



AGENDA STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: 11/4/2025

AGENDA SECTION: GENERAL BUSINESS

SUBJECT:

Adoption of Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy and adoption of Resolution 25-63-R, amending the Handbook of Rules and Procedures to include the addition of personal social media usage for elected and appointed officials.

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommendation: That City Council adopt the Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy and adopt Resolution 25-63-R, amending the Handbook of Rules and Procedures to include the addition of personal social media usage for elected and appointed officials.

Recommended Motions:

Motion 1: I move to adopt the Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy and direct staff to allow commenting on the City's social media sites.

Motion 2: I move to adopt Resolution 25-63-R, amending the Handbook of Rules and Procedures to include the addition of Chapter 5, Section 3 for personal social media usage for elected and appointed officials.

BACKGROUND:

In March of this year, City Council directed staff and the city attorney to move forward with creating the City's first social media policy that would allow public commenting again by designating the City's social media sites as limited public forums. A limited public forum is one of several types of forums courts take into consideration when analyzing a government's restriction of speech on public property.

As the city attorney has explained, a limited public forum structure would allow the City to impose viewpoint-neutral limits on social media comments or even further limit comments to the topics raised by the City through its posts (Council favored the latter approach). In addition to hiding or deleting off-topic comments, the City can hide or delete comments that are not protected by the First Amendment, such as obscene or defamatory speech. A key requirement of the *Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy* (attached) is that these rules be displayed as a disclaimer on every City social media account. It reads in part:

This account is intended to be a limited forum for communication and discussion between the City of Hanford and members of the public about specific topics. The City of Hanford reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments, including, without limitation, those comments that are not topically related, comments that are not protected speech under federal or state law, including, without limitation, profane or obscene language, sexual content, threats, defamatory statements, the

encouragement of illegal activity, violations of the legal ownership interests of another party, solicitations of commerce, statements in support or opposition to political candidates or ballot propositions, content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination, information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems, or other statements violating the City of Hanford Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy.

Beyond simply setting up a framework for how the public comments or otherwise interacts with the City through social media, the *Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy* also establishes standards for the effective management of the City's social media accounts by an Administrator, defined as the City Manager or his or her designee. While the policy references authorized users (i.e. other City employees who manage City social media pages), City staff has determined any provisions specific to these users should be included in the City's Administrative Regulation related to social media (AR 1.30) versus this policy. Similarly, new language related to personal social media use by all City employees will be incorporated into the AR document. In the coming months, arrangements will be made for affected employee bargaining units to review and comment on these proposed changes to the AR before adoption by the City Manager, since they relate to employee working conditions and disciplinary matters.

In the meantime, staff believes Council could lead by example and implement a set of standards related to their personal use of social media. Resolution 25-63-R would amend the Handbook of Rules and Procedures to include the addition of Chapter 5, Section 3 regulating personal social media usage by elected and appointed officials. This section also lays out the disciplinary measures Council has at their disposal for addressing any violations of this section.

FISCAL IMPACT:

NONE

ATTACHMENTS:

1. LIMITED PUBLIC FORUM SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY (DRAFT)
2. RESOLUTION 25-63-R
3. HANDBOOK OF RULES AND PROCEDURES (AMENDED)
4. HANDBOOK OF RULES AND PROCEDURES (REDLINE)

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Handbook of Rules and Procedures-Amended
2. Handbook Resolution 25-63-R
3. Handbook of Rules and Procedures-Redline
4. Limited Public Forum Social Media Policy