



**CITY OF HAMILTON**  
**CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE**  
**Communications and Strategic Initiatives**

<b>TO:</b>	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
<b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>	February 15, 2023
<b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b>	Media Relations Program Review - Media Accreditation Policy (CM23008) (City Wide)
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	City Wide
<b>PREPARED BY:</b>	Matthew Grant (905) 977-8045
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Matthew Grant Director, Communications and Strategic Initiatives City Manager's Office
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (a) That Council adopt the City of Hamilton's Media Accreditation Policy and Procedure (Appendix A), as presented;
- (b) That Council authorize staff to enter into Media Centre User Agreements for regular users and Per Use Agreements for temporary users of the Media Centre agreements as outlined in the Major Terms and Conditions overview (Appendix B);
- (c) That Council authorize the creation of a new Media category for parking passes, which would allow a single pass to be shared between pre-determined vehicles associated with a specific media outlet.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City of Hamilton is committed to openness, transparency, and an informed public and recognizes that the news media is essential in achieving those goals.

The recommendations and associated resource allocations and re-allocations included are in addition to the media and the public's current ability to access City information,

City Council proceedings and related information; and no reductions or restrictions to existing information are contemplated in this report.

In late 2021, the Communications Division began reviewing its media relations program as part of an overall review of its operations as directed by the City Manager. The review occurred in two phases, which included an assessment of core service levels and a review of amenities designed to assist the media in their work.

Phase two consultations focused on media-related amenities at City Hall and included a broad range of Hamilton media outlets. Consultation efforts included tours of the new Media Centre space prior to a competitive bid process for the space's technology, a formal survey, and one-on-one interviews with the Director of Communications and Strategic Initiatives.

Common areas of agreement among media outlets consulted highlighted engagement with the need to have eligibility standards, often referred to as accreditation, governing access to the space as well as general agreement that those standards should not be developed or overseen by the City or members of Hamilton media. The majority of media also agreed on the need for appropriate security and after-hours access to the space.

Staff recommended the use of third-party, self-regulatory standards bodies as a form of objective criteria, which the majority of those media consulted deemed appropriate. Staff confirmed the majority of Hamilton media are already members of one of the self-regulatory bodies and confirmed eligibility of non-members who regularly cover City business, including post-secondary-institutions with dedicated media.

Accredited media would be offered access passes to the City's Media Centre and press conference area after signing a User Agreement. Accredited media that do not want to sign a user agreement will be provided with a digital access pass to provide for virtual attendance at press conferences and announcements.

In the coming months, Communications staff plan to implement further improvements to the City's media relations program, including the development of better online media resources, media training and education for key City staff, and the creation of dedicated media relations resources in the division to better prioritize requests. All improvements are contemplated to come from existing resources.

### **Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable**

### **FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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**Financial:** The Media Centre was fully funded from existing operating budgets. Recovered user fees received into the designated account to be used to offset ongoing facility costs associated with the Media Centre.

**Staffing:** No staffing implications beyond reprioritization of existing headcount.

**Legal:** Legal Services reviewed the proposed policies and raised no legal concerns.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The City of Hamilton is committed to openness, transparency, and an informed public and recognizes that the news media is essential in achieving those goals.

The City's Communications and Strategic Initiatives division further recognizes the need for a clear and inclusive policy framework concerning its media relations activities, which supports both traditional and new media.

In late 2021, the Communications Division began reviewing its media relations program as part of a broader divisional review directed by the City Manager in the summer of 2020. The media relations portion of the program review occurred in two phases. Phase one focused on service levels, including the City's provision of proactive news and information to the media and efforts to help media access information and subject matter experts. Phase one also included discussions and review of the amenities and support offered to the press. Phase two focused specifically on the physical and digital amenities made available to the media and how those amenities should be accessed.

Phase one of the review, which concluded in the spring of 2022, concluded there were a number of areas which needed improvement related to City service levels, with the most frequent feedback received related to the need to make City subject matter experts more regularly available for interviews. Phase one also concluded the need to better explain the use of the City's Freedom of Information (FOI) processes, that the quality and availability of City video resources used by media should be assessed and improved, and that the physical space offered to the media at City Hall was too small, was not meeting their needs, and was not well used.

