



Corporate Policy Manual

Topic: Media Relations

Policy No. COMM.5-01

Section: Communications

Covered: All Employees & Elected Officials

Approved by EMT: April 27, 2005

Revision No: Date:

Approved by Council: _____
Date

Policy Statement

In keeping with its core value of accessibility and governance objectives to encourage two-way interactivity and strengthen community relations through formal communications, the Town of Newmarket seeks to proactively inform its residents, businesses and visitors via established communications programs and policies. One of the most effective and quickest ways to accomplish this is by working in partnership with the news media. The purpose of a Media Relations Policy is to support staff throughout their dealings with the media to ensure effective, corporately consistent messages.

This policy reflects current media relations practices, replacing the related text in the administrative by-law.

By identifying key spokespersons to address the media it ensures consistent, accurate reporting on Town of Newmarket issues. It also reinforces that the Town of Newmarket is a professional and unified government organization with the public. Repeating consistent messaging instills the public's trust in government. This is particularly important during an emergency or when dealing with contentious issues. Conflicting details on a particular issue can be detrimental to public health and safety and can lead to mass confusion and distrust.

In all instances elected officials have every opportunity to address the media to express individual points of view on Town issues. This policy in no way impedes or infringes on Councillor's or staff's rights to freedom of expression.

The Mayor is the primary spokesperson for Town Council, unless otherwise designated. The CAO is the primary spokesperson regarding administrative issues, unless otherwise designate.

Procedures:

The Communications Division of the CAO's Office is responsible for the Town's media relations. Although the majority of media requests are received via the Communications Division, all Town employees should notify Communications whenever media inquiries are received, to enable a co-ordinated response, and accurate tracking and reporting of the Town's communications effectiveness.

Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all departments respond as soon as possible when Communications requests department information or a spokesperson for the media. Specific guidelines for responding to media requests follow.

Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate.

CORPORATE SPOKESPERSONS:

The Town's primary spokespersons are:

- Mayor
- C.A.O.

Alternate or secondary spokespersons for the Town, may include:

- Council Members, as designated by the Mayor
- Commissioners & Directors, as designated by the CAO
- Manager of Corporate Communications

MEDIA INQUIRIES ON GENERAL OR ROUTINE ISSUES:

Example: A media call regarding an upcoming special event.

Employees should always immediately refer calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) and print media (newspaper and other written publications) to their Commissioner and/or Director, for response. Commissioners/Directors should contact Corporate Communications prior to responding to these calls to obtain assistance with fact-checking, for tracking purposes, key message preparation, and co-ordination to ensure the message is consistent with corporate viewpoints.

Extreme discretion must be used in dealing with such inquiries in order to maintain a positive relationship with the media in the pursuit of their legitimate function as public inquiry.

MEDIA INQUIRIES ON SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:

Example: A media call seeking comment on fraud or conflict of interest.

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to Corporate Communications and the employee's Commissioner and/or Director. Communications staff will contact the Commissioner/Director, the Mayor's and/or CAO's Office and co-ordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the Mayor and/or CAO and/or appropriate Department.

LITIGATION, PERSONNEL AND ELECTION ISSUES:

Generally, the business conducted by the Town is public, and therefore, is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation, Town land acquisitions and certain personnel-related information are exceptions.

Employees should refer all inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation to the Commissioner of Legal & Development Services and/or Town Clerk pertaining to insurance matters, and notify Corporate Communications.

Employees should refer all inquiries regarding personnel- and/or labour relations-related information to the Manager of Human Resources, and notify Corporate Communications.

Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues should be referred to the Town Clerk. That office will contact the CAO and Corporate Communications as appropriate.

PERSONAL POINTS OF VIEW

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the Town's official policy. Therefore, employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official Town stationary.

EMPLOYEE POINTS OF VIEW

If an employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a Town employee in any personal letter or e-mail to the editor of a local newspaper, he or she must state that their expressed views do not represent the Town's views, but are the employee's personally held opinions. Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting or other public forum or is interviewed for

a radio or television program unless the employee is officially representing the Town of Newmarket.

Employees who are representing the Town must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the Town.

Cross References [Media Tips](#)