COUNCIL REPORT

Edmonton

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Recommendation

That the August 19, 2025, Office of the City Manager report OCM03050, be received for information.

Requested Action	Information only		
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle		**ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals**	
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.		**Healthy City**	
City Plan Values	BELONG		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	Inclusive and compassionate	**Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities**	Conditions for service success
Corporate Business Plan	Managing the corporation		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	● C593D - Public Engagement Policy		
Related Council Discussions	● June 9, 2014, CR_1354, Administrative Update on Social Media Review ● June 9, 2014, CR_1356, Social Media Review		

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the April 8/9, 2025, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report assessing the City's current engagement on social media platforms, including X, that includes the nature and frequency of posts, levels of public interaction, and any potential risks or benefits associated with continued use of these platforms,

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ROUTING - City Council | DELEGATION - J. Badry, P. Gonzales. R. Velmurugiah
August 19, 2025 – Office of the City Manager OCM03050

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that also explores alternative communication channels that align with the City's communications needs to provide effective and timely outreach to relevant platform participants.

Executive Summary

- Social media has become a key pillar for how the City listens, communicates and connects with the community.

- The City's current use of social media platforms is guided by Social Media Standards.

- The current approach to the City's social media platforms includes:

  ○ Moderation and transparency
  ○ Effective and timely interactions or outreach
  ○ Nature and frequency of posts
  ○ Ongoing evaluation of platform engagement and effectiveness, including analysis of potential risks, benefits and alternative communication channels.

- Administration follows a moderation approach guided by the publicly-available City of Edmonton's Social Media Terms of Engagement.

- Content posted on the City's social media platforms is tailored to each channel's format and audience.

- The City adjusted its approach to X in response to evolving platform functionality and shifting public behaviour:

  ○ Posting frequency was reduced in favour of targeted, high-impact content
  ○ The City does not currently invest in paid advertising on X

- The City prioritizes psychological safety, staff well-being and the maintenance of safe, inclusive online spaces through ongoing moderation and engagement policies.

- Social media is not intended to be used in isolation. Rather, it's part of a suite of tactics the City uses to connect with residents and strengthen calls to action (whether that is the promotion of an event or critical incident-response information).

- Engagement on social media is distinct from traditional public engagement. The City uses social media to build community, promote events and wellness opportunities, as well as to draw attention to important information for residents. Public engagement, however, aims for meaningful involvement through structured opportunities for people to contribute to Administration and City Council decision-making.

REPORT

The City of Edmonton first established a presence on social media in 2009 and has since become a key pillar for how the City listens, communicates and connects with the community. Currently, the City is active on Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, LinkedIn and also has a presence on Threads. Each proprietary platform has unique dynamics, including user-interface and algorithmic performance.

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The City's social media presence is a key component of its overall corporate communications strategy, designed to inform, engage and build trust with Edmontonians, while ensuring a consistent brand voice and professional presence across all accounts.

Administration has a dedicated team of corporate and department communications employees who create content, monitor engagement (including comments and direct messages) and work collaboratively with industry partners to leverage unique opportunities, such as the Stanley Cup Playoffs, or to assist in the response of a major event, such as the Jasper wildfire evacuations.

In addition to the primary accounts, the City maintains a broader network of secondary accounts tied to specific programs and services, including Edmonton Transit Service, Edmonton Fire Rescue Services and City of Edmonton recreation centres. While the corporate social media team provides governance, training and strategic oversight, operational management of these secondary accounts is decentralized to their respective business areas.

Social Media Standards

Whether the team is preparing partner-coordinated content or responding to an emerging issue, the City's current use of social media platforms is guided by robust and iterative Social Media Standards[1], updated in February 2025, which outline both the strategic intent and the operational framework for how the organization communicates on social platforms (see Attachment 1).

These standards reflect the City's commitment to:

- Providing accurate, timely and accessible information to the public
- Ensuring a consistent brand voice and professional presence across all accounts
- Promoting inclusive and respectful dialogue aligned with City values and accessibility principles
- Supporting crisis and emergency communications, ensuring residents receive real-time updates during urgent events like wildfires, floods or public health emergencies

The Standards reflect the evolving landscape of social media, the risks of non-compliance and the City's significant reliance on and priority use of social media as a tool to connect directly with Edmontonians. This guiding document modernizes the City's social media through consistent best practices, content standards, streamlined processes, data-driven decision making and impactful storytelling.