Media with access to the former media room were informed in the spring of 2022, prior to City Hall moving to hybrid Council meetings, that the space on the second floor would be repurposed and that a new space was being developed for their use. An interim measure of additional seating in Council Chambers was made available for media use, which would allow for physical distancing in the event that a significant number of media members wished to attend Council meetings in person. The former media room was

repurposed as a space to support wedding ceremonies at City Hall for use by City Clerks.

As first communicated to City Council members in March 2022, the location for the new Media Centre is located on the basement level of City Hall and was selected in consultation with the City's Energy, Fleet and Facilities Division. The new location offers office space that is significantly larger than the previous room and will accommodate more local media and visitors and provide the ability to appropriately physically distance. The new Media Centre also offers secure storage for expensive broadcast equipment as well as a dedicated area to develop a press conference centre, which would allow the City to stream and record press and public announcements in high-quality video using its own resources. The need for enhanced City streaming capabilities became clear during the pandemic.

Following discussions with staff from Corporate Security, Information Technology, Procurement, and the Energy, Fleet and Facilities Divisions, Communications staff conducted a second phase of consultation with the media, specifically related to the development of the new Media Centre. This second phase of consultations began in September and concluded in December 2022 and included pre and post procurement consultation efforts with several Hamilton media. Outlets that accepted consultation invitations included the Hamilton Spectator, Hamilton Community News, CHCH TV, CBC Hamilton, CHML and the Bay Observer. Community partners including Cable 14 and Mohawk College also accepted invitations to participate.

The consultation included a pre-procurement media tour of the space, a formal survey, one-on-one meetings with the Director of Communications and Strategic Initiatives, a final wrap-up meeting and update emails related to survey and overall consultation results.

Procurement in the form of a Request for Quotations (RFQ) concluded following the media tour and resulted in an award to MacLean's Media Systems for an approximate price of \$138,000 plus a \$12,000 contingency. Funds were primarily earmarked for technology to support the development of a press conference centre with funds coming from existing resources, primarily from the Communications Division's 2022 operating budget.

During consultations, media identified several priorities the City should consider as part of its efforts to develop a new Media Centre, including:

- The need to have a standard, often referred to as accreditation, governing access to the Media Centre.
- Assurances that journalists using the Media Centre would be subject to City workplace-related policies and enjoy a professional, safe environment.
- The ability to access the Media Centre outside of regular business hours.

- The development and implementation of appropriate security measures related to the space, both during and outside regular business hours.

Discussions with Corporate Security identified the need for individualized security passes to provide accredited reporters with access to the public areas of City Hall, limited elevator access, and access to a secure area in the basement of City Hall. The pass would also provide access to the Media Centre. Corporate Security indicated that this type of privileged access for journalists at City Hall, including after-hours access, would be the first of its kind at the City of Hamilton and proposed security features and after-hours access similar to those included in the City of Toronto's Media Accreditation policy and procedures, which were approved and implemented in 2012 (Appendix C).

Consultation participants confirmed that in the development or use of any standards governing access to the Media Centre and its resources, their preference was that standards not be created or overseen by either Hamilton media or City staff.

City staff recommended recognizing membership in two existing, independent self-regulating media standards councils as an objective, third-party criteria.

The Canadian Broadcasting Standards Council (CBSC), includes private sector television and radio media outlets regulated by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, and the National News Media Council, includes members of media outlets not subject to regulation including the majority of Canada's newspapers as well as digital outlets that produce online news sites, newsletters and blogs.

The majority of Hamilton media, as well as provincial and national media, are already members of one of the Council's with remaining media members eligible for membership.

Should Hamilton City Council approve the recommendations in this report, it is anticipated that media accreditation could be completed for the majority of Hamilton media outlets within days as the standard recommended is one that most members of Hamilton, provincial and national media already meet. Following accreditation, the Media Centre could be made available to accredited media in a timely manner with an estimated start date in March of 2023.

Council should also expect further improvements related to the City's media relations program in the coming year as a result of the program review, including:

- the creation of dedicated media relations staff in the Communications division as a result of a reprioritization of resources
- the completion of media training and education for staff in divisions of interest to the media

- the development of improved online media resources for members of Hamilton's press community

Agreements with community and educational partners, which will come forward in a future report, will take weeks to months to complete, with students and community television partners provided access to the facility late Spring or early summer, subject to Council approval.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS**

- The Media Accreditation Policy and Procedures would clarify the definition of accredited media for the City of Hamilton. It would also provide access to the City Hall Media Centre from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm for accredited media

## **RELEVANT CONSULTATION**

### **Canadian Broadcasting Standards Council (CBSC)**

Reviewed materials and had discussions with CBSC related to their membership and criteria.

### **City of Toronto Corporate Communications**

Correspondence with Toronto Communications staff to understand the scope of their media centre, press conference facilities, and accreditation process.

### **City of Hamilton Corporate Communications Staff**

Interviewed staff involved in media relations as well as records and notes related to City interactions with media.

### **City of Hamilton Corporate Security**

Discussed providing media access to secure areas of City Hall outside business hours. Input informed security-related recommendations and information in this report.

### **City of Hamilton Corporate Real Estate Office**

Worked with Corporate Real Estate office on the Media Centre User Agreement.

### **City of Hamilton Facilities and Fleet division**

Discussions with the Facilities and Fleet division identified available space for the Media Centre and associated, non-RFQ capital costs as well as ongoing operational costs.

### **City of Hamilton Legal Services**

Legal Services has confirmed the City has the authority to set its own media accreditation standards as is done in other public sector organizations.

### **Hamilton-Area Media**

Held pre and post procurement discussions on desired Media Centre amenities as well as standards governing eligibility and use of the Media Centre. These consultations most significantly shaped and influenced the recommendations contained in this report.

### **National NewsMedia Council**

Reviewed available material and corresponded with Council to confirm current membership as well as eligibility of membership for non-traditional media, including various forms of digital only media.

### **Mohawk College – School of Creative Industries**

Discussed learning opportunities for students and City staff in general and specific to the Media Centre. Confirmed College's interest in participating in work-integrated learning opportunities to support the City's work and student learning. Discussed and confirmed support for standards governing the space, which is also proposed to serve as a learning environment for journalism and communications students.

## **ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

Analysis and rationale for the recommendations contained in this Report and broken down as follows:

### **Recommendation One - *That Council Adopt the Proposed City of Hamilton Media Accreditation Policy and Procedures, as contained in Appendix "A" of this Report:***

The City of Hamilton's Media Centre and associated services propose to offer privileges to current and future members of the news media not available to members of the general public. These privileges include access to professional office space, extended hours of access to City Hall, and assistance from staff dedicated to media relations that will assist members of the press in accessing public information and interviews with subject matter experts.

During consultations with leaders of numerous Hamilton media outlets, media supported the use of standards, often called accreditation, to ensure that the Media Centre offered a professional environment inclusive of traditional and non-traditional news media committed to generally accepted journalism principles. The majority of Hamilton media representatives consulted further provided the view that the development and application of any standard governing Media Centre eligibility should not rest with members of local media or staff from the City of Hamilton.

The use of media accreditation is standard practice in private and public sector organizations worldwide, though details of how accreditation is decided and applied vary. Media accreditation is widely used in Canada's public sector, including in

provincial legislatures, courts, crown corporations, and several large municipalities, including the City of Toronto, which has had its accreditation policy in place since 2012. Through their accreditation standards, Canadian public sector organizations frequently make clear through accreditation that they will offer special privileges to members of a "bona fide" or "recognized" media organization, with members of the media frequently asked to produce letters of request for accreditation from their employers. Public sector accreditation standards often make clear that media privileges are not available to individuals involved in related work, including marketing, advertising, advocacy, non-profit work, paid advertorials, sales, personal interest websites or blogs, or similar work that would not constitute professional journalism.

In recognition of media's preference that accreditation standards not be developed by Hamilton media or the City of Hamilton, City Communications staff proposed using independent, self-regulatory bodies that abide by generally accepted journalism principles and standards. Staff further recommended that two organizations be used – one for broadcast media and one for online and print media – in recognition that television and radio news media are subject to government regulation and oversight through the Broadcast Act and Canadian Radio and Television Commission, while newspapers and digital media remain largely unregulated.

