initial post may be edited, or a subsequent post may be created to include the information.

City of Big Lake's social media managers will not edit any posted comments. However, comments posted by members of the public may be removed if they fall into at least one of the following categories:

- Obscene or pornographic content
- Direct threats to persons or property
- Material asserted to violate the intellectual property of another person
- Private, personal information about a person published without his/her consent
- Information that compromises a public safety security system
- Statutorily private, confidential, or nonpublic data
- Commercial promotions or spam
- Hyperlinks to material that falls into one of the foregoing categories

A member of the public whose comment is removed may appeal the removal of the comment and seek reconsideration of its removal by contacting the City in writing and explaining how the comment does not fall into one of the categories for removal. A written response should be provided as soon as reasonably possible.

A member of the public who disputes the legality of any portion of this policy may dispute the particular portion in writing. The City should acknowledge the claim promptly and, upon consultation of the city attorney, respond to the claim concerning legality of the policy portion as soon as reasonably possible under the circumstances.

When using social media sites as representatives of the City, employees and agents will act in a professional manner. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Adhere to all City personnel and Computer Use policies
- Use only appropriate language

Be aware that content will not only reflect on the writer but also on the City of Big Lake as a whole, including elected officials and other city employees and agents. Make sure information is accurate and free of grammatical errors.

## **Personal Social Media Use**

The City of Big Lake respects employees and agents' rights to post and maintain personal websites, blogs and social media pages and to use and enjoy social media on their own personal devices during non-work hours. The City requires employees and agents to act in a prudent manner with regard to website and internet postings that reference the City of Big Lake, its personnel, its operation or its property. Employees and agents and others affiliated with the city may not use a city brand, logo or other city identifier on their personal sites, nor post information that purports to be the position of the City without prior authorization.

City employees and agents are discouraged from identifying themselves as city employees when responding to or commenting on blogs with personal opinions or views. If an employee chooses to identify him or herself as a City of Big Lake employee, and posts a statement on a matter related to City business, a disclaimer similar to the following must be used:

“These are my own opinions and do not represent those of the city.”

Occasional access to personal social media websites during work hours is permitted, but employees and agents must adhere to the guidelines outlined in the City's Computer Use policy and the City's Respectful Workplace policy. Employees and agents should also review the Ownership section of this policy (below).

There may be times when personal use of social media (even if it is off-duty or using the employee's own equipment) may spill over into the workplace and become the basis for employee coaching or discipline. Examples of situations where this might occur include:

- Friendships, dating or romance between co-workers
- Cyber-bullying, stalking or harassment
- Release of confidential or private data; if there are questions about what constitute confidential or private data, contact the City Administrator.
- Unlawful activities
- Misuse of city-owned social media
- Inappropriate use of the city's name, logo or the employee's position or title
- Using city-owned equipment or city-time for extensive personal social media use

Each situation will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis because the laws in this area are complex. If you have any questions about what types of activities might result in discipline, please discuss the type of usage with the City Administrator.

## **Data Ownership and Retention**

All social media communications or messages composed, sent, or received on city equipment in an official capacity are the property of the City and will be subject to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. This law classifies certain information as available to the public upon request. As no transactions of city business shall be conducted through social media accounts (outside of disasters), in accordance with the City's records retention schedule, the City shall retain all social media messages only until read. The City of Big Lake also maintains the sole property rights to any image, video or audio captured while a city employee is representing the City in any capacity.

The City retains the right to monitor employee's social media use on city equipment and will exercise its rights as necessary. Users should have no expectation of privacy. Social media is not a secure means of communication.

## **Policy Violations**

Violations of the Policy will subject the employee to disciplinary action up to and including discharged from employment.

# **CITY ISSUED DEVICE GUIDELINES**

## **General Information**

These guidelines pertain to city employees, elected and appointed officials who are issued a device purchased by the city. The purpose of these guidelines is to outline the responsibilities and care required for the city-issued devices.

The devices are intended to be utilized by staff members and elected and appointed officials for the purpose of enhancing meeting workflow, reducing the use of paper agenda packet materials, improve staff efficiency, and improving the timeliness of Council, staff and resident communication.

## **City Use**

Issued devices are intended for professional use. The city does not maintain loaner devices, so users will be responsible for conducting meetings without a device in the event of a lost or misplaced device.

- Devices shall be maintained in a suitable charged state during work hours.
- Inappropriate media may not be used as a screensaver or background photo.
- Devices will be secured with a password.
- Sound shall be muted at all times unless needed for instructional purposes.
- Personally, owned music, games and apps may only be present on city-issued devices when using a personal account.
- In case a device is restored to its original condition, the user is responsible for restoring any personal content.
- City staff is not responsible for backing up personal related content.
- Users may save work locally on the device. It is strongly recommended that users utilize the city-designated online storage technology.
- Information stored on a city own device could be classified as public, private, or other data and is governed by Minnesota Government Data Practice Act (MN Statute Chapter 13) and must be treated accordingly.
- Staff, elected or appointed officials, should retain information stored on any city-issued device in keeping with city policies and procedures per the General Records Retention Schedule.

## **Personal/Home Use**

City-issued devices may be taken home provided the use is consistent with the Electronic Media Usage Policy portion found in the Personnel Policy Manual and the City Computer Use Policy. Failure to adhere to the policy shall result in the revocation of such use privilege.

- Users are allowed to connect devices to non-city wireless networks.

- While instruction and advice may be offered, city staff is not responsible for home network use or support.
- It is the policy of the city to maintain the right to access and disclose any and all message communicated through electronic means when city-issued equipment is used. Regardless of the intent of the message (business or personal), any employee and/or city official involved has no right to privacy, or to the expectation of privacy, concerning the content of any message or the intended destination of any message when using city-issued equipment.

### **Device Care**

Users will be held responsible for the maintenance and care of assigned communication devices.

- Keep batteries charged and ready for use at meetings.
- Clean the view screen with soft, dry cloth or anti-static cloth as needed.
- Do not lean or place anything on the screen that may cause damage.
- Utilize the protective case at all times.
- When not in use, store in a secure location. Never leave in an unlocked care or any other theft-prone area.
- Immediately report lost stolen, malfunctioning or damaged devices to the City Clerk.
- Stolen devices must be reported immediately to the local authorities.
- Consult with the City Clerk office before connecting or syncing devices to another computer.
- Upon request, devices must be delivered to the City Clerk's office for annual maintenance.

### **Application Software**

All software applications purchased and installed by the city staff must remain on the device in an usable condition and be accessible at all times. Users are responsible for personal software applications and are responsible for installation and backup.

- Software purchased by the city will be coordinated through the city IT consultant.
- Users are allowed to purchase and download personal applications providing they are not profane, obscene or offensive to others. The city reserves the right to remove any personal applications at any time for any reason.
- The city is not responsible for the loss of any personal software applications when they device is updated, tested with diagnostic tools or restored to its original state.
- Storage space needed for city applications will take precedence over space used for personal items.

# **COMPUTER – SOCIAL MEDIA – CITY DEVICES POLICIES ADOPTION**

The Computer/Social Media/City Issued Device Policies shall be adopted by the City Council. The policies shall be reviewed by the Finance Department staff on an ongoing basis and any modifications made thereto must be approved by the City Council.

Adopted by City Council May 24, 2017

Revisions:     January 2020  
                  January 2026