

Town of Fairview

Department: Administration

Title: Communications Policy

Updated:

Approved: June 20, 2017

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to ensure that communication with the stakeholders and residents of the Town of Fairview is efficient, effective, consistent, timely, and open. This policy will apply to all internal and all external communications of the Town of Fairview.

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Town of Fairview to:

1. Inform citizens about the Town's policies, programs, services, projects, events and initiatives through communication that is effective, timely, accurate, and consistent.
2. Consult and inform stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies, programs, and services where reasonable and practical.
3. Anticipate the needs of the community, Council, and Administration for timely and relevant information.
4. Engage in a proactive communications program that uses a variety of formats to accommodate diverse needs and that reflects the diversity of the community.
5. Ensure the Town is visible and responsive to the citizens it serves.

External Inquiries

Information on the Town's policies, programs, services, projects, and initiatives should be generally available to the public in a variety of formats, subject to available resources.

Guidelines for dealing with general external inquiries include:

1. Information is provided to the public by trained and knowledgeable staff.
2. Service is timely, courteous, and efficient.
3. When information is unavailable, a prompt and clear explanation of other information providers, the process for gathering the information, and timelines for obtaining the information is provided, as applicable.
4. Information in all formats is well identified as being from the Town of Fairview and follows the brand format.
5. Commonly available information will be made available on the Town's website for public access. Information must be posted when a major new policy, program, service, project, or initiative is underway to advise the public of services for which they may be eligible, to explain new developments, or to inform citizens of risk(s) to health and safety.

For inquiries made by representatives of the media; inquiries regarding legal issues, Town personnel, or municipal elections; or inquiries made to members of Council, the following guidelines must be followed.

1. Media Inquiries

- a. The media play an important role in disseminating information to the public. Due to the delicate balance that must be struck between freedom of information and protection of privacy when dealing with the media, all media inquiries shall be directed to the CAO or their designate.
- b. The Mayor is generally the Town's chief spokesperson regarding policies, priorities, and decisions to the public, unless another member of Council is designated by Mayor and Council. The CAO shall direct all appropriate inquiries regarding Council matters to the Mayor.
- c. Committee Chairs are normally the spokesperson for regular matters dealt with under the jurisdiction of their particular committee.
 - i. If a committee issue becomes controversial, or is likely to become controversial, the Mayor will be the spokesperson for the committee.
- d. The CAO is the spokesperson for administrative and operational matters, but may direct inquiries of a technical nature to the director of individual departments, programs, or projects. With the approval of the CAO, the director may designate technical experts to present information on specific programs or projects with which they are intimately familiar.

2. Legal, Personnel, and Election Inquiries

- a. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, or involving a significant exposure to litigation, should be directed to the CAO.
- b. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be directed to the CAO.
- c. Inquiries regarding municipal election and campaign issues should be directed to the Returning Officer or the CAO.

3. Inquiries of Council Members

Inquiries made to Council members, whether by phone, email, social media, letter, or in person, must be addressed as soon as reasonably possible.

a. Formal Inquiries:

If citizens are requesting action from the municipality, or wish to ensure their communication is addressed formally by all of Council, they must submit their inquiry or request in writing.

- i. Formal inquiries received by members of Council must be forwarded to the CAO or designate as soon as reasonable.
- ii. All formal inquiries requesting Council decision or policy formulation shall be forwarded to Council as an agenda item at the meeting following the date the request was received by the CAO. Inquiries may be forwarded by council to the appropriate committee for a recommendation to Council.
- iii. Any administrative inquiries that can be handled internally will be dealt with by the CAO.

- b. Informal Inquiries:
An informal inquiry would be defined as citizens communicating verbally with any member of Council where the discussion is general in nature and does not require any action.
 - i. Informal inquiries may be responded to by the Council member who receives the request.
 - ii. Where a response is provided to an informal inquiry that is expected to attract media attention or become part of a Council or committee agenda in the future, the response shall be provided to all members of Council and the CAO.
 - iii. A councillor will formulate responses based on adopted policy or council resolutions. In the event that a councillor is unsure of the appropriate response, they may direct the inquiry to the CAO or get the information from the CAO and respond to the inquiry themselves in a prompt fashion.

