



Communications Policy		Effective:	, 2021
		Approved:	, 2021
Policy:	Communications	Resolution:	
Application:	All Employees, Council, Committee Members	Supercedes:	115/2007

Policy Statement

The Municipality of Port Hope (the “Municipality”) recognizes the important role that communications and media relations (print, television, radio, websites, digital blogs, and social media) has on enhancing community awareness and understanding of Council decisions, as well as municipal services, programs, initiatives, and engagement opportunities. Comprehensive, accurate and strategic communications is essential to uphold the Municipality’s reputation and can influence the perceptions and behaviours of its many audiences. For this reason, the Municipality is committed to delivering tactical, trustworthy, and timely communications with a consistent approach to foster trusting relationships with its stakeholders and enhance the reputation of the Municipality and the community.

The Municipality’s Communications Division (“Communications”) is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Municipality’s corporate communications.

Communication matters that have not been specifically addressed in this policy shall be handled at the discretion and authority of the CAO.

Purpose

The purpose of the Communications Policy is to:

- Ensure professionalism and consistency in how the Municipality communicates with its stakeholders.
- Establish a clear, consistent, and manageable process for the successful delivery of communications at the Municipality, including:
 - intake of, and response to media requests
 - identification of designated Municipal spokespersons
 - distribution and posting of materials, including but not limited to releases, advisories, public notices, statements
 - Issues management and emergency communications
 - Website and social media communications

Scope

The Communications Policy applies to Municipal Council, appointed members of all Municipal committees, all Municipal staff, contractors, and consultants, temporary and other workers, and volunteers.

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

- The Code of Conduct for Council and Committee Members
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Accountability and Transparency Policy
- Social Media Policy
- The Emergency Management Plan
- Brand Guidelines

1. Definitions

Campaigning means engaging in activities with the goal of affecting – positively or negatively – a candidate for municipal office.

Communications methods means the tools and initiatives used by the Municipality to communicate with stakeholders and the public. These tools include but are not limited to:

- advertisements in the newspaper
- media releases
- social media messaging
- digital advertisements
- interactions with people in person, over the phone or by email
- website communications.

Council means the Municipal Council of the Municipality of Port Hope as elected by its citizens.

Media means accredited representatives of the print, radio, television, and online media.

Media Release means a factual written summary of information issued to the Media for the purpose of making an announcement or relaying important municipal information.

Municipal Spokesperson (“spokesperson”) means the individual who is authorized by this Policy to represent the Municipality in response to a media request for an interview in written communications, in-person interviews, or if approached in the workplace, at a function or at an event.

Public Notice means a factual written summary of information that is posted on the municipal website for the purpose of sharing information or relaying important municipal information.

Social media means the web-based technologies and sites, including blogging, microblogging, photo sharing, video sharing, and networking, which allow users to interact with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, photographs, and interests.

Subject Matter Expert is a person who is an authority in a particular area or topic to present information on specific programs or projects with which they are more familiar.

2. General

All parties identified under the scope of this policy are expected to adhere to the following:

2.1 Copyright - The Canadian *Copyright Act R.S.C., 1985, c. C-42* must be adhered to, to ensure the ownership rights associated with printed and digital materials subject to copyright are fully respected in all communications. If parties under the scope of this Policy are unsure about the copyright of a print or digital asset, they must contact Communications to discuss. All parties must maintain a record of authorizations to use copyright material.

2.2 Confidentiality - In all communications, all parties under the scope of this policy must comply with 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.

2.3 Municipal Branding – The most current Municipal Brand Guidelines (2018) must be complied with in all forms of print and digital communications, promotion, and branding efforts.

2.4 Plain Language - The Municipality of Port Hope will use ‘plain language’ for its external communications wherever possible. ‘Plain language’ can be broadly described as any writing designed to ensure the reader understands the message as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. Plain language strives to be easy to read, understand, and used. It avoids verbose, convoluted language and jargon.

3. Media Relations

Communications is responsible for developing and implementing the Municipality’s media relations activities and strategies, except for emergency situations (where the Municipality’s emergency plan would come into effect).

A proactive media relations approach taken by the Communications Division includes but is not limited to issuing media releases and advisories, public notices, coordinating one-

on-one interviews or background reports, supporting and coordinating responses to media inquiries, and proactive outreach to media.

A reactive media relations approach taken by Communications requires fast turnaround due to limited timelines. All media inquiries received by Municipal staff shall be directed to Communications to help facilitate a consistent approach and message.

3.1 Media Inquiries

3.1.1 Media inquiries received by the Mayor and/or the Mayor's Office staff, are to 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.

3.1.2 Council Members who receive media inquiries can address them on behalf of themselves as elected officials; however, comments from the Councillor represent the views of the Councillor and not necessarily the formal position of the Municipality. Members of Council are encouraged to contact Communications for accurate and up-to-date background 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.

3.1.3 Media inquiries received by Municipal staff shall be immediately directed to Communications for follow-up as soon as received. Communications will follow up with the reporter to confirm the interview time and the appropriate spokesperson based on the request and assessment of the subject matter and reach out to the spokesperson to discuss the interview. If deemed appropriate and necessary, Communications may also assist staff with the preparation of briefing notes and key messages.

3.1.4 If a reporter calls or arrives in person at a work site without making prior arrangements and requests an interview or a statement, staff should assist the media in contacting Communications to determine who is available to speak with them.

3.1.5 Municipal staff are not permitted to speak to the media without prior consent and coordination through Communications. In addition, Municipal 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.

3.1.6 In an election year, from Nomination Day until the day after Election Day, any member of Council taking part in a regular municipal media opportunity, as arranged by the Communications office, must not engage in actions that could be seen as campaigning and can only discuss the topic of the municipal election to provide general information on processes and procedures.

4. Municipal spokesperson(s) and responsibilities

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Council and designated staff spokespersons will communicate accurately and effectively the decisions of Council or senior management, without prejudice.

4.1 All designated Municipal Spokespersons identified in this Policy will receive media training to be provided by Communications.

4.2 Mayor and/or Deputy Mayor

The Mayor acts as the spokesperson for Council. On occasions when the Mayor is not present, not able, or unwilling to respond to media inquiries or attend functions, the Deputy Mayor is the alternate. If the Deputy Mayor also cannot act, then Councillors will serve as the alternate on a rotating basis unless deemed appropriate to be addressed by the CAO.

4.3 Chief Administrative Officer

The Chief Administrative Office (CAO) is the spokesperson for administrative and operational issues of a significant nature, but inquiries may be directed to a Department Director or staff subject matter expert regarding specific programs or projects.

4.4 Clerk and/or Deputy Clerk

The Clerk is the spokesperson for any questions related to procedural matters of Council, Boards and Committees.

4.5 Communications

Communications Division staff manage the Municipality's media relations, identifies appropriate spokespersons, and ensures that the information provided to the media or spokespersons is timely, accurate, relevant, and approved by the appropriate subject matter expert. The Manager, Communications can also serve as a general spokesperson for the Municipality where appropriate and necessary.

4.6 Municipal staff

Municipal staff have an active role in assisting the Communications with messaging and media relations, including:

- identifying proactive media relations opportunities and potentially contentious issues that may attract media, stakeholder, or public attention to communications

- working in partnership with Communications to draft effective and timely information, and ensure all information is factual
- referring all media inquiries to Communications in order to help ensure the Municipality has a consistent, strategic and effective approach to communications
- acting as Municipal spokesperson only after identified, designated as subject matter expert by Communications.
- notifying Communications of errors noticed in print, online or radio messaging related to the Municipality.

5. Issues Management and Emergency Communications

Issues management communications is managed by the Communications Division, in consultation and coordination with the Mayor's and the CAO's offices, except in the event of an emergency.

5.1 Where communication of an emergency or critical event is required (i.e., major accident, fire, etc.), on-scene and post-event communications and media relations is managed by incident command (Fire and Emergency Services or Police). Communications may assist Fire and Emergency Services with messaging, as required. Communications for the Port Hope Police Service and the Ontario Provincial Police is managed by their own organizations internally.

5.2 In the event of a crisis that is not an emergency, Communications will arrange an appropriate crisis management plan to manage the messaging.

5.3 During a declared emergency, the dissemination of public information and the media relations approach is outlined in the Municipality's Emergency Plan. Under the Plan, a designated Emergency Information Officer is the main point of contact for the media and the Public Information Officer is the main point of contact for the public.

6. Website and Social Media Communications

The Municipality's corporate website (porthope.ca) and tourism website (visitporthope.ca) as well as their respective social media accounts are managed by the Communications and the Marketing and Tourism divisions, who administer the overall strategy and direction of the website and social media content respectively. Content (both copy and imagery) is contributed by designated staff in each department, at the direction of the department director or manager. The Social Media Policy outlines the Municipality's approach to social media communications.

Staff contributing information and imagery to the website must comply with the guides and protocols for website content, including the Writing for Web Style Guide and the Content Management System Manual. Staff must also adhere to the Brand Guidelines document.