



Town of Whitby Policy

Policy Title:	Corporate Media Relations Policy
Policy Number:	G 170
Reference:	Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Municipal Act, Public notice requirements from the Planning Act and/or other pertinent Provincial or Federal legislation, Whitby Emergency Plan, Council Resolution # 278-12, Council Resolution # 201-21
Date Approved:	June 21, 2021
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Approval:	Council
Point of Contact:	Manager, Communications

Policy Statement

The Corporation of the Town of Whitby (hereinafter the “Town”) recognizes the important role the media and social media influencers (print, television, radio, online websites, digital blogs, and social media) play in promoting community awareness and understanding of Council decisions, as well as Town services, programs, initiatives, and engagement opportunities. Media relations is a powerful tool that can enhance the Town’s reputation and, ultimately, influence the perceptions and behaviours of its target audiences. For this reason, the Town is committed to a centralized, strategic, coordinated, and timely approach to media relations to help build mutually beneficial and trusting relationships with news media and social media influencers. Such relationships help foster accurate, balanced, and fair reporting; increase positive coverage; build trust in the Town; and, protect and enhance the reputation and integrity of the Town and the community.

The Town’s Communications and Creative Services Division (hereinafter “Communications”) serves as the Town media relations expert. Communications is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Town’s corporate media relations.

All parties identified under Scope are expected to follow this Policy and all related Town policies and applicable legislation.

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- Ensure professionalism and consistency in how the Town works with the media;
- Ensure media inquiries are responded to in a timely manner;
- Ensure the Town delivers accurate and clear messaging, through the most appropriate Town spokesperson; and,
- Establish a clear, consistent, and manageable process for the successful delivery of media relations services at the Town, including:
 - intake of, and response to media requests;
 - identification of designated Town spokespeople;
 - distribution and posting of materials, including but not limited to releases, advisories, public notices, statements;
 - proactive outreach to media outlets and social media influencers for storytelling opportunities;
 - crisis and emergency communications;
 - Media monitoring; and,
 - reporting data, analytics and key performance indicators (KPIs).

Scope

The Corporate Media Relations Policy applies to Town Council, appointed members of all Town committees, all Town staff, contractors and consultants, temporary and other workers and volunteers.

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1 Definitions

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

Media Relations involves working with media for the purpose of informing the public of an organization's mission, policies and practices in a positive, consistent and credible manner. Typically, this means coordinating directly with the people responsible for producing the news and features in the mass media.

Media Advisory is an alert released by Communications to media about events or photo opportunities happening at the Town at a specific date, time, and place to which the media is invited. Advisories may also be issued about events organized specifically for media, to which the public are not invited.

Media Release means messaging released by Communications to the media when there is something significant (large number of people affected by the message) and newsworthy to announce. A media release is a tactic that could be part of an overall communications plan.

Public Notice means communication released by Communications to provide information to residents about events happening at the Town that are straightforward, routine, or happen on a regular basis, but yet are newsworthy. For example, street or facility closures, community open houses, program and schedule changes, holiday schedules, seasonal reminders, etc.

Town Spokesperson means the individual authorized by this Policy, who may be approached by Communications to respond to a media request, as outlined in Appendix 2.

Social Media are online interactive technologies that enable users to create and share content, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression to online communities and networks.

Social Media Influencer is a user on social media who has established credibility in a specific industry. A social media Influencer has access to a large audience or a highly engaged audience and can persuade others by virtue of their authenticity and reach.

2 Responsibilities

2.1 Mayor to:

- Be the designated Town spokesperson on behalf of Council and/or the Town.

2.2 Mayor and Members of Council to:

- Act as a Town spokesperson, as outlined in Appendix 2; and,
- Assist in identifying proactive media relations opportunities and potentially contentious issues that may attract media attention for communications.

2.3 Chief Administrative Officer to:

- Be the designated Town spokesperson on behalf of the Town.

2.4 Communications to:

- Manage the Town's media relations strategy and identify appropriate spokespeople; and,
- Ensure the information provided to the media is strategic, consistent, accurate, relevant, forthright, timely, and approved by the appropriate manager or subject matter expert.

2.5 Mayor and Councillors' Office Staff to:

- Forward any media inquiries received by the Mayor's Office to Communications for review.

2.6 Town Staff to:

- Assist in identifying proactive media relations opportunities and potentially contentious issues that may attract media attention to communications;
- Work in partnership with Communications to draft effective and timely media materials, and ensure all information is factual;
- Refer all media inquiries to Communications in order to help ensure the Town has a consistent, strategic and effective approach to media relations;
- Act as Town spokesperson only after identified, designated as subject matter expert by Communications and trained (see Appendix 2); and,
- Notify Communications of errors noticed in media reports related to the Town.

