



The Corporation of the Town of Tecumseh

Policy Manual

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Subject:	Communications Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1 Establish guidelines to facilitate internal and external communications that are coordinated and consistent as well as open and responsive.
- 1.2 To ensure citizens are informed of Town policies, programs, services, and initiatives through communication that is timely and accurate.
- 1.3 Provide guidelines to inform and/or consult Stakeholders (i.e., media) of priorities, projects, policies, programs, or services.
- 1.4 To establish clear protocols for the Mayor, Council and Administration for communication practices.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 Consultation: To seek advice or information. This may, where warranted, involve a formal consultation process designed to seek the views of citizens and community stakeholders or the public at large, including collecting and analyzing public input and feedback.
- 2.2 Crisis: A situation, present or future, or major issue that may disrupt service or impact on public trust in the Town.
- 2.3 Emergency: An unusual situation that requires prompt action to limit damage to persons, property, or the environment.

- 2.4 Media: Representatives of the print, broadcast, and digital media.
- 2.5 Media Advisory: A notice to the media to announce an upcoming Media event such as a news conference, a special meeting of Town Council, or a photo opportunity.
- 2.6 Media Conference: A meeting of News Media representatives arranged for the purpose of making a statement, announcement or replying to questions from the Media.
- 2.7 Media Liaison: A communicator who facilitates Media relations and communication between the News Media and the appropriate spokesperson.
- 2.8 Media Release: A factual written summary of information issued to the Media for the purpose of making a statement or announcement or replying to questions from the Media.
- 2.9 Boards and Agencies: Organizations recognized by the Corporation through the Budget process as an outside board or agency.
- 2.10 Plain Language: Effective communication that is clear, concise, relevant, and easy to understand where applicable.
- 2.11 Public Events: An event arranged by the Town directly, or in partnership, to release information, raise awareness, or to celebrate a civic milestone. Some of the most common include award presentations, dinners, conference greetings, festivals, dedication ceremony, groundbreaking, official opening, program launch, ribbon cutting, sod turning, major announcements.
- 2.12 Public Statement: A statement made verbally or in writing by spokespersons or civic employees to the Media, collectively or individually.
- 2.13 Stakeholder: Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision.

3. Scope & Key Concepts

- 3.1 Confidentiality: In all communications, spokespersons and departments must comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information. The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act extends access and privacy principles to Ontario municipalities. Refer to Town Policy #57 – Confidentiality Policy.

- 3.2 Copyright: Departments must comply with the Copyright Act to ensure the ownership rights associated with works subject to copyright are fully respected in all communications. Departments must maintain a record of authorizations to use copyright material. Refer to the Town Access Copyright Agreement
- 3.3 Visual Identity: A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the policies, programs, services, and initiatives of the Town. To present a strong, unified, consistent identity, departments must follow the Tecumseh Brand Identity & Standards Guide and display the Town logo in all applications, regardless of medium, for external and internal use.
- 3.4 This Policy applies to:
 - 3.4.1 All those responsible for developing, delivering, and/or approving internal and external communications on behalf of the Town. This may include but is not limited to: Town staff, consultants, contractors, partners, elected or appointed officials.
 - 3.4.2 All internal and external communications by the Town.

4. Guidelines

4.1 Informing Citizens

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

4.1.1 Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- a. Information is provided to the public by trained and knowledgeable staff.
- b. Service is timely, courteous, and efficient.
- c. When information is unavailable, a prompt and clear explanation is provided.
- d. Information in all formats is well identified as being from the Town of Tecumseh in accordance with the Tecumseh Brand Identity & Standards Guide.
- e. Published information is provided in Plain Language.

- f. A record of any published information is maintained, and the published information includes the publication date.
- g. Information is available regarding service standards, including timelines for response to inquiries, mail, and complaints.

5. Media Relations

- 5.1 The Media play an important role in providing information to the public on matters of civic interest.
 - 5.1.1 Media inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, should be addressed promptly to accommodate publication or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible.
 - 5.1.2 For information on protocol for designated spokespersons, please refer to section 5.3.
 - 5.1.3 A spokesperson may share or delegate their spokesperson responsibilities when subject matter expertise/information is sought beyond what the spokesperson is able to provide, and when the delegated spokesperson is adequately prepared to undertake this responsibility.
 - 5.1.4 Members of Council or employees who are not authorized spokespersons must refer media inquiries to the authorized spokesperson for the department or project and notify the Communications Officer.
 - 5.1.5 Employees who are not designated spokespersons are not authorized to make statements to the media and/or in public discussion on behalf of the Town. If approached, explain that they are not a spokesperson for the Town and respectfully decline the request for an interview or information. An appropriate response to the media would be: "I do not have the information for you regarding that topic. I will forward your request to the Communications Officer who will respond to you as soon as possible."
 - 5.1.6 Unless acting as spokespersons, Members of Council shall preface any remarks made to the media with a statement that they are not acting as a spokesperson for the Municipality but expressing their own view and opinion as individual Members of Council. For

confidential matters, Members of Council shall not express any views to the media.