Staff recommended using membership in the Canadian Broadcasting Standards Council (CBSC) for broadcast media and a complimentary body for newspapers and digital media, the National NewsMedia Council (NNC), as the City's accreditation standard. The CBSC is an industry-funded, self-regulatory organization for private broadcasters and administers standards established by its members. Similarly, the NNC is "Canada's self-regulatory body for news media" and includes newspapers and digital media, including online news sites, digital newsletters, and blogs.

Membership in the Canadian Broadcasting Standards Council is for private broadcasters and requires them to agree to be held to various standards, including journalism standards by the Radio Television and Digital News Association, and to pay \$300 in annual fees.

Membership in the National NewsMedia Council requires applicants to have their own journalistic standard that is complimentary to the Canadian Association of Journalists Code of Ethics and that the applicant agrees to be held to that standard. Annual fees start at \$140 per year and are on a sliding scale based on circulation.

The vast majority of Hamilton-area media already belong to either of the Councils (Appendix D), meaning they would immediately be eligible for accreditation. Future applicants would similarly be considered eligible for accreditation upon producing proof of membership. Staff further confirmed with the National NewsMedia Council that Hamilton's non-traditional, digital-only media outlets are eligible for membership.



The majority of Hamilton media consulted acknowledged membership in one of these two organizations as an appropriate standard, and no alternatives to their use were offered.

It should be noted that public broadcasters, including the CBC and TVO, are not members of standards councils as their mandates are legislated. Though largely independent, they are ultimately accountable to legislative bodies, including Parliament and the Legislature of Ontario, respectively. Under Hamilton's accreditation framework, both organizations would be considered eligible for accreditation.

**Recommendation Two –** *That Council Authorize Staff to Enter into a Media Centre Use and Facility Per Use Agreements with Accredited Media Outlets and Authorize Access to Accredited Media to the City Hall Media Centre Between the Hours of 8:00 am and 10:00 pm, Monday to Friday:*

As a supporting document to the City's proposed Media Accreditation Policy and Procedures, staff also recommends using licensing agreements that outline the terms of service for the use of the Media Room, including adherence to City of Hamilton policies. This agreement is similar to those used in other jurisdictions, including the City of Toronto.

The creation of a user agreement would provide a common frame of reference for the terms, conditions, and expectations between the City of Hamilton and facility users, as well as between facility users themselves, and would form the basis of governance of the facility. Administration of the facility would occur in partnership between City of Hamilton staff and media organizations through the form of a membership council, with the City maintaining sole authority over all aspects of safety and security as well as the assets in the press conference centre.

Following the signing of a Media Centre User Agreement, accredited media will be provided with a security pass that provides them physical access to the Media Centre and press conference area as well as after hours access to City Hall. Facility Per Use Agreements provide accredited media with access to the Media Centre on an as needed basis. Special passes can also be created for education and community partners by agreement.

Accredited media that do not want to sign a Media Centre User Agreement or a Facility Per Use Agreement will be provided with the option of a digital access pass to provide for virtual attendance at press conferences and announcements.

**Recommendation Three** - *That Council Authorize the Creation of a New Media Category for Parking Passes, Which Would Allow a Single Pass to be Shared Between Pre-Determined Vehicles Associated with a Specific Media Outlet*

During consultations, the majority of Hamilton media outlets consulted supported making parking passes available to individuals engaged in reporting at City Hall, both for reasons of convenience and safety for those working late. As a single outlet may have a number of journalists attending City Hall at various points, often intermittently, it is recommended that media passes be able to be transferred between pre-identified vehicles at the same media outlet to minimize parking-related expenses.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION**

N/A

**ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN**

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Hamiltonians have a high level of trust and confidence in their City government.

**APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED**

Appendix “A” – City of Hamilton Media Accreditation Policy and Procedures

Appendix “B” – Media Centre User Agreement

Appendix “C” – City of Toronto Media Accreditation Policy and Procedures

Appendix “D” – Membership in Self-Regulatory Standards Councils