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| <b>SECTION:</b> Communication          | <b>EFFECTIVE DATE:</b> September 9, 2024 |
| <b>RECOMMENDATION NO.:</b> GC88-24     | <b>COUNCIL APPROVAL:</b> Res. No. 159-24 |
| <b>SUBJECT:</b> Media Relations Policy | <b>POLICY NUMBER:</b> Communication-15   |

#### **POLICY:**

The Town of Huntsville strives to have a transparent and professional working relationship with its local media outlets that is built on a system of trust and positive rapport. This type of relationship is mutually beneficial to provide the public with fair, balanced reporting of municipal issues and Council decisions, foster public awareness of Town initiatives, programs, services, and encourage coverage of Town announcements and events.

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear, strategic approach in how the municipality communicates with its local news media outlets, and to **define who should interact with the media in an official capacity on behalf of the Town of Huntsville**. It also outlines the procedure for responding to a media inquiry.

All Town departments have a role to play in building co-operative and mutually beneficial relationships between the Town and media. It is advised that designated spokespersons notify the Marketing and Communications Department of media inquiries to the Town prior to interviews on contentious or sensitive topics.

#### **SCOPE:**

This policy applies to Mayor and members of Council for the Town of Huntsville, along with the Chief Administrative Officer, and all municipal staff, including department heads, full-time and part-time employees, contract staff, members of council appointed committees and volunteers.

Any constraints within this policy only apply to elected officials who are speaking on behalf of the Town / Council as a whole; they do not apply to elected officials speaking on their own behalf. This policy does not put any restrictions on members of Council over and above the Municipal Act. It should be noted that there may be certain legally sensitive topics on which Councillors are not authorized to speak.

#### **DEFINITIONS:**

**“Media”** refers to traditional print and digital media outlets, including television, radio, daily and weekly newspapers and online publications. The Town may use discretion if contacted by a freelance journalist, blogger, independent news publication or any reporter who wishes to remain anonymous.

**“Media advisory”** refers to a notice used to invite journalists to an event, announcement or to advise of municipal business that may be developed into a news story.

**“Media release”** refers to a longer, more detailed document that includes background information and offers a statement or quote from a designated spokesperson. It can be easily developed into a news story or printed directly in a publication. Media releases offer timely, relevant information about a municipal event, issue or council decision.

**“News notice/announcement”** refers to the distribution of timely, need-to-know information for the media to redistribute to its audience. This could include road closures, emergency detours, service disruptions and notices of special meetings.

**“Designated spokesperson”** refers to a municipal employee or elected official who is authorized to provide media interviews and verbal and written statements on behalf of the municipality.

**“Council or Committee Meeting”** refers to any open or closed meeting of council or a council appointed committee where quorum is present and where discussions materially advance the Town’s business and decision-making.

**“Public meeting”** refers to open meetings of council, Town Hall style meetings, open houses, public engagement sessions, and other municipal events where the audience can hear and/or participate in discussions with municipal staff and elected officials.

## **RESPONSIBILITY:**

### **1.0 Oversight:**

Huntsville’s CAO oversees this policy, its updating and designation of municipal spokespeople.

### **2.0 Spokespeople:**

The following spokespeople in the Town of Huntsville are authorized to provide media interviews and official statements to media outlets.

**Mayor:** The Mayor is the spokesperson for the Municipality and may speak to media as head of Council and on behalf of the Town. In the Mayor’s absence, the Deputy Mayor or a designated member of Council may take their place.

*From time to time, Council members may be asked by the media to provide comment, but unless designated, are not authorized to represent Council as a whole. **Councillors providing comment to the media must be clear that their comments represent them as an individual elected representative.***

**Chief Administrative Officer (CAO):** Huntsville’s CAO is a designated spokesperson for municipal matters outside of council business. In the CAO’s absence, the Designate is authorized to step into this role.

**Division Directors:** Division Directors are authorized to provide media interviews related to programs, operations and activities that operate within their respective departments and areas of responsibility. Divisional Directors can provide an acting or alternate spokesperson for a specific area, service or in their absence.

**Fire Chief:** The Fire Chief is the designated spokesperson for matters related to public and fire safety, fire-related incidents. In the event of a crisis or emergency situation, the Fire Chief or Emergency Information Officer for the municipality may act as spokespeople, in accordance with the Town’s [Emergency Preparedness Public Plan \(2021\)](#).