- 5.1.7 Inquiries regarding municipal election matters should be referred to the Clerk, who will consult with the Communications Officer as appropriate.
- 5.1.8 Administration or Town staff should not comment on Council Meetings or Reports in advance of the meeting date. Should there be a need to provide comments in advance of a Council Meeting, please consult the Communications department.

5.2 Coordination

- 5.2.1 The Communications Officer will reach out to media on behalf of either the Mayor's Office or a Council member. They will assess the reporter's requirements and deadline. If the Mayor or an appointed spokesperson agrees to the interview, the Communications Officer will prepare essential speaking notes to assist with the interview. When feasible, representatives from the Communications department may attend media interviews conducted by the Mayor or the designated spokesperson to offer assistance, conduct post-interview debriefs, and address any remaining inquiries.
- 5.2.2 Town staff should promptly forward any media inquiries to the Communications Officer for immediate attention. Communications will then contact the reporter to verify the interview schedule and identify a suitable spokesperson based on the request and an evaluation of the topic. Additionally, they will coordinate with the designated spokesperson to review the interview. If deemed suitable and essential, Communications may also support staff in crafting speaking notes and key messages.
- 5.2.3 Town staff must obtain prior consent and coordinate with the Communications department before engaging with the media. Municipal staff are strictly prohibited from discussing ongoing investigations, legal proceedings (whether they are pending or ongoing), personnel matters and any content deemed confidential with the media.
- 5.2.4 Tecumseh O.P.P. and Emergency Medical Services release information through their respective Public Information Officers and conduct their own Media relations.

5.3 Spokesperson Protocol

Mayor & Council:

- 5.3.1 The Mayor and Members of Council (as designated) are normally the Town's chief spokespersons who explain policies, priorities, and decisions to the public.
- 5.3.2 The Mayor is normally the chief spokesperson for the Town unless the Deputy Mayor is designated; or in absence of the Deputy Mayor, another Member of Council is designated.
- 5.3.3 Committee Chairs are normally the chief spokespersons for matters dealt with under the jurisdiction of their particular committee.

Administration:

- 5.3.4 CAO, Directors: The Chief Administrative Officer is the chief administrative spokesperson. Directors are the spokespersons for programs, services, and initiatives they administer.
- 5.3.5 Legal, Personnel and Election: Inquiries regarding pending litigation, or involving a significant exposure to litigation, should be directed to the Town Solicitor/Clerk. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be directed to the CAO or designate. Inquiries regarding municipal election and campaign issues should be directed to the Town Solicitor/Clerk with the exception of election sign issues, which should be directed to Bylaw Enforcement.
- 5.3.6 Directors should appoint Community Liaisons for major projects.
- 5.3.7 Departmental Staff: Staff may provide background information that is publicly available. Requests for interviews should be referred to the Communications Officer.

6. Crisis Communications

The Town of Tecumseh Emergency Response Plan details the protocol for Emergency Media communications.

7. Media Conferences & Events

Public Events and announcements are arranged to communicate major developments or to release information that is new and important to municipal

services, programs, and initiatives and or related to public health, safety and essential services.

Departments must consult with the Communications Officer to:

- 7.1 Determine whether they will arrange, or participate in an event, or announcement.
- 7.2 Prepare a Public Event or Media Conference Plan to ensure well-managed communication. The plan should take into account the appropriate recognition of partners and stakeholders. Such recognition may include the use of partner or stakeholder names and logos.
- 7.3 Provide an advance agenda or copy of the Public Event or Media Conference Plan and speaking notes to Council representative(s) taking part, together with an advance copy of any Media Advisory, or media release.
- 7.4 Coordinate participation through the Communications Officer when multiple departments, community partners, and/or other levels of government are involved, or as requested by the Mayor or CAO. This includes a review of all resources required for the Public Event or Media Conference.

8. Website & Social Media

The Town website and social media are important tools, which allow 24- hour access to information and support two-way communication. Departments must:

- 8.1 Create website publications of interest to citizens, available in an accessible format when webpages are published.
- 8.2 Incorporate mechanisms for receiving and acknowledging public inquiries and feedback.
- 8.3 Maintain a record of information posted to the Town's website prior to changes related to news and events.
- 8.4 Establish ongoing updates and regular reviews of departmental webpages and sub-sites so that information on policies, programs, services, initiatives, and related third-party links is accurate and easy to understand.
- 8.5 Follow branding & webpage design standards for the Town's website and maintain compliance with accessibility standards.

