

Howell Township Email Account Use Policy for Township Officials

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for the use of Township-provided email accounts by Township officials.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of Howell Township to encourage the use of online technology and electronic communications. Email access may be provided to Township employees and elected/appointed officials at the Township's discretion for the purpose of communication and exchange of information. This policy applies to Township elected and appointed officials ("Township Officials") who make use of Township-provided email accounts. The policies and procedures contained within are to establish guidelines that promote the effective, efficient, and orderly use of the email accounts.

III. PROCEDURES

Township Officials who use email accounts provided by the Township should be aware of and abide by the following guidelines:

1. Official Business. Email is intended to conduct Township business, but occasional personal use is permitted so long as such use is not otherwise prohibited by this Policy and so long as such use does not interfere with official duties.
2. OMA. Emails among a majority or more of a quorum violate the Open Meetings Act ("OMA") when used to discuss, deliberate, and/or decide Township business outside a properly noticed meeting. See MCL 15.261 *et seq.* Accordingly, Township Officials should be aware of and abide by the following OMA-related guidelines:
 - a. Township Officials are permitted to provide information to each other, regardless of the number of members participating in the discussion, ***if the information is non-deliberative and non-substantive***, such as scheduling meetings and confirming receipt of information.
 - b. When receiving email information that could be deliberative and substantive and that is sent to a majority or more of a quorum of Township Officials on any given body, such as an email with meeting agendas and packets, ***members should not "reply all" or "forward" emails in which all members have been included, nor engage in discussion over email.***
3. FOIA. A public record is "a writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a public body in the performance of an official function, from the time it is created." See MCL 15.232(i). A "public body" includes the Township Board and any of its departments or commissions acting in an official capacity. See MCL 15.232(h). Emails sent

or received by Township Officials may, depending on the content and circumstances, be subject to disclosure as a public record unless a FOIA exemption applies. This is true, regardless of whether that email is transmitted via a Township email account or a private email account, or if an email has been deleted, because the Township's obligation to review and potentially produce email and other electronic communication pursuant to the FOIA.

4. No Presumption of Privacy. In general, users should exercise caution when using all forms of electronic communication. Email should not be assumed to be private and security cannot be guaranteed. Highly confidential or sensitive information should not be sent through email. Email may be reviewed, monitored, and read by authorized personnel for the Township and it may be subject to disclosure in response to FOIA requests or litigation.
5. Ownership. All information and messages that are created, sent, received, or stored on the Township's email system and Township-provided devices are the sole property of the Township, regardless of whether the information or message is related to a personal or personal-business matter.
6. Professionalism. Email sent from the Township's email accounts and/or Township-provided devices reflect on the Township's public image. As such, Township Officials using a Township-provided email account should comply with standards of professional conduct and courtesy that reflect positively on the Township.
7. Management of Email Account. Township Officials are responsible for mailbox management, organization, and mailbox cleaning, and are encouraged to check their email in a consistent and timely manner to be aware of important messages and communications. Township Officials are also responsible for adhering to Township and applicable State record retention policies as they relate to email communications.
8. Passwords. Township Officials should regularly change their passwords and create strong passwords that are easy to recall but that are difficult for hackers to crack to ensure no disruption to or inappropriate/unlawful access to Township business, records, etc. The use of password generators is allowed to aid in this process.
9. Social Media. The Township may use Social Media tools to provide its citizens and stakeholders with accurate and timely information concerning operations, announcements, and community events, but users should not post pictures of other Township personnel, co-workers or their co-workers' family members and children without their consent. With approval from the Board, Board members may use their Township-provided email accounts to register for Social Media tools. The creation of a Social Media account with a Township-provided email account must be for Township business purposes only. Use of a Township-provided email address to register for Social Media tools for personal reasons is strictly prohibited. Board members should clearly distinguish between personal and official use of social media. To decrease hacking vulnerability, Board members must use a password for the Social Media tool that is different from any same or similar password used to access the Board member's email account. Refer to the Township's *Social Media Policy* for

guidance. Board members must furnish a written list of all Social Media accounts created using the Board member's email address.

10. Prohibited Content. Email solicitations, including but not limited to, solicitations for personal business, business unrelated to the Township, religious, political or other personal causes are strictly prohibited. The Township-provided email address should not be used to subscribe to any email mailing lists unless related to or incidental to Township business, such as membership in township-based associations or professional organizations. E-mail communications containing derogatory, defamatory, sexual, racist, ethnic, ageist, harassing, abusive, or offensive remarks or images are strictly prohibited. In addition, inappropriate, prohibited electronic communication and use of the Township email accounts includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. Any purposes which violate any federal, state, or local law, and/or which violate the rights of any person and/or company protected copyrights, trade secrets, patents, or intellectual property.
 - b. Exporting software and/or technological information in violation of any laws or without permission of the Township Board.
 - c. Introducing malicious programs or malware onto Township networks and/or servers.
 - d. Communicating, viewing, transferring, making, printing, sending, receiving, retrieving, or disseminating obscene, pornographic, abusive, slanderous, defamatory, harassing, sexually oriented, discriminatory, retaliatory, vulgar, threatening, and/or offensive material, all of which will be broadly construed.
 - e. Unauthorized communication, transfer, copying, sending, retrieving, printing, or disseminating of material that is confidential or proprietary to the Township, its vendors, clients, or suppliers. Unless copied for information purposes to the Township Supervisor, users are not permitted to indiscriminately forward email or other electronic communications which are marked "confidential" or "privileged" or directed solely to a single recipient.
 - f. Personal use of social media or other unauthorized social networking that violates this Policy or the Township's Social Media Policy.
 - g. Personal use of AI tools, or "machine-based systems that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations or decisions influencing real or virtual environments," such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini. AI tools may be used for Township business only when the Board has approved such use.

- h. Opening email attachments from unknown, illicit, or malicious sources. Attachments are a primary source of computer viruses and should be deleted without opening.
- i. Sharing email accounts or other passwords with another person or attempting to obtain another person's email account password or other password. Email accounts are only to be used by the registered user.
- j. Forwarding of confidential Township messages or copyrighted information to other users or external locations.
- k. Gambling.
- l. Use for access to, distribution, or playing of online or computer games.
- m. Broadcasting unsolicited personal views on social, political, or religious or other matters unrelated to official duties, assigned tasks, or other Township-related functions.
- n. Adding personalized logos to email documents in place of the Township seal or letterhead.
- o. Sending, creating, viewing, or posting messages or material that could damage the Township's image or reputation.

IV. REGULATION

The Township Board of Trustees shall be responsible for the adoption, amendment, and enforcement of this policy. Except for the Township's elected or appointed officials, enforcement may include, but is not limited to, deactivation of a Township Official's Township-provided email account.

This policy was adopted by the Howell Township Board of Trustees on _____, 2026.

Sue Daus, Howell Township Clerk