*(Name of Municipality)*

**Media Relations Policy**

Approved by:

Effective Date: January 1, 2018

**POLICY STATEMENT**

The *(Name of Municipality)* recognizes a strategic approach to media relations is crucial to building mutually beneficial and trusting relationships with news media. Such relationships will help foster accurate, balanced and fair reporting; help allow the *(Name of Municipality)* to convey information through media to stakeholders; increase positive coverage; and protect and enhance the *(Name of Municipality)* reputation.

Spokespeople are encouraged to participate in interviews with journalists and/or bloggers who:

* identify themselves and any affiliation they may have with print, broadcast or online media outlets
* conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the Canadian Association of Journalists’ Principles for Ethical Journalism and Ethics Guidelines

**SCOPE**

This policy applies to all *(Name of Municipality)* full-time, part-time, casual and temporary workers, volunteers and co-op placements.

It addresses how employees interact with traditional (e.g., print, radio, TV), online and social media according to principles outlined such as:

 Work collaboratively across the organization to ensure information provided to media is accurate, thorough, clear, easy to access and timely.

 Consider the range of communication tools available and use those most appropriate to address the needs associated with each circumstance.

 Respect the access to information and privacy rights of employees and citizens.

 Support opportunities for engagement with the media to inform public policy.

 Strive to achieve a culture of two-way communication and communications excellence practices.

This policy also aligns with two strategic directions:

 Ensure accountability, transparency and engagement

 Strengthen citizen and stakeholder engagement and communications

**PURPOSE**

This policy outlines who can interact with media in an official capacity on behalf of the *(Name of Municipality)*; and when, how and why to initiate or respond to inquiries from print, broadcast, online and social media outlets.

The Chief Administrative Officer leads the organization’s media relations activities, but all *(Name of Municipality)* departments have a role to play in building co-operative and mutually beneficial relationships between the *(Name of Municipality)* and media.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Media**

Media include traditional news media (print, radio and television), online (websites) and social media (blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter and other sites where content is generated by users).

**Spokesperson**

A spokesperson is an employee who has the authority to make statements to traditional, online and social media on behalf of the organization. Unless otherwise authorized, the spokespeople are:

* Mayor and members of Council
* Chief Administrative Officer
* Police, Fire and Emergency Medical Services Officers. Police and Fire and Emergency Medical Services have media guidelines that govern their procedures regarding patient confidentiality, security, criminal investigation, etc.

**Public discussion**

A public discussion includes but is not limited to media interviews, public presentations, open houses, public meetings, posts, comments and questions on websites, blogs and social media sites – anywhere an audience can see or hear the statements being made by participants.

When participating in public discussions online (e.g., commenting on blogs, Twitter posts), it is important to understand the difference between personal use, professional use and official use:

**Personal Use** - when you participate on a social media site or blog and comment as yourself about your opinions, interests, family and friends. Personal social media activity should be done outside work hours, using your own personal computer/Smartphone/device, from an account or profile associated with your personal email address.

**Professional Use** – when you participate on a social media site or blog and comment personally as an experienced person in your field of expertise. This should be done using your own personal computer/Smartphone/device from a profile or account associated with your personal email address.

**Official Use** - when you are delegated the authority to participate on a social media site or blog as a spokesperson for the municipality. This should be done using a municipality-owned computer/Smartphone/device using email address or online account established and administered by the municipality

**PROCEDURE**

**Initiating media relations**

Most municipal-initiated media relations activities are led by the Chief Administrative Officer.

**RESPONDING TO MEDIA INQUIRIES**

**Authorized City Spokesperson**

Spokespeople may address media inquiries on matters pertaining to their day-to-day operations without the involvement of the CAO.

Spokespeople may contact the CAO for support and advice in preparation for media interviews at any time.

A spokesperson may share or delegate their spokesperson responsibilities when subject matter expertise/information is sought beyond what the spokesperson could provide, and when the delegated spokesperson is adequately prepared to undertake this responsibility.

Following media interviews of consequence, spokespeople are required to email the Mayor, City Councillors, the CAO and any other relevant staff the following information:

 the media outlet and reporter

 the interview topic and a brief summary of questions and responses

 date and time when the article, online post or broadcast will be published or aired

**Non-spokespeople**

Employees who are not authorized spokespeople must refer media inquires to the authorized spokesperson for the department or project (i.e., Fire Chief, Senior Officer, Public Works Manager) and notify CAO.

Employees who are not designated spokespeople are not authorized to make statements to the media and/or in public discussion on behalf of the municipality.

**Personal point of view**

All employees have the right to express personal points of view and, at times, an employee’s opinion may conflict with the municipality’s official position.

Personal opinions must not be expressed using official letterhead, email addresses or online accounts.

If an employee expresses his or her personal opinion during a public discussion, he or she must identify himself or herself as a municipal employee, and state that his or her views do not represent the views of the municipality, but rather, are the employee’s personally held opinions. Employees should use a disclaimer when expressing personal opinions in public.

During public discussions and media interviews, employees acting as municipal spokespeople are expected to convey the official position of the municipality rather than personal points of view.

**Known or potentially contentious issues**

All media inquiries regarding known or potentially contentious issues must be immediately referred to the Chief Administrative Officer or section head (i.e., Fire Chief, Public Works Manager). In collaboration with the Mayor and members of Council, the CAO will coordinate a plan and/or response on behalf of the municipality.

**Litigation, personnel and election issues**

Inquiries regarding pending litigation, exposure to litigation or staff-related information must be immediately referred to the Chief Administrative Officer.

Inquiries regarding municipal election matters should be referred to the Chief Administrative Officer, who will consult with agencies as appropriate.

**Public safety issues**

Because the Fire Department and the Emergency Medical Service operate 24-hours a day, seven days per week, and their work generates a particular interest of media inquiries, those service areas may have designated employees as media spokespeople and follow other guidelines regarding patient confidentiality, security, criminal investigation when releasing information.

**Crisis or emergency issues**

During an emergency, the procedure for working with the media is outlined in the municipalities Emergency Plan. Under the procedure and the plan, a designated Information Officer is the main point of contact for the media.

**Anonymous media requests**

The municipality reserves the right to refuse anonymous media requests.

**Non-media information requests**

All employees are encouraged to answer general or routine inquiries, provided they pertain to their area of work, the employee is knowledgeable enough about the subject to answer, and the information is already in the public domain (e.g., published in public reports or on the municipalities website).

**Responding to blog posts**

The municipality’s practices for responding to blog posts continue to evolve. The CAO leads the municipalities response to blog posts. Employees are required to contact the CAO if they feel a response to a blog post is warranted and/or required.

**POLICY APPLICATION**

Subject to applicable collective agreements and employment agreements, the Municipality may consider disciplinary measures or legal action if an identifiable employee makes defamatory or otherwise inappropriate statements in public about their co-workers and/or employer. This includes comments made on websites, blogs and social media networks using personal computers, Smartphones or devices, from an online account or profile associated with a personal email address.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*(Name)*

Chief Administrative Officer

*(Name of Municipality)*