External Communications

1. Coordination

- a. The CAO is responsible for the overall coordination of communication and the carrying out of this policy.
- b. The Communications Coordinator is normally responsible for carrying out external communications.
- c. General guidelines for external communications include:
 - i. Respect the authority and responsibility of the Town Council, whose members are entitled to learn about proposed policy initiatives, or major new services, programs or initiative before information about them is released to the general public or the media.
 - ii. Consult with the CAO when preparing information campaigns or strategies, or when preparing a response to a media inquiry.
 - iii. Keep information that is related to matters in draft form, under investigation, before the courts, protected by FOIP, or under the jurisdiction of another authority in strict confidence.

2. Public Events and Announcements

Information campaigns regarding public events are arranged to communicate about major developments or to release information that is new and important to municipal services, programs, projects, and initiatives.

Guidelines for each proposed public event or information campaign include:

- a. Determine whether individual departments will arrange or participate in an event or information campaign.
- b. Prepare a Communications Plan to ensure well-managed communication. The plan should take into account appropriate recognition of partners and funders. Such

recognition may include the use of partner or funder corporate names and logos.

- c. Provide, in advance, an agenda or copy of the Public Event or News Conference Plan and Briefing Notes to the CAO and any Council representative(s) taking part, together with an advance copy of any Media Advisory, Release, or Backgrounder.
- d. Coordinate participation through the CAO when multiple municipal departments, community partners, or other levels of government are involved, or as requested by the Mayor or CAO.

3. Public and Stakeholder Consultations

Open and effective communication is the key to successful public consultations.

Guidelines for Public Consultations include:

- a. Consult with the CAO who provides support, advice, and approval to administrative staff who plan, implement, and evaluate public consultation processes.
- b. Prepare public consultation plans for any significant changes in service levels, notify Council in advance of the Consultation plan
- c. Inform citizens and stakeholders about opportunities to participate in public consultation and citizen engagement processes (such as surveys, town hall meetings, public hearings, open houses, committees meetings, etc.) including dates, times, and locations.
 - i. This may be done through the Town's website, Town run social media, letters of invitation, posted notices, newsletters, advertisements, and other formats.
 - ii. Clearly identify public information materials as being from the Town.
- d. Report back to Council on the results of the public consultation.
- e. Inform participants in summary form of the results of the public consultation and outcomes.
 - i. This may be done through the Town's website, Town run social media, letters of invitation, posted notices, media notices, advertisements, and other formats.

4. Social Media use by Council Members

Council recognizes the importance of social media as an additional communication tool for the purpose of sharing information and encouraging dialogue with the public. Council Members engaging in social media should follow the same principles and guidelines as engaging in traditional forms of communication - by using sound judgment and common sense and by adhering to Council's values as laid out in the Council Code of Conduct Bylaw. Council Members should also abide by the following guidelines when using Social Media:

- a. Voice of Council
 - i. Since Council Members are perceived to represent the will and opinions of Council when speaking in any public forum, Council members are strongly encouraged not to submit posts to social media that are not reflective of, or which contradict, the will or position of Council on a given matter.
 - ii. If a Council Member does choose to post something which may not be reflective of the position of Council as a whole, they will include a disclaimer to ensure readers understand that the Member is speaking from their perspective only. An example of a disclaimer — "This is my personal opinion only and does not

necessarily reflect the will of Council as a whole."