Current City Engagement on Social Media

Engagement on social media is distinct from traditional public engagement. Public engagement aims for meaningful involvement through structured opportunities for people to contribute to Administration and City Council decision making regarding the City's policies, programs, projects, and services. The City uses social media to build community, promote events and draw attention to important information for residents, including public engagement opportunities.

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[1]
www.gov.edmonton.ab.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/Social-Media-Standards.pdf?cb=17397 48189

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

While social media engagement can be a valuable tool for promotion and initial outreach, it often lacks the depth and structure needed for complex issues.

From this perspective, the current approach to the City's social media platforms include:

- Moderation and transparency
- Effective and timely interactions or outreach
- Nature and frequency of posts
- Ongoing evaluation of platform engagement and effectiveness, including analysis of potential risks, benefits and alternative communication channels.

Management and Response

The main City social media accounts are managed during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). Urgent or emergency postings outside of these hours are managed by a rotating communications staff member who serves as the appointed after-hours media contact.

When appropriate, staff strive to respond to inquiries (including through the comment sections or direct message features) within a maximum of two business days, depending on their complexity.

Moderation and Transparency

Administration follows a moderation approach guided by the City of Edmonton's Social Media Terms of Engagement[2]. These terms set clear expectations for mutually respectful online behaviour and provide criteria for moderating interactions on official City channels.

The moderation policy outlines that content may be hidden or deleted and accounts may be blocked or reported for engaging in any of the following:

- Hate speech, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism or any form of discrimination
- Threats or incitement of violence
- Harassment, bullying or personal attacks
- Misinformation that may cause public harm
- Repeated off-topic or spam content

These steps are not to censor critical feedback or differing viewpoints, but to safeguard public dialogue from abuse and uphold the City's commitment to fostering safe online spaces. Moderation decisions are in alignment with internal protocols, with ongoing review to ensure fairness, equity and consistency across platforms.

Nature and Frequency of Posts

The City of Edmonton's core social media channels play a critical role in delivering timely, transparent and accessible information to Edmontonians. Each platform is used strategically based on its strengths:

- X for real-time updates and emergency communication

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[2]
http://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/PDF/Social_Media_Terms_of_Engagement.pdf

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- Facebook for broad public reach and service awareness
- Instagram for community storytelling and visual engagement

Content posted on the City's social media platforms is tailored to each channel's format and audience. The volume of posts varies week to week depending on seasonality, current events and operational needs. Based on 2024 social media activity, the City shares approximately per week:

- 53 X posts
- 26 Facebook posts
- 30 Instagram posts and stories

These averages provide a general benchmark but fluctuate to support timely outreach and public awareness. The City's social media team adjusts frequency based on content demand, ensuring alignment with audience expectations. As a result, follower growth and engagement across platforms continues to trend upward.

As platforms evolve, the City's social media approach continues to prioritize engagement quality, audience value and accessibility, ensuring Edmontonians receive relevant, trusted information in ways that match their digital habits.

These platforms have been in use by the City for more than a decade; X and Facebook since 2009 and Instagram since 2012. The City's consistent presence and engagement on these channels have contributed to a steady following.

As of June 2025:

- X remains the City's most-followed platform, with more than 273,000 followers, offering broad reach for real-time and high-priority messaging.
- Facebook continues to grow steadily, now reaching more than 139,000 followers and is an effective channel for promoting services, events and community initiatives.
- Instagram has seen the most significant relative growth, surpassing 105,000 followers and supports strong visual storytelling and engagement with younger demographics.

Evaluation of Platform Engagement and Effectiveness

Measuring social media engagement helps the City understand how well the social media content is resonating with Edmontonians. Online engagement refers to the actions people take when they see a post, such as liking, commenting, sharing, clicking a link or watching a video. Attaining close to or above average platform engagement signals that City content is resonating and reaching the intended audiences in meaningful ways.

The City tracks a range of engagement metrics to evaluate performance across platforms. Platform Engagement (Attachment 3) provides a snapshot of 2024 engagement outcomes across X, Facebook and Instagram, drawn from the City's 2024 Social Media Report.

In 2024, the City of Edmonton saw strong growth in social media engagement. Instagram had the highest engagement rate and share activity, despite having the smallest follower base, indicating a highly active audience. Facebook also performed well, with a significant engagement rate and the

highest number of comments. X maintained the largest follower base but had the lowest engagement rate, pointing to a more passive audience.

As X continues to have the City's highest online following, Administration has opted to share critical information through this platform while also shifting its focus to more targeted, high-impact content, which has led to growth in followers, reactions and views.

Analysis shows that Facebook posts received the most negative feedback, while Instagram content received the most positive responses, particularly to visual and narrative-driven content. Storytelling and event-focused content consistently performed well across platforms. Video content has seen exceptional growth, reaching 4.4 million views in 2024, a 430 per cent increase over 2023, highlighting the audience's growing preference for visual storytelling.

Combining performance results with market research and known audience demographics provides Administration with evidence-based insights that help inform future strategy development.

Social Media Potential Risks and Benefits

Potential Risks

Platform Instability and Unpredictable Policy Changes

Social media platforms are regularly updated. Their algorithms are proprietary. Meaning, when account holders notice changes to features and performance, they are often using deductive reasoning to form assumptions about algorithms in order to adapt their own usage and maintain a prominent presence with their followers. Changes to algorithms, features and content policies often occur with little notice.

These updates can affect when and how content is displayed. This can present challenges for account holders, including the City of Edmonton, who rely on several platforms in order to disseminate time-sensitive or event-based communication. For example, algorithm changes may impact the order in which content appears in users' feeds, meaning posts about urgent or real-time events may not reach audiences until hours or days later. As such, the City of Edmonton has a multi-pronged approach to urgent communications that includes, but is not limited to, media releases, push notifications and website updates (including banner notifications).

Mis/Disinformation and Content Moderation

In 2024, the City of Edmonton added mis- and disinformation to its corporate risk profile. Misinformation is incorrect or misleading information where the perpetuator may not be aware or have the intention of sharing inaccurate information. Disinformation is the intentional distribution of malicious or nefarious information that is deliberately intended to mislead or divide audiences. Both mis- and disinformation can undermine public trust and have reputational impacts. To mitigate, the City regularly uses a variety of tools and platforms to share fact-based information, including through Open City.

Harassment and Online Abuse

City staff and public-facing officials may face harassment or abusive comments through social media platforms. While each platform provides tools for reporting and filtering harmful content,

enforcement and platform response are inconsistent. Perpetual exposure to this type of environment can have negative impacts on staff well-being and may discourage public participation, especially from equity-deserving groups.

The City is committed to fostering safe online spaces and takes actions, including deleting and reporting comments and blocking accounts, when necessary, to safeguard public dialogue from abuse and disinformation. One distinct consideration is that paid advertising on some platforms limits or prohibits the City from moderating comments. This presents the City with a challenge to balance informing Edmontonians about important programs and services that may directly affect them with the moderation shortcomings some of these platforms present. To support delivery of essential information to intended audiences, the City has examined additional ways to more directly communicate with residents (such as on-site signage); however, these tactics do not allow for the same interaction that social media offers, that, when on topic, can be highly useful and indicative of community sentiment.

Benefits

Timely and Broad Reach

Social media continues to be one of the most effective ways for the City to communicate quickly and directly with residents. Social media channels allow for immediate distribution of time-sensitive information. These channels complement other communication tools such as the City's website, 311, public releases and traditional advertising.

Two-Way Interaction and Public Dialogue

Online platforms offer an accessible space for two-way communication between the City and Edmontonians. Features such as comments and replies allow for public input, feedback and clarification of City initiatives. Polls on Instagram stories are mostly entertainment-based and primarily used to boost engagement. Social media channels help build transparency and trust while allowing the City to listen and respond to emerging feedback in real-time. While the City's social media channels are not used as a formal engagement tool, they do provide important feedback and indicators, which can be taken under consideration as part of City decision making.

Cost-Effective Campaigns and Outreach

Compared to traditional advertising (television, radio, print), social media offers relatively low-cost ways to reach large audiences. Paid social media campaigns allow precise targeting based on geography, demographics or interests. Even with recent increases in ad costs and restrictions, social remains a cost-efficient tool for civic engagement and service promotion.

Support for Inclusivity and Representation

Platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn allow the City to showcase diverse voices, staff stories, community partnerships and equity initiatives in a visual and human-centered way. This helps reflect Edmonton's diversity and supports more inclusive human-centric storytelling. Careful content planning and audience awareness are essential to ensure representation aligns with GBA+ principles.

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Alternative Communication Channels

Emerging and Popular Platforms

The City continues to monitor new and emerging platforms to assess their long-term viability. Building a meaningful presence on these platforms demands a solid grasp of their unique dynamics, consistent content creation and continuous engagement. Dedicated time and resources would be required to monitor these platforms for public interaction, ensuring a safe and respectful online environment.

To protect brand integrity and prevent impersonation, the City has proactively secured social media handles on platforms such as Mastodon and Bluesky, even where no active content strategy is currently in place.

The City does not operate a TikTok account, in alignment with the federal government's guidance, due to security and privacy concerns associated with the platform. These measures mirror similar restrictions by the Government of Alberta and other municipalities. Administration continues to follow these directives as part of its broader commitment to safeguarding users' data and maintaining public trust.

Paid Social Media Promotions and Campaigns

The City of Edmonton uses paid social media advertising strategically to support specific communications objectives, including public engagement, behaviour change and timely awareness campaigns. Paid promotions complement organic content by extending reach to target audiences not easily captured through regular posts.

These campaigns are typically run on platforms with robust targeting and analytics capabilities, including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. These platforms allow the City to reach Edmontonians based on geography, demographics and interests, optimizing both reach and cost-efficiency.

Paid advertising remains a cost-effective tool for high-impact, time-sensitive messaging, allowing the City to reach broad and specific audiences in support of key public initiatives. The City does not currently invest in paid advertising on X.

Community Insight

The social media landscape is continually evolving, prompting individuals, organizations and municipalities to reassess their presence on platforms like X. While some have scaled back or exited, others maintain a more nuanced presence.

Some comparative approaches from other Canadian municipalities include:

- The City of Calgary - The City of Calgary remains active on X, particularly for emergency communications and municipal updates. Their primary account has comments turned off and no longer advertises on the platform. They continue to monitor their primary and

secondary accounts on X along with other social media channels to determine viability and effectiveness.

- Halifax Regional Municipality - Halifax Regional Municipality suspended most activity on X in 2023, citing concerns about misinformation and polarization. The municipality's strategy shifted toward platforms like Facebook and Instagram, where engagement was deemed to align more closely with its objectives.

- City of North Vancouver - While maintaining a presence on X, this municipality has diversified its strategy by increasing focus on other platforms and community forums.

- Toronto - The City of Toronto has reduced usage of X, limiting it to emergencies and critical updates, while prioritizing broader public engagement on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube

The City of Edmonton adjusted its approach to X by reducing posting frequency in favour of targeted, high-impact content and opting out of paid advertising on the platform. These diverse approaches demonstrate the range of strategies municipalities are using, from full withdrawal to tempered participation.

Further, social media is not intended to be used in isolation. Rather, it's part of a suite of tactics the City uses to connect with residents and strengthen calls to action (whether that is the promotion of an event or critical incident-response information).

GBA+

Safe and Inclusive Online Spaces

Through the Indigenous Framework, the City of Edmonton has a commitment to "identify and implement easy to make City spaces and buildings welcoming and safe for indigenous Peoples and ensure they can see themselves reflected in the City's spaces and places." Administration considers digital spaces as an extension of the City's public realm and as such must uphold the same standards of safety, accessibility and cultural respect as physical spaces.

Further, a commitment to safe online spaces extends to all equity-deserving groups, including, but not limited to, the LGBTQ2S+ community, racialized individuals, persons with disabilities, youth, seniors and newcomers - all of whom may face disproportionate harm or exclusion in online discourse. Recognizing that hate, discrimination and misinformation can be amplified on social media, the City is committed to fostering an online environment where all Edmontonians can participate safely and meaningfully.

Staff Well-being and Psychological Safety

A key consideration is the psychological safety of City staff, particularly those responsible for monitoring, moderating, and responding to public comments on social media. These team members are exposed to harmful, hostile or discriminatory content. This environment can impact mental health and job satisfaction, especially for staff from equity-deserving groups.

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In addition to resources available through the Employee Assistance Program, Administration continues to explore additional measures to support psychological safety and reduce harm in digital spaces.

Equitable Access to Information

While certain platforms can be polarizing and may host ideologically-diverse or even adversarial audiences, they can also serve as relevant channels for communicating about civic matters. Therefore, providing accurate, real-time information on these platforms can be viewed not as an endorsement of the platform's broader culture but as part of fulfilling a civic responsibility. Considering the need to reach as many Edmontonians as possible, including those whose views may differ from the City's values, this outreach can be vital to fostering public engagement and social cohesion.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

Attachment

1. Platform Engagement