



REPORT

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Alex Fuller, Director of Communications

DATE: March 20, 2024

REPORT NO.: ADMIN-2024-002

SUBJECT: Communications Update and Media Policy

RECOMMENDATION:

That Report No. ADMIN-2024-002 dated March 20, 2024 regarding the Communications Update and Media Relations Policy be received for information;

AND FURTHER THAT Council approve the proposed Media Relations Policy.

KEY POINTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- The Town's Corporate Communications Division provides a suite of services to inform, educate and/or engage the public.
- Portfolios led by the Corporate Communications team include communications strategy and execution, issues and crisis management, media relations, social media, graphic design, corporate advertising and management of 2 websites: haltonhills.ca and letstalkhaltonhills.ca (engagement platform).
- Communications staff adhere to best practices and work collaboratively with staff across all departments to provide accurate information to the community in a timely and transparent manner.
- Media relations is an integral component of the communications portfolio, and the proposed policy formalizes the current protocols.
- The current media protocol has evolved to a centralized approach through the Communications Division that ensures queries are tracked, responded to quickly and that any potential issues are flagged and considered for further action.
- In 2023, Communications managed 170 media queries including 47 interviews.
- The Town's approach has resulted in strong coverage of municipal issues and initiatives and factual and timely reporting.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:

Purpose

The purpose of this report is two-fold:

- i) To provide Council with a brief overview of the work of the Communications Division
- ii) Introduce a proposed media policy.

Communications Services

Communications staff provide a variety of services supporting departments across the organization. Staff work to engage, educate and inform residents and stakeholders across multiple social media platforms, 2 websites (haltonhills.ca and letstalkhaltonhills.ca), and develop and produce various communication products (e-newsletters and bulletins). Strategic communications planning, public engagement, graphic design and corporate advertising are among the services provided.

An overview of the services and metrics for 2023 can be found in Appendix A.

Media Relations

The protocol outlined in the proposed policy details the Town of Halton Hill's approach to media relations and who can interact with the media in an official capacity on behalf of the municipality. The approach has been successful, resulting in strong coverage of municipal issues and initiatives and factual and timely reporting. The Town's approach is predicated on managing communications with the media in a timely and effective manner and supports the following goals:

1. Inform, educate and engage community on Town issues and initiatives through accurate, fair and balanced media coverage.
2. Grow Town media coverage including goodwill/positive stories (earned media).
3. Identify and mitigate issues.

The protocol aligns with the Town's [Public Engagement Charter](#) and [Social Media Guidelines](#).

Media Approach

The Town recognizes that a strategic approach to media relations is important to build mutually beneficial and trusting relationships with the media. Productive relationships help foster accurate, balanced and fair reporting; support the Town in conveying important information to the public; increase positive coverage and protect and enhance the Town's reputation.

Media Policy

The proposed media policy attached as Appendix B, outlines the roles of elected officials and administration and addresses specific circumstances (i.e., emergency management).

The proposed media policy also notes other related protocols per the staff Personnel Policy Manual.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have an impact on the Town's Strategic Plan.

RELATIONSHIP TO CLIMATE CHANGE:

This report is administrative in nature and does not directly impact or address climate change and the Town's Net Zero target.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Public Engagement was not needed as this report is administrative in nature.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION:

This report was discussed with the CAO and Deputy Clerk.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

This report is administrative in nature and does not have any financial implications.

Reviewed and approved by,

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer