



CORPORATE POLICY

POLICY TITLE:	Media Relations
POLICY #:	PLCY-2024-0XX
CATEGORY:	Office of the CAO/Communications Division
AUTHORITY:	N/A
POLICY APPROVED BY:	ADMIN-2024-002
EFFECTIVE DATE:	May 6, 2024 (subject to Council approval of Report No. ADMIN-2024-002)
APPLICABLE TO:	Town of Halton Hills staff and Halton Hills Town Council

1. Purpose

The Town recognizes that a strategic approach to media relations is important for building 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.

The proposed policy details and formalizes the Town of Halton Hill's approach to media relations including who can interact with media in an official capacity on behalf of the municipality. The Town's approach supports the efficient management of communications with the media in a timely and effective manner.

2. Definitions

"Administration" means Town of Halton Hills staff.

"Elected Officials" means Mayor and Council members for the Town of Halton Hills.

"Non-authorized spokesperson" means Town of Halton Hills staffing positions not listed as a media spokesperson nor called upon to speak to the media.

"Spokesperson" means person(s) authorized to speak to the media (includes authority by position and requests to professional staff to speak on specific project/portfolio areas within their area of expertise).

"Town" means Town of Halton Hills.

3. Policy

Roles

This policy recognizes the different roles between elected officials (Mayor and Council members) and administration (staff).

Elected officials

The Mayor is the official spokesperson of Town Council and the corporation unless their authority is delegated on a specific topic or issue.

Councillors may offer personal opinions, speak on Council direction and decisions through their lens as a ward or regional representative and steward of the municipality.

Administration

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) may speak to media on any issue at any time, recognizing his role as the head of staff with responsibility for fulfilling the direction of Town Council's decisions. Depending on the circumstance, the CAO may designate other staff (Commissioners and/or their designate which may include professional staff) to provide comment.

The Director of Communications (director) or staff designate is responsible for managing media relations (print and digital) and shall act as the Town's spokesperson on daily, ongoing and routine matters of business. The director will receive, manage and track requests, arranging interviews with subject matter experts (staff), ensuring that department and division heads are notified. Issues of significant impact (e.g., financial, reputational, legal) may require input from the CAO.

The director shall call upon technical staff and/or subject matter experts, to provide information to the media on specific projects or issues regarding legislative requirements of various acts and applicable laws; performance metrics, current and best practices, impacts and actions in accordance to Council direction.

The following chart reflects the communications process used to determine the appropriate spokesperson. Note that consultation may occur prior to confirming the spokesperson.

Media Request Category	Examples (List is not comprehensive)	Spokesperson (& informed staff)
Political (Town wide)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Item before Council or related to other levels of government. • Town-wide advocacy. • Item related to a particular ward. 	Mayor and/or designate as directed.
Political or Special interest (Ward specific)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council item related to particular ward. • Councillor special interest • Ward advocacy 	Councillor
Operational (General)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day-to-day operations • By-laws and programs • Personnel • Technical questions 	Director of Communications, (and directors and technical staff as required). Commissioners to be advised by departmental staff. *Director of Communications
Operational (Contentious)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day-to-day operations • By-laws and programs • Personnel • Technical questions 	CAO (and commissioners and directors as directed). *Director of Communications
Administrative (Staff, union)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel issue • Salary or negotiation issue 	CAO, Commissioner of Corporate Services and Director of Human Resources. *Director of Communications
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters with legal implications/before the court. 	CAO, Town solicitor or Mayor. *Director of Communications
Election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal elections. 	Town Clerk or designate. *Director of Communications
Public Safety/Emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public emergencies • Incident response (e.g., fire). NOTE: In a declared emergency, the Emergency Plan will guide communications.	Fire Chief or Deputy, CAO, Director of Communications (or designate) acting as the Communications Officer.
<i>*The Director of Communications may respond to the media with information provided by staff and/or deliver approved statement(s) on behalf of the municipality.</i>		

Non-authorized Spokesperson

Only authorized staff should speak to the media. Media requests should be referred to the Director of Communications or designated alternate, providing the name of the journalist/reporter, publication, contact number, topic and deadline.

Issues & Crisis Management

In the event of a contentious and/or volatile issue, Town Council will refrain from comment. Spokespersons will be limited to the Mayor (if desired), the CAO or Director of Communications, adhering to vetted and approved talking points. Councillors will be kept informed.

Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency (an unusual situation that requires prompt action to limit damage to persons, property or the environment), the Town will adhere to the protocols and prescribed roles as outlined in the Emergency Plan under the direction of the Fire Chief unless otherwise directed by the CAO.

Devices

All communications with the media shall be performed using a Town-owned computer, smartphone/device using an official Town email address or online account established and administered by the municipality.

Personal point of view - Staff

All employees have the right to express personal points of view and, at times, an employee's opinion may conflict with the Town's official position. Personal opinions must not be expressed using Town letterhead, email addresses or online accounts. Employees communicating with the media should recognize their responsibility as a representative of the corporation and reflect the views of the municipality.

Personal Point of View – Elected Officials

Elected officials have the right to express personal points of view and particularly if the opinion conflicts with the Town's official position, should stipulate that it is their own personal opinion offered in their role as an elected member of Town Council.

Accountability

Subject to applicable collective agreements and employment agreements, the Town may consider disciplinary measures or legal action if an identifiable employee makes defamatory or otherwise inappropriate statements in public about their co-workers and/or employer. This includes comments made to the media and on websites, blogs and social media networks using personal computers, smartphones or devices, from an online account or profile associated with a personal email address.

Media Accreditation

The Town does not have a formal accreditation process (per higher orders of government), however reporters and journalists working for recognized media will be prioritized. The Town strives to be responsive and transparent to all queries but reserves the right to not respond to frivolous or bad faith requests from individuals who do not conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the Canadian Association of Journalists' Principles for Ethical Journalism and Ethics Guidelines; and/or anonymous individuals.

References

- Staff Personnel Policy Manual
- [Town of Halton Hills Public Engagement Charter](#)
- [Town of Halton Hills Social Media Guidelines](#)
- [Canadian Association of Journalists' Principles for Ethical Journalism and Ethics Guidelines](#)

4. Review and Revision

This is a new policy that will be reviewed in five (5) years, or earlier if warranted.