- 8.6 Assign designated web authors who create, review, and maintain webpages. Web authors (or designate) may consult the Communications Officer for support and guidance as required.
- 8.7 Send requests to the Communications Officer via the Communications Form for making information available through other sites such as *Facebook, Instagram, X or similar*, for the Town of Tecumseh, Tecumseh Recreation Services or Tecumseh Fire & Rescue Services pages.
- 8.8 Link to pages on the Town website only and not to third party sites directly.
- 8.9 Confirm that inclusion of third party links on Town website or social media does not imply endorsement by the Town 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 the Communications Officer (as required).

9. Public Consultations

Open and effective communication is the key to successful public consultation and engagement. Departments in collaboration with the Communications Officer will:

- 9.1 Inform citizens and stakeholders about opportunities to participate in public consultation and citizen engagement processes (such as surveys, town hall meetings and committees). This may be done through the Town's website, online engagement tools such as PlaceSpeak, social media platforms, letters of invitation, posted notices, notices to the Media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
- 9.2 Clearly identify public information materials as being from the Town.
- 9.3 Inform participants, in summary form, of the results or outcomes from public consultations. This may be done through the Town's website, reports to citizens, letters, posted notices, notices to the Media, social media, advertising, and other formats normally used by departments.
- 9.4 Collaborate with the Communications Officer who provides support and advice to management staff who plan, implement, and evaluate public consultation processes. The Communications Officer prepares and helps to implement communication plans and strategies.
- 9.5 Prepare public consultation plans for any significant changes in service levels, notify Council in advance of the consultation plan and report back to Council on the results.

- 9.6 Anything falling under the Planning Act will follow associated legislation and guidelines for public consultations.

10. Advertising

- 10.1 Advertising in media other than the website will be coordinated through the Communications department and will be done in coordination with each department.

11. Communication Planning

- 11.1 Communication planning must be part of annual business and service delivery planning processes. Evaluation of communications should be part of ongoing departmental service delivery assessment as well as project specific evaluations.
- 11.2 The Communications Officer will assist in the development of a Corporate Communications Plan and centralized calendar, with input from Departments, that integrates the Town's strategic priorities, identifies target audiences, both internal and external, as well as objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required and evaluation.

12. Internal Communications

Open, two-way communication between Council and Administration and among employees is vital to the effective operation of the Corporation and to achieve the strategic priorities of the Corporation. Internal communication is an integral part of the Corporate Communications Plan.

12.1 Town Intranet:

- 12.1.1 The Town Intranet (tectown.ca) will be the main source of information for all Tecumseh staff for news, notices, staff updates etc.
- 12.1.2 The Intranet will be managed by the Technology & Client Services department. Communications staff will update and post on the News/Notices pages where necessary. People & Culture will manage staff announcements and other announcements coming from that department. Legislative & Clerk Services will manage policy updates.

12.2 Council & Administration

12.2.1 Corporate Reports 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.

12.2.2 Members of Council bring forward items for the Council / Committee Agendas in accordance with the Procedural By-law.

12.2.3 Public announcements shall be provided in advance to Members of Council prior to media outlet distribution. During activation of the Emergency Response Plan, established protocols for Emergency Media Communications will be followed.

12.2.4 Councillors shall direct resident inquiries and complaints to the Town's website under 'Report an Issue'.

12.3 Councillor Inquiries

12.3.1 Councillor inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, must be acknowledged promptly.

12.3.2 Formal inquiries are managed by the Clerks' office.

12.3.3 For informal inquiries, Directors are available to ensure that information requests, particularly for technical information, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated as a spokesperson for their department or division. Where the nature and scope of the inquiry is unclear, or a conclusive response is not brief and direct, departments should seek clarification by responding to the Councillor using the same method of communication and/or by phone. Where an inquiry is expected to involve detailed research on information that is not generally available, the Councillor may be referred to the formal inquiry process and may require a resolution by Council.

12.3.4 Where a response is provided to an inquiry that has broad corporate interest or application, anticipated media attention or may garner heightened interest from the general public, the response shall be provided to all Members of Council, the Clerk's office, and the Communications Officer.

12.4 Directors/ Managers & Employees

12.4.1 Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by the CAO and Directors.

12.4.2 Directors and managers must communicate with employees openly, often and, wherever possible, before information is made public.

12.4.3 To inform and engage employees, a variety of formats must be used, as appropriate and as resources permit, to reach the diverse audience across the organization. This may include the Town's Intranet, a mix of published materials, electronic bulletins, oral presentations, and staff meetings.

12.4.4 The needs of all employees should be considered, including outside, casual, part-time or seasonal workers who may have limited access to electronic information.

12.4.5 To ensure consistency and effective use of corporate communication channels and formats, departments should consult with the Communicators Office for support and advice before undertaking corporate-wide communication initiatives.

13. **Related Documents:**

- Town of Tecumseh Visual Identity Manual
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Confidentiality Policy #57
- Use of Official Mark Policy #51
- Accessible Customer Service Policy #66
- Copyright Access Agreement
- Town Website (www.tecumseh.ca)
- Social Media Policy