- iii. If there is the potential that a post may pose a risk or compromise the professional integrity of the poster, Council, or that of the Town, the Council Member should check with other members of Council and/or the CAO. Information that is published online becomes part of a permanent record; there is no taking it back. Although a posting becomes a permanent record, any requests will not be deemed as official correspondence.
 - b. Maintain Confidentiality & Privacy
 - i. Council Members will not post information discussed during closed or in-camera sessions of Council, private or confidential information about members of Council or Town employees, or information or situations involving named or pictured individuals without their permission. Do not post anything that you would not present in a public forum.
 - c. Ensure Accuracy
 - i. Members of Council have an obligation to ensure their posts are accurate and not misleading.
 - ii. Council Members should refrain from cutting and pasting emails from staff or others into posts without clear context and permissions as these are written for a specific audience for a specific purpose.
 - d. Self-Monitoring for Personal Sites
 - i. Site maintenance is recommended to ensure content remains current and accurate. Static sites quickly fall into disuse and pose a risk with outdated information.
 - ii. Post "Terms of Use" on your personal site that reflect how you as a member of Council will deal with abusive, hateful, defamatory, anonymous, profane or otherwise inappropriate comments or content, including information that may jeopardize the privacy of others or harm or jeopardize the reputation of the Town, Council, or Administration.
 - e. Official Town Websites
 - i. No member of Council will create, operate or manage any website or social media site on behalf of the Town.
5. Social Media use by Town Employees
- a. Private posts by Town employees that reflect a negative image of the municipality, staff and council will not be tolerated and will incur disciplinary action up to termination, as appropriate based on the content of the material posted.
 - b. Town business will only be addressed on Town managed sites, and only by authorized individuals.
 - c. No employee shall respond directly to Town business items on non-Town managed social media sites.

Internal Communication

Open, two-way communication between Council and Administration and among Foremen, Managers, or

Supervisors and Employees is vital to the effective operation of the Town and to achieve the Mission and Goals of the Town.

1. Council and Administration:

- a. Requests for Decision and Information Packages are the formal means of communication between Administration and Council. Clear, concise, relevant reports provide Members of Council with the information they need to make decisions on municipal policies, programs, services, and initiatives.
- b. Public Announcements must be distributed concurrently to Members of Council, except in urgent situations affecting public health, safety, or danger to persons or property, where every attempt will be made to distribute as soon as possible after distribution to the Media.

2. Inquiries Made by Members of Council:

- a. The CAO shall be the primary contact for all Councillor inquiries.
- b. Councillor inquiries by any medium must be addressed promptly.
- c. Formal inquiries are directed to the CAO.
- d. Informal inquiries may be delegated to individual staff members who are knowledgeable in the specified area of inquiry.
- e. Where a response is required to an inquiry that is expected to attract media attention, the response shall be provided to all members of Council and the CAO
- f. At no time should a member of Council direct operations or employee of the Town of Fairview.

3. All Employees:

- a. Effective internal communication is a shared administrative responsibility, led by the CAO and Directors.
- b. Foremen, Managers, and Supervisors must communicate with employees openly, often, and before information is made public, whenever possible.
- c. To inform and engage employees, a variety of formats must be used, as appropriate and as resources permit.
 - i. This may include the Town's intranet or published materials such as memoranda, notices, employee newsletters, electronic bulletins, oral presentations, and staff meetings.
- d. The needs of all employees should be considered including any employees who may not have access to electronic information

Internet and Electronic Communication

The internet and other electronic communication are important tools, which allow 24-hour access to information and support two-way communication.

Guidelines for the use of the internet and electronic mediums in communication include:

- 1. Make publications and routinely available information of interest to citizens available on the

- Town's website as soon as possible.
2. Incorporate mechanism for receiving and acknowledging public inquiries and feedback made through electronic means.
 3. Establish ongoing updates and regular reviews of departmental pages and sub-sites so that information on policies, programs, services, projects, initiatives, and related third-party links is accurate, organized, and easy to understand.
 4. Follow brand standards across all pages on the Town's website.
 5. Links to Third Party Sites:
 - a. This type of link, which will generally open a new browser window, is provided for the convenience of the visitor. Inclusion of the link does not imply endorsement by the Town of Fairview, and the Town accepts no responsibility for the content found on any third party website. Links are subject to the approval of the appropriate department and may be removed without notice at the discretion of the department. Factors affecting approval or removal may include business case considerations, an assessment of the needs of the intended audience, the relevance to the Town or appropriate department and technical or legal considerations.

Values and Ethics

The Town is responsible for informing Council, Administration and the public with policies, programs, services in an accountable, non-partisan fashion.

Communication must be in a manner that affirms Canadian values of freedom, openness, security and respect.

Visual Identity

A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the policies, programs, consultations, services, projects, initiatives, etc., of the Town. A Brand Standards Guide will be developed as per the Communications Plan to address this issue. Once the guide has been developed, this policy will be amended to reference that guide.