



## **VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION POLICY**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Township of Assiginack is committed to delivering the highest quality of municipal services, administration and excellence in governance and we strive to do so in a manner that is transparent, accountable and with a focus on effective communication and customer service.

The Township recognizes that online communication is constantly evolving and is rapidly changing the way that we discover, communicate, and share information. We also recognize the many benefits these tools may offer. Examples of some of the benefits that virtual communication tools have are:

- Increases our ability to share information in a timely manner to the public;
- Ability to promote and market our community and its programs, events, and activities to a broader audience; and
- Increased civic engagement through the provision of additional tools that allow the public to communicate with the Township and have reliable platforms where residents can access our information.

The Township of Assiginack supports the use of virtual communication as a tool to share information with the public while balancing the Township's need to ensure this use does not compromise public safety or the Township's image; is in accordance with the Township's core values; and that this form of communication does not violate any person's privacy or conflict with existing municipal policies, by-laws and/or other legislation as applicable.

### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to establish protocols and guidelines on how we will ensure timely, consistent, and accessible online communication to and with our residents. This policy will also:

- Establish the methods in which the Township will communicate with the public and other audiences using online tools;
- Identify the roles and responsibilities of staff members who are responsible for the management of these communication tools on behalf of the Township;
- Provide guidelines, direction, and protocols for staff on the approved usage of these online communication tools regarding monitoring, administration, acceptable use, and privacy.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

*Virtual communication tools* are the umbrella term used to describe the variety of digital or online ways to communicate with our community members and people. These methods may include websites, social media, emails, messaging, etc.

*Social Media* includes websites where people can post information, build community knowledge, and network and discuss issues or concerns. Some examples of these types of social media platforms include: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Tik Tok, Pinterest, YouTube, Chat rooms, Discussion groups, Blogs, or web-blogs, etc.

*Clerk's Department* shall mean the Clerk of the Township of Assiginack and/or their designate, the CAO/Deputy Clerk.

*Clerk* shall mean the Clerk of the Township of Assiginack.

*Council* shall mean the Council of the Corporation of the Township of Assiginack.

*Department Head* shall mean the staff member responsible for the management of a specific municipal department and who reports directly to the CAO.

*EDO or Economic Development Officer* shall mean the Economic Development Officer of the Township of Assiginack.

*External events* shall mean any events and/or activities outside of the Township of Assiginack.

*Municipality* shall mean the Township of Assiginack.

*Offending User* shall mean an individual and/or organization and/or group of individuals who do not comply with the Township's Virtual Communications Policy.

*Recreation Director* shall mean the Recreation Director of the Township of Assiginack.

*Township* shall mean the Corporation of the Township of Assiginack and/or the Township of Assiginack.

### 4. APPLICATION

The Township of Assiginack will utilize the following methods of virtual communication to share information with the public and our community:

- ***Municipal Website:*** The Township of Assiginack's website ([www.assiginack.ca](http://www.assiginack.ca)) is the Township's primary and predominant internet presence for in depth information, by-laws and policies, forms, and online documents. All social media sites that the Township utilizes will direct visitors back to our website and appropriate sections of our website.

- **Social Media:** The Township will share information on our social media pages. Currently the Township of Assiginack has social media accounts and maintains social media pages for Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter).
- **Email:** The Township maintains a general email address ([info@assiginack.ca](mailto:info@assiginack.ca)) that residents and the public may contact regarding their questions and concerns.

The following information will be permitted to be shared through the Township of Assiginack's virtual communication platforms:

- Information pertaining to the Township's municipal business and services provided;
- Marketing and promotion of the Township, its municipal amenities and facilities, events, and activities;
- Information pertaining to events held within Township facilities and spaces that are conducted by the municipality.
- Information pertaining to Public Health and Safety (such as road closures, inclement weather, Emergency Management, etc.)

The Township of Assiginack will not promote external events and activities using our virtual communication tools, unless otherwise directed by the Clerk's Department or as requested by Council Resolution.

## **5. MANAGEMENT OF VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION BY STAFF**

The Clerk's Department shall be the lead department for the Township's online communication strategy and presence. Login and passwords for all methods of virtual communication are confidential information and the Clerk will retain a copy of all login details and passwords.

The Clerk will delegate staff members the authority for the management and implementation of the communication tools identified within this policy. Each staff member is responsible for their own respective roles in terms of the implementation and management of this strategy, as identified within the table below in Section 6, under Staff Roles and Responsibilities.

Staff members who are assigned roles and will implement the Township's Virtual Communication Policy include:

- Recreation Director
- Economic Development Officer
- Clerk (alternate/back-up: CAO/Deputy-Clerk)

## 6. STAFF ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

<b>Virtual Communication Strategy Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Duties/Responsibilities</b>	<b>Staff Member Primarily Responsible</b>
Website ( <a href="http://www.assignack.ca">www.assignack.ca</a> )	Maintaining, updating, and modifying the website's pages and content to ensure information is accurate, current, and up to date.	Economic Development Officer
	Maintaining and updating the website's photos.	Economic Development Officer
	Adding information and documents to the website (such as by-laws, policies, minutes, and agendas, etc.) as requested and on an ongoing basis.	Economic Development Officer
	Maintaining and updating the Events section of the website with the Township's programs, activities and events schedule and information on a regular and ongoing basis.	Recreation Director
	Maintaining and updating the online booking system for recreational programs that is connected to our website.	Recreation Director
Social Media	Creation of content and posts for the Township's current social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) and ensuring that they adhere to the guidelines found within this policy.	Recreation Director
	Ongoing monitoring of the Township's social media accounts	
	Forwarding necessary comments and messages received through our social media accounts to the	

	appropriate department heads and staff.	
Email ( <a href="mailto:info@assignack.ca">info@assignack.ca</a> )	Receive, respond to or forward emails to appropriate department that are received through the <a href="mailto:info@assignack.ca">info@assignack.ca</a> email address.	Clerk

## 7. STAFF EXPECTATIONS AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Use of an employee's Township email address, communicating in an official capacity or discussing Township business on personal or Township accounts, websites or networks shall constitute conducting Township business.

