



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

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	March 22, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Media Relations Program Review – Update to Media Relations Policy (CM23007(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Matthew Grant (905) 977-8045
SUBMITTED BY:	Matthew Grant Director, Communications and Strategic Initiatives City Manager's Office
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) That City of Hamilton's Revised Media Relations Policy (**Appendix A**), as amended at the February 15, 2023 General Issues Committee Meeting be approved;
- (b) That the full implementation of the policy be delayed from July 31, 2023 to August 31, 2023 to allow for necessary preparations and training to occur.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The presentation of this revised media relations policy follows Council discussion on Report [CM23007](#) at the February 15, 2023 meeting of the General Issues Committee. The February 15 meeting follows a deferral of the report from the January 18, 2023 General Issues Committee meeting. The policy is largely the same as the original staff policy approved in May 2012 with a few key changes that were recommended following consultation with members of the press.

The updated Media Relations Policy seeks to address concerns members of the press raised during consultations. The primary concern raised was an overreliance by the City on written response to media questions and the challenges experienced by members of the media in securing interviews with City subject matter experts to do their reporting.

The other core differences in the updated policy include the requirement for the City to stream and archive press conferences and announcements as well as a requirement for the City to provide clearer rationale to media when it directs them to Freedom of Information legislation.

At their February 15, 2023 meeting, members of the General Issues Committee requested two amendments to the policy as presented, which include:

- That the requirement to stream and archive press conferences “wherever possible” be amended to ensure that the City will stream and archive all press conferences;
- That the policy makes clear that while journalism codes of ethics encourage reporters to identify human and physical sources of information in the majority of cases, that the City of Hamilton will continue to respect journalists’ decisