



CITY OF PORT MOODY

Guidelines for Respectful Dialogue and Civic Discourse

Produced by the Mayor's Task Force on Public and Social Media Communications Guidelines for Elected Officials and Candidates

2026



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1. Introduction

Municipal leaders interact closely and regularly with residents. The public has many opportunities to engage with government representatives at public meetings, community events, schools, businesses, and neighbourhood gatherings, and through social media. Consequently, these engagements provide valuable opportunities for leaders to build trust with the public and promote transparency and accountability.

Healthy civic discourse requires open discussions of ideas and opinions; however, it also requires respect, generosity, and curiosity – being open to disagreement, while still listening actively to understand differing perspectives. The goal is not to eliminate disagreement but to build understanding and collective solutions while strengthening civic trust and community partnerships.

Council members and election candidates set the tone for civic dialogue.

Respectful dialogue keeps discussions focused on issues, policies, and community priorities. Communication should not include or encourage discrimination, harassment, violence, or hate. Residents are more likely to engage in civic discussions when their perspectives are heard and considered.

Individuals considering running for City Council should prepare for the increased public scrutiny that comes with any leadership role in government. Public dialogue is more visible and sometimes more intense. Social media amplifies this environment. Incumbent and potential elected representatives may make statements that can circulate quickly and influence community conversations. Public comments may involve criticism and strong opinions, amid rapidly changing environments and information. This also provides an opportunity to demonstrate constructive dialogue amongst community leaders.

These guidelines are a practical resource for incumbent and aspiring Council members to support constructive and respectful communication in public discourse. They are intended to help incumbent and aspiring elected officials navigate civic discourse and public conversations, which can be complex and challenging.

While this is intended for incumbent and aspiring Council members it is a document that can be used by all community members.

2. Purpose

These guidelines seek to:

- ▶ support respectful civic dialogue
- ▶ provide practical communication tools for incumbent and aspiring Council members
- ▶ help community leaders navigate public conversations and support community participation
- ▶ keep discussions focused on issues, not individuals

3. Why Respectful Communication Matters in Local Government

Municipal government in BC is grounded in processes that encourage public discourse. Respectful public dialogue supports healthy democratic processes and effective municipal governance by:

- ▶ building public trust in local government
- ▶ encouraging residents to participate in civic discussions
- ▶ keeping debates centred on issues and solution-oriented interactions
- ▶ strengthening working relationships within Council
- ▶ supporting collaborative approaches to community challenges

Maintaining respectful communication and dialogue allows municipal councils to work through disagreements while preserving productive civic relationships.



4. Guiding Principles

The following principles support respectful dialogue in municipal public life:

(a) Be respectful

- focus on issues, not individuals

(b) Be curious and generous

- be brave
- listen actively
- be patient
- be open to new ideas

(c) Be transparent and accountable

- recognize that what is said matters
- stand behind what you say
- be accountable to the consequences of what you say
- speak truthfully

(d) Focus on collaborative problem-solving

- be prepared and open to working collaboratively with others who may or may not share your opinions
- encourage participation and engagement

(e) Be dedicated to public service and building civic understanding and trust

- focus on policies, priorities, and community outcomes
- foster a safe and welcoming environment
- share accurate information, linking to City sources when possible

5. Practical Communication Tools

Public conversations move quickly, particularly online. It is important to take a moment to reflect before responding. Before posting or replying, it may be helpful to ask:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| ▶ Is my information accurate? | ▶ Is my tone respectful? | ▶ Would I say this the same way in a Council meeting or other in-person conversation? | ▶ Will this contribute to a constructive conversation? |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|

A short pause can often prevent a conversation from escalating unnecessarily; it changes the response from being reactive, to one that is reflective and considered.

(a) Responding to community concerns

Residents often raise concerns about issues that affect them directly. Even when disagreeing with a perspective, it is important to acknowledge the concern, remain open and listen actively.

Helpful approach:

- acknowledge the concern
- provide clear and accurate information if you have this available
- explain next steps or limitations if appropriate
- invite continued dialogue



Response Example: “I appreciate hearing your concerns. I would be happy to discuss them with you further. Municipal budgets have specific legislative requirements and are structured differently than other sectors. If you are looking for more information you can find it here: [insert link].”

(b) Communicating on social media

Social media allows incumbent and aspiring Council members to connect directly with residents and share information about community issues. Careful online communication can help keep digital spaces more constructive. Responding calmly and focusing on the issue can help prevent discussions from escalating.

Helpful approach:

- pause before responding to criticism
- focus on the issue, not the individual raising it
- share facts, not hearsay or opinions
- assess a conversation, reduce engagement if it is unproductive or harmful



Response Example: “Thank you for raising this issue. I would be happy to discuss this with you further. There has been a lot of discussion about this topic. If you are looking for more information, you can find it here: [insert link].”

(c) Responding to misinformation

Occasionally inaccurate information about municipal issues circulates online.

Helpful approach:

- share accurate information calmly
- provide links to official sources of information from the City website
- avoid repeating the incorrect claim unnecessarily



Response Example: “Thank you for raising this issue. I would be happy to discuss this with you further. There has been a lot of discussion about this topic. If you are looking for more information, you can find it here: [insert link].”

(d) Knowing when to disengage

Not every comment requires a detailed response. Sometimes stepping away from a conversation or choosing not to engage in the first place, is the most effective and productive option.

Appropriate times to disengage:

- the discussion becomes repetitive
- personal attacks replace constructive dialogue
- the conversation moves away from the issue



Response Example: “Thank you for sharing your perspective. It is important for us to hear from all our community members.”

(e) Communicating at public meetings and community events

Public meetings can involve strong opinions and passionate discussion. Active listening helps residents feel heard.

Helpful approach:

- listen fully before responding
- restate the concern to confirm understanding and acknowledge the comment
- identify the issue and speak to the issue
- focus on possible next steps

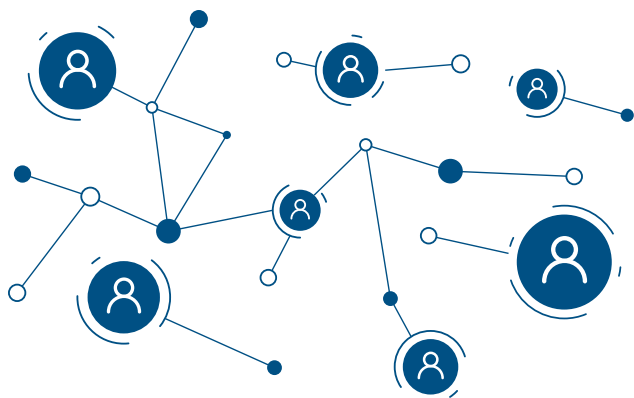


Response Example: “Let me see if I understand you correctly. You raised concerns about [fill in the issue]. I can appreciate that you are concerned about this issue. I would welcome speaking with you more about it. My understanding of the situations is ...”

6. Maintaining Productive Relationships

Healthy debate is an essential part of democratic decision-making and civic discourse. Maintaining respect during disagreements allows people to work through differences while preserving productive relationships and public confidence in community leadership. The following may be helpful:

- ▶ focus debates on ideas, not individuals
- ▶ recognize that others may hold different perspectives
- ▶ maintain respectful communication
- ▶ remember that working relationships matter



7. Quick Reference for Election Candidates

Election candidates may find the following reminders useful during campaigns and public discussions:

- ▶ validate the information:
 - visit the City website at portmoody.ca
 - find key City contacts at portmoody.ca/contact
 - see portmoody.ca/i-want-to to find information grouped by common public requests
 - visit the City's public engagement website at engage.portmoody.ca
 - find City master plans and strategies at portmoody.ca/reports
 - read City news and notices at portmoody.ca/news
- ▶ pause before responding
- ▶ focus on the issue, not the person raising it
- ▶ acknowledge concerns before providing information
- ▶ share facts clearly and calmly
- ▶ know when to step away from unproductive conversations
- ▶ remember that comments made during campaigns can influence working relationships after the election

Mayor's Task Force on Public and Social Media Communications Guidelines for Elected Officials and Candidates Membership:

- Councillor Haven Lurbiecki - Chair
- Councillor Samantha Agtarap - Vice-Chair
- Councillor Diana Dilworth - Member-at-Large
- Councillor Amy Lubik - Member-at-Large
- Nicole Blades - Member-at-Large
- Robert Simons - Member-at-Large
- Rosemary Lodge - Member-at-Large

We carry out our business on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the k'w'ikw'əłəm (Kwikwetlem), səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh), x'w'məθk'w'əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), q'ícəy' (Katzie), q'w'a:n'ł'ən' (Kwantlen), q'iq'éyt (Qayqayt), and Stó:lō (Sto:lo) Peoples, and extend appreciation for the opportunity to work on this territory.

8. Helpful Resources

City of Port Moody resources:

- portmoody.ca
- engage.portmoody.ca
- [Council Code of Conduct Bylaw](#)
- [Respectful Communications Policy](#)

Federal resources:

- [Best practices for public servants using their personal social media](#)
- [Countering Disinformation: A Guidebook for Public Servants](#)

Regional resources:

- [Foundational Principles of Responsible Conduct \(2022\) – LGMA/UBCM/Ministry of Municipal Affairs](#)
- [Responsible Conduct of Local Government Elected Officials – LGMA](#)

Strong Cities Network resources:

- [A Toolkit for Manitoba Municipalities: Addressing Anti-Government Hate and Harassment](#)
- [City Leadership in the Face of Rising Incivility and Polarization](#)
- [City Leadership in Partnering with Local Communities for Social Cohesion](#)
- [North America Regional Hub: Practical Recommendations for Canadian Municipalities Facing Anti-Government Hate and Harassment](#)
- [Preventing and Responding to Election Disruption and Violence: Ten Considerations for Cities](#)

Other resources:

- [Government Communication – OECD](#)
- [How social media platforms can reduce polarization – Brookings](#)
- [How to disagree productively and find common ground – TED Talk by Julia Dhar](#)

You may wish to consider joining the growing movement aimed at fostering respect, inclusivity, and safety in public life. Example: [Elect Respect – Democracy Depends on It](#)

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