Employees are discouraged from discussing Township business through personal social media accounts, websites, or networks. All Township business whenever possible, should be conducted through the Township's corporate website, social media account(s) and emails.

When using virtual communication tools, Township staff will conduct themselves in a manner that conforms to the Townships' health and safety policies passed under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Staff should be cautious and aware of the following:

- Submissions are often permanent. Previous comments, even those thought deleted can be found through search engines.
- The laws of privacy, libel, copyright, human rights and Charter of Rights and Freedoms apply to virtual communication and online content.
- If making virtual communication submissions utilizing Township equipment or in any reference to a professional relationship with the Township of Assignack, then staff are subject to the Township's policies, as well as all Provincial and Federal legislation.
- Staff are personally responsible for the content of their submissions.

## 8. GENERAL GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS

The Corporation of the Township of Assignack staff who are responsible for the management of our virtual communications make a genuine effort to provide timely, accurate information and the best customer service to our residents possible.

Township staff will not respond directly to comments, inquiries and/or complaints that are generated by the public as a result of content posted on the Township's social media sites. The Clerk and/or designate shall determine if an exception to this policy is required and shall make a response.

## **Response to Public Inquiries and Comments**

Township staff will not respond directly to any comments and inquiries that are generated by the public as a result of content posted on social media sites. It is the Clerk's discretion if any exception to this policy is required and shall make the response.

## **Response Time**

The Township's virtual communications are monitored during Township business hours Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Staff will make every effort to respond to all virtual communication inquiries in a timely manner and aim to provide a response within **1-2 business days**. \*

*\*Please note that this turnaround time may be impacted by staff availability and resources across the Township, and there will be instances when a response may take more time. In addition, there are some situations where inquiries/comments will be forwarded onto the appropriate municipal department head for a response, which may occur outside of this turnaround time.*

## **Unacceptable Content**

In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and in protecting Township staff from harm and harassment in the workplace, the Township of Assiginack does not condone the following types of behavior, activity, or comments through our virtual communication tools:

- Abusive, profane, derogatory, slanderous, or offensive language or content;
- Information that may compromise the safety and security of the Township or municipal employees;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination in any way;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Encouragement or promotion of illegal activities of any nature;
- Promotion, sale, or advertising that is not directly connected to the Township;
- Promotion of political candidates of any level of government (municipal, provincial and/or federal);
- Content that violates legal ownership interest of any party;
- A violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code;
- Or any content that is deemed to be inappropriate in the opinion of the Clerk's Department.

In the event that any communication received through the Township's various virtual communication tools is deemed to meet the criteria identified above, all staff will notify their Supervisor and the Clerk's department immediately.

Upon notification, the Clerk's Department will take the following actions:

1. Municipal Website

- i.) Upon receiving inquiries that are deemed unacceptable as per the criteria above, through [www.assignack.ca](http://www.assignack.ca) staff shall report this to their immediate Supervisor and the Clerk.
- ii.) A record of the email will be obtained and kept on file within the Clerk's office.
- iii.) Staff will not provide a response to the offending user and will delete the email.

2. Social Media

- i.) Township staff reserve the right to remove the comment or comments that are deemed to meet the criteria identified above upon discovery and without notice to the offending user.
- ii.) If the offender continues to make comments that are deemed to meet the criteria identified established above, the Township reserves the right to block the offending user.
- iii.) The Township of Assignack reserves the right to ban specific users from the Township's social media pages whose activities do not comply with this Virtual Communication Policy.

3. Email

In the event that the Township receives an email through the [info@assignack.ca](mailto:info@assignack.ca) general email address, staff will take the following actions:

- i.) Upon receiving inquiries through [www.assignack.ca](http://www.assignack.ca) that is deemed unacceptable as per the criteria identified above, staff shall report this to their immediate Supervisor and the Clerk.
- ii.) A record of the email will be obtained and kept on file within the Clerk's office.
- iii.) Staff will not provide a response to the offending user and will delete the email.

**BREACH OF POLICY**

A breach of this policy by an employee is a matter that may result in disciplinary action(s), up to and including termination, by the employee(s) respective Supervisor and/or the CAO.

**DISCLAIMER**

Information that is shared through the Township's virtual communication tools is provided solely as a guide to services offered and a source of communication for upcoming events and public notices. Every effort will be made to ensure that the content contained within our website and social media pages are relevant, current, timely and accurate, however due to circumstances beyond the control of the Township, information may change without notice.

The Corporation of the Township of Assignack is not responsible for comments made by subscribers or members related to its virtual communication applications and reserves the right to remove any content that is deemed inappropriate for any reason and at any time. Third-party virtual communication tools such as social media and/or websites are private businesses with their own terms of service and privacy policies. The Township does not accept responsibility for the operation of third-party virtual communications and is unable to

guarantee the privacy of individuals who access content provided to such sites by the Township.

The Township does not make any representation concerning the accuracy and reliability of information contained within externally linked websites nor is the Township responsible for endorsing information on any linked website.

#### **PRIVACY AND PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Unless obligated by applicable law, by-law, legislation or to demonstrate negative behavior from an offending user, the Township of Assiginack does not capture or record the contact details of parties interacting with its social media or website. Any information identified and deemed confidential or private is treated in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990.