3 Media Inquiries

- 3.1** The CAO's Office, through Communications, is responsible for developing and implementing the Town's media relations strategy and the coordination of media relations activities, media inquiries and interviews, with the exception of emergency situations (where the Town's emergency plan would come into effect). This includes proactive media relations to support strategic storytelling opportunities and may include tactics like: issuing Town media releases and advisories, public notices, one-on-one interviews or background reports, supporting and coordinating responses to media inquiries, and proactive outreach to media. This also includes reactive media relations, which requires fast turnaround due to tight deadlines. To mitigate message overload, all media inquiries received by Town staff are to be directed to Communications, in order to help facilitate a consistent approach and voice.
- 3.2** Media inquiries received by the Mayor and/or the Mayor's Office staff, be directed to Communications for follow-up. Communications will contact the reporter on behalf of the Mayor's Office, determine their needs and deadline, and (if the interview is accepted by the Mayor or designated spokesperson) draft key messages in support of the interview. Where appropriate and possible, Communications will also sit in on media interviews conducted by the Mayor or designated spokesperson in order to provide support, debrief, and follow-up on any outstanding questions.
- 3.3** Ward and Regional Council Members who receive media inquiries can speak on behalf of themselves as elected officials, it being understood that comments from the Councillor represent the views of the Councillor and not necessarily the formal position of the Town. Members of Council are encouraged to contact Communications to help ensure they have the background and most up-to-date information on the interview topic. Where appropriate and at the request of the Council Member, Communications will provide suggested key messages and background information to aid in a response. It is not advisable to speak to media about any ongoing investigations, legal actions (pending or current charges or hearings), or any confidential personnel matters.
- 3.4** Media inquiries received by Town staff will be directed to Communications for follow-up as soon as received due to the urgent nature and fast turnaround required to meet tight deadlines. Communications will contact the reporter, determine their needs and deadline, and organize the most appropriate spokesperson and response to the request for comment or information by collaborating with the department subject matter expert. This may include an interview or the sharing of background information.
- 3.5** If a reporter calls or arrives in person at a work site without making prior arrangements and requests an interview, staff should assist the media in contacting Communications to determine who is available to speak with them.

3.6 Town staff are not permitted to speak to the media without prior consent, training, and coordination through Communications. In addition, Town staff are not permitted to speak to the media about any ongoing investigations, legal actions (pending or current charges or hearings), or any confidential personnel matters.

4 Town Spokesperson

4.1 All designated Town Spokespeople identified in Appendix 2 of this Policy will receive media training to be provided by Communications.

4.2 In the case of Whitby Fire and Emergency Services (WFES) being required to operate 24/7 to respond to emergencies, it is not always possible to alert Communications prior to emergency-related interviews being conducted. In such instances, WFES spokespeople are encouraged to email Communications the following information:

- the media outlet and reporter;
- a summary of the interview topic, types of questions asked and key messages delivered – can be grouped as a general summary related to a number of interviews delivered on the same incident; and,
- if possible, date and time when the article, online post or broadcast will be published or aired.

In all other non-emergency cases, media inquiries received by WFES should be flagged to Communications to determine the most appropriate follow-up.

5 Proactive Media Outreach Guidelines

Outreach to the Media

Communications is responsible for developing a comprehensive Media relations strategy that supports the Corporate Strategic Plan. All proactive outreach to the media and social media influencers is based on strategic plans to support telling stories about why Whitby is a great place to live, work and play. Media materials are developed in partnership with Town staff – the subject matter experts. This could include tactical execution through pitches, releases, advisories, notices or statements.

Managing Quotes

Communications is responsible for recommending the most appropriate Town spokesperson to be quoted by media, in person, in media releases or other supportive materials. All quotes will be sent by Communications to the person being quoted for review and approval in advance of media distribution.

Media releases/advisories, where appropriate, may also quote Members of Council, representatives of other levels of government, and/or community businesses or funding partners.

Crisis and Emergency Communications

In the event of a crisis or unexpected issue, in consultation with the Mayor's and CAO's Offices, Communications will put into place an appropriate crisis management procedure to help ensure communication with the media is well managed.

This may include:

- Identifying and briefing the most appropriate Town spokesperson;
- Convening discussions with relevant Town staff, SLT, Councillors, Mayor's Office, and CAO;
- Ensuring only designated Town spokespeople make comment; and,
- Implementing real-time monitoring to support the development of messaging.

During a declared emergency, the process for working with the Media is outlined in the Town's Crisis Communications Procedure and Emergency Plan. Under the Plan, a designated Public Information Officer is the main point of contact for the media.

Appendices

Appendix 1 [Process for intake of media inquiries](#)

Appendix 2 [Authorized Town Spokespersons](#)

This Policy is hereby approved by Council Resolution #201-21 on this 21st day of June, 2021.

Appendix 1

Process for intake of media inquiries:

Example 1:

Mayor's Office ➤ Communications ➤ Reporter ➤ Communications ➤ Mayor's Office ➤ Interview or Background Information ➤ Post-interview follow up and media monitoring by Communications

Example 2:

Town Staff ➤ Communications ➤ Reporter ➤ Communications ➤ Designated Town Spokesperson ➤ Interview or Background Information ➤ Post-interview follow up and media monitoring by Communications

Example 3:

Councillor ➤ Communications for background information as required ➤ Councillor ➤ Reporter for Interview or Background Information ➤ Post-interview follow up and media monitoring by Communications

Appendix 2

The following chart outlines which Town spokesperson will be approached by Corporate Communications to handle each type of media request.

MEDIA REQUEST TYPE	OVERVIEW	SPOKESPERSON
Political	Item currently before Council or related to other levels of government. Advocacy efforts. Item that relates to a particular ward.	Mayor or Council designate, based on topic and/or ward
Policy-Related	Council decisions. Policies and by-laws.	Mayor or Council designate, based on topic and/or ward; CAO; or Town Clerk; or SLT as subject matter expert
Operational / Administrative	Items relating to day-to-day operations, Town programs, personnel or technical questions.	CAO, SLT or appropriate staff
Legal	Matters with legal implications or already before the Court.	Mayor or Town Solicitor
Election	Inquiries regarding municipal elections.	Town Clerk or designate
Special Interest	Stories that focus on human interest matters or community events in a particular ward. These are not operational or political in nature.	Relevant Council Member or appropriate staff
Public Safety /Emergency	Public emergencies or incident response (such as fire). NOTE: In the event of a declared emergency, the Town's Emergency Plan shall take precedence and direct communications.	Fire Chief or media-trained Fire and Emergency Services staff designate