*In the case of a municipal emergency, the procedure for communications laid out in the [Emergency Preparedness Public Plan \(2021\)](#) supersedes this policy.*

### **3.0 Procedure:**

#### **3.1 Responding to media inquiries – authorized spokespeople:**

- The Manager of Marketing and Communication is to be made aware of any requests for statements or media interviews to provide support or advice for an interview or statement.
- Spokespeople contacted by media for an interview in statement will:
  - Ask for the reporter's name and organization.
  - Inquire about the nature of the discussion or interview topic.
  - Ask the journalist to provide a deadline for comment from the municipality.
  - Relay this information to the Manager of Marketing and Communication.
- During an interview, Spokespeople will speak to their area of responsibility or expertise. They should avoid providing information that is confidential, sensitive in nature, or may put the corporation, its staff or elected officials at risk.
- Spokespeople may arrange their own interview time, providing they have already advised the Manager of Marketing and Communications of the request.
- Spokespeople who are emergency personnel will make reasonable effort to return media inquiries after an active incident or emergency has ended and it is legally appropriate to do so.

#### **3.2 Responding to media inquiries - Non-authorized spokespeople:**

- Any staff member who is not an authorized spokesperson, but who is contacted by media, will:
  - a) Provide good customer service by asking for the reporter's name and organization, deadline, and nature of the request.
  - b) Advise them that the right spokesperson will be in touch.
  - c) Relay this information to their department head and the Manager of Marketing and Communication.

#### **3.3 Council and Public Meetings:**

- Media are permitted to attend public meetings and regular meetings of Council and Committees of Council, and may ask for on-the-spot commentary. Mayor and Council may seek support and advice, through the CAO and Manager of Marketing and Communication, ahead of the meeting.

#### **3.4 Inaccuracies:**

- If any published article, release, announcement or other media material is found to have inaccuracies or factual errors, the Manager of Marketing and Communication and CAO is to be notified.

### **4.0 Proactive Media Relations:**

#### **4.1 Media Pitches:**

- The Marketing and Communication Department will discuss with the appropriate department before pitching a potential story idea to media.

- The spokesperson will be pre-determined, and provided support, advice and/or key messaging for an interview should media show interest.

#### ***4.2 News Releases, Media Advisories, News notices/Announcements and/or Council Highlights:***

- Marketing and Communication Department will lead the development of Media releases, advisories, public announcements and Council highlights with support from the appropriate department.
- All staff or Council quotes must be approved by the person being quoted prior to any materials being released.
- Media releases, advisories, public announcements and/or Council highlights of a strategic communications nature will require the approval of the CAO prior to publishing; operational communications require the approval of the appropriate Director, Manager, or other operational designate.

#### ***5.0 Media Visits***

- It is recommended that Authorized Spokespeople notify the Manager of Marketing and Communication and or the CAO of media visits to Town facilities to support media relations activities and for further education and awareness purposes.

#### ***6.0 Personal Points of View:***

The Town of Huntsville is a small, tight-knit community, and the Town is aware that its staff and/or elected officials may volunteer and work in the community in other capacities. The Town is also aware that staff and/or elected officials may have personal points of view that conflict with the Town's position. The Town recognizes that staff and elected officials have the right to express personal points of view, within the following guidelines:

- When speaking at a public meeting or discussion where the employee or elected official is a participant outside of their role with the municipality, they make it clear that their views do not represent the Town, but are their own personal views.
- When operating outside of their municipal role at a community event or within a volunteer position, discussing municipal business, or topics of a sensitive or confidential nature, should be avoided.
- They do not use Town letterhead, e-mail accounts, or social media accounts to express their personal points of view.
- When speaking to the media outside of their role with the Town of Huntsville, they refrain from discussing matters related to the Town.
- They adhere to the Town's employee Code of Conduct, even when they are not acting in that capacity.

#### ***7.0 Contentious issues:***

Media inquiries about potentially contentious issues or confidential information should be referred to the CAO, who may include the Manager of Marketing and Communication, before speaking with media. This includes but is not limited to:

- Litigation matters
- Labour relations
- Human resources or information about identifiable individuals

- Election matters
- Requests for information that would fall under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA)

### ***8.0 Media Training***

All staff and elected officials who act as authorized spokespeople, as well as those who are authorized to speak in their absence, should receive media training once every four years.

### ***9.0 Media Monitoring:***

The Communications Specialist will monitor local media for stories and articles of interest and share relevant news with the CAO and Mayor on an as-needed basis.

### ***10.0 References and related documents:***

Code of Conduct for Employees  
Social Media Policy  
Photo and/or Video Consent and Release form,  
Emergency Public Information Plan  
Council Code of Conduct  
Procedural Bylaw

### **APPENDICES:**

Nil