



Municipality of the County of Colchester
Communications Policy

1. Policy Statement

1.1 The Municipality of the County of Colchester (“Municipality”) is committed to consistent, clear, effective, timely, and transparent communications. Effective communications are critical to the Municipality’s work and contribute directly to citizens’ trust in their local government. This Policy is intended to guide open, honest, and effective communication with the Municipality’s residents, stakeholders, Council, and employees.

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that communications with residents, stakeholders, Council, and employees reflect the values of the Municipality, and is efficient, responsive, and human-focused.

This Policy establishes the principles that will direct all communications and provides specific direction and standards for a variety of communications related activities. This Policy provides direction to Council and employees to ensure, at all times, the Municipality:

- Provides clear, accurate and timely information about its policies, programs, services, and initiatives to the community.
- Uses a variety of communication methods to engage and provide access to local government information in formats that respond to and accommodate the community’s diverse needs.
- Is visible, accessible, transparent, and accountable to citizens.
- Provides clear and timely messaging to communities in response to emergencies or crises.
- Engages the public when establishing priorities, developing policies, and planning programs and services.
- Provides timely, accurate and relevant information to staff and Council on key issues prior to release to the public.
- Provides a brand that is clear, cohesive and concise, and ensures communications regarding the official position of the Municipality on all issues reflect the majority vote of Council or existing policy framework adopted by Council.

3. Application

3.1 This Policy applies to all internal and external communications of the Municipality and applies to all Members of Council and employees.

4. Definitions

4.1 Authorized Person: an employee appointed by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to interact with media or represent the Municipality.

4.2 Corporate Communication(s): the variety of ways the Municipality, as a government body, communicates with external and internal audiences.

4.3 Emergency: A situation that requires prompt action to limit damage to persons, property, or the environment.

4.4 Inappropriate Communication means in-person, electronic, telephonic, written, or other forms of communication that:

- a person knew or reasonably ought to have known would cause the subject of the communication, the person receiving the communication, or both to feel humiliated or intimidated;
- is discriminatory, threatening, violent, or defamatory; or
- is part of a pattern of communications that are frivolous, vexatious, or made with malicious intent

4.5 Social Media: websites and digital applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content online, or to participate in social networking.

4.6 Stakeholder: a resident, business, municipal neighbour, elected official, staff, upper tier level of government, board, committee, authority, agency, association, and anyone with an interest in municipal affairs.

5. Values and Guiding Principles

5.1 In all communications, the values of the Municipality shall be embodied and reflected:

- **Accessibility**: Communications shall use plain language and a variety of methods as a means to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of target audiences.
- **Diversity**: Communications shall be correct, concise, accessible, gender neutral, and non-discriminatory. Communications shall exclude words and images that connote stereotypes, exclude any negative or passive language relating to physical appearances, and exclude clichés, slang, and jargon. All communications shall reflect and promote inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.
- **Accountability**: Communications and engagement must always reflect that the Municipality takes responsibility for its actions, words, goals, and objectives. When

an error is made, it must be corrected, with notice and taking responsibility for it.

- **Listening:** As an organization, including Council and staff, the Municipality will strive to listen to the input from citizens to gain new information, view an issue from a unique perspective, reduce conflict and build confidence and trust.
- **Cordiality:** As individuals, and as an organization, the Municipality's communications, systems, and the execution of our work must be delivered with friendliness, kindness and compassion.
- **Timeliness:** In all matters, clarity and timeliness of communications shall be observed. The Municipality must communicate with citizens as quickly as possible without compromising key values. If an interaction requires seeking additional or detailed information and input, the request should be acknowledged, and the expectations defined around the communications.
- **Transparency:** The Municipality must communicate honestly and openly with stakeholders whenever possible. This includes providing proactive disclosure of information when appropriate.

6. Brand Usage

6.1 Corporate communications shall make use of the Municipality's brand and brand standards as appropriate and in accordance with the brand adopted by Council. Usage of the Municipality's brand outside of corporate communications shall be at the discretion of the CAO.

7. Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy

7.1 In all communications, the Municipality, Members of Council, and employees are subject to the *Municipal Government Act*, SNS 1998, c 18, Part XX.

8. Respectful Communications Policy

8.1 1. Responding to Inappropriate Communication to employees:

- If employees believe they have received inappropriate communication, they will prepare an Incident Report detailing the incident. Employees will submit the incident Report to their Manager or Director. Where the Incident is limited to written or electronic communication, a copy of that written or electronic communication should be included with the Incident Report.
- If, upon receipt and review of an Incident Report, the Manager or Director believes the incident may have violated this Policy, they will notify the CAO and provide the CAO with the Incident Report.
- When the CAO receives an Incident Report, they will take such action as they consider appropriate in the circumstances, considering the following guidelines:

- whether the Inappropriate Communication concerned a matter for which the author of the communication had a statutory right to be heard;
- the role of the individual to whom the Inappropriate Communication was directed;
- whether the inappropriate communication relates to comments and feedback regarding a program, service, or initiative of the Municipality;
- whether the inappropriate communication is violent, threatening, defamatory of an individual, or discriminatory;
- whether the inappropriate communication was a single or repeated act;
- whether the person has acknowledged wrongdoing or apologized for the inappropriate communication;
- whether the person had received previous warnings or actions from the Municipality regarding inappropriate communication; and
- any other relevant consideration.

8.2 The CAO may determine that the incident did not constitute a violation of this Policy and take no further action.

8.3 The CAO may determine that the incident constituted a violation of this Policy but decide that no further action is required in the circumstances.

8.4 The CAO may determine that the incident constituted a violation of this Policy and take one or more of the following steps:

- issue a written warning letter to the person who engaged in inappropriate communication;
- request that the person who engaged in inappropriate communication meet with an employee;
- impose limits on the way a person may communicate with employees, including:
 - limiting the person to communicating

8.4.1 in a particular manner (e.g., email only);

8.4.2 at a particular time (e.g., telephone calls only one day per week, emails only reviewed once per week);

8.4.3 for a particular duration of time (e.g., a maximum time for telephone calls);

8.4.4 with a particular person (e.g., requiring that all communications from the person be directed to the Manager and advising other employees not to respond; and,

8.4.5 any other action the CAO considers appropriate in the circumstances.

- instruct employees not to acknowledge, respond to, and/or publish future communications from the person engaging in inappropriate communication;
- any other action the CAO considers appropriate in the circumstances.

8.5 Nothing in this Policy is intended to limit a Council Member's ability to respond to communication received from the public.

9. Communications Support Provided to the Mayor

9.1 In their capacity as the spokesperson for Council, the Municipality may provide communications support to the Mayor, if required. Such assistance may include but is not limited to speaking notes for public appearances or events, scripts or research notes for media interviews, and key messages for media requests or emergency situations.

10. Communications from Members of Council

10.1 In all communications from Members of Council, including the use of social media, the following shall be considered:

- Obligations under Council's Code of Conduct;
- Obligations under Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation;
- The accuracy of information provided;
- If the communication could bring about disrepute to or expose the Municipality to legal action;
- Whether the subject or position on a matter is enabled or prohibited by a law, or By-law or Policy of the Municipality;
- Whether the communication reflects the values of the Municipality; and,
- Whether Council has taken a particular position, by way of a motion, on the topic.

10.2 Individual members of Council are encouraged to reflect the position of Council in their communications, or state they are providing a personal opinion. Where an individual Member of Council expresses a personal opinion, whether written or verbal, it must be explicitly clear to the audience that the Member is not speaking on behalf of the Municipality or Council.

Accordingly, when a Member of Council is communicating as an individual, they may include the following statement in written correspondence:

“The information contained in this correspondence reflects the views of an individual Member of Council, and not those of Council as a whole or the Municipality of the County of Colchester.”

- 10.3 With respect to communicating the business of Committees of Council, the Members of Council serving as Chair shall refer to and be bound by the policies of their respective Committee.
- 10.4 It shall be the responsibility of the Chair of a Committee to verify, if required, the accuracy of information being communicated to Council with the CAO.
- 10.5 Following circulation of formal written correspondence, Members of Council shall provide a copy of the correspondence to the CAO. This shall include copies of letters of support or commendation, or responses to community issues, but exclude emails, social media posts, or routine correspondence with constituents.

11. Media Inquiries Received by Members of Council

- 11.1 Councillors shall refer all media inquiries to the Mayor and CAO for direction and assistance.
- 11.2 The Mayor shall be the default spokesperson for all media inquiries regarding Council matters, unless another Member of Council is designated to respond to a particular matter.
- 11.3 The Municipality will endeavour at every possible chance to have Members of Council to respond to and engage with media inquiries on District-specific matters.

12. Corporate Communications

- 12.1 The Municipality shall maintain a website to provide the public with information regarding municipal services, Council decisions, Council and Committee meeting schedules, minutes and agendas, By-laws, Policies, activities, events, and ongoing government business.
- 12.2 The CAO shall be the official spokesperson for matters related to the administration of the Municipality. All media inquiries shall be referred to them for direction.
- 12.3 If authorized by the CAO, an employee may serve as the designated spokesperson for matters relating to their position, skills, and expertise.

13. Social Media Use by the Municipality and Employees

- 13.1 The Municipality shall not provide administrative support to the individual social media accounts of Members of Council.
- 13.2 Only authorized persons may write in the voice of the Municipality on social media.

- 13.3 All social media platforms and activities must be reflective of the Municipality's values and will continually strive to protect the organization's credibility and meet the information needs of citizens.
- 13.4 The CAO, or their designate, shall be responsible for managing the primary social media channels representing the Municipality as a corporation.
- 13.5 All social media content shall require approval by the CAO, or their designate, prior to publication.
- 13.6 The Municipality may establish standards and guidelines for commenting and engagement with its social media content that include, but are not limited to:
- Responding to posts or comments;
 - Moderating discussions;
 - When posts or comments may be removed, such as instances of:
 - Racist, hateful, sexist, homophobic, slanderous, insulting, or threatening language.
 - Aggressive, coarse, violent, obscene, or pornographic content.
 - Offensive or threatening comments directed at an individual or an organization.
 - Content posted for the sake of advertising or self-promotion.
 - Unintelligible, repetitive, or spam content.
 - Post any comments in any way contrary to law.
- 13.7 Council members shall remain mindful of their obligations under the Code of Conduct for Members of Council when sharing content on social media.

14. Emergency Communications

- 14.1 In times of emergency or crisis, the Municipality shall communicate any and all information that will protect the health, safety, security, of residents and their property.
- 14.2 Communications decisions shall be made by the Colchester Regional Emergency Management Organization.
- 14.3 Communications will take any form necessary to ensure residents receive accurate, timely, and relevant information to prevent, mitigate, respond to, or recover from an emergency

15. Copyright

- 15.1 The use of images in print and digital communications products, and their distribution to targeted audiences, will comply with the Copyright Act. The Municipality will ensure

that the ownership rights associated with works subject to copyright are fully respected in the Municipality's communications channels and products.

16. Reporting Violations

16.1 Members of Council and employees shall immediately report known or suspected violations of this Policy to the CAO. All good faith allegations of violations of this policy will be confidentially investigated.

17. Policy Review

17.1 This policy will be reviewed every five years from the date of approval by Council. Council will be provided with recommended updates, as required, based on changes in the corporate reporting structure, changes in best practices or technological changes that need to be addressed in the Policy framework.

18. Roles and Responsibilities

The communications function is a shared role that requires the cooperation of many internal stakeholders whose communications-related responsibilities are as follows:

18.1 Council will:

18.1.1 ensure the Municipality has a current and comprehensive Policy for communications; and

18.1.2 review and amend this Policy as required.

18.2 The Chief Administrative Officer:

18.2.1 will implement this Policy and oversee effective communications of municipal policy and initiatives;

18.2.2 will identify and propose revisions to this Policy; and

18.2.3 may delegate their authority.

Clerk's Annotation For Official Policy Book

Date of Notice to Council Members of Intent to Consider (7 days minimum): December 11, 2023

Date of Passage of Current Policy: January 25, 2024

I certify that this Policy was adopted by Council as indicated above.

Dan Troke

Municipal Clerk

January 30, 2024

Dated

originally approved January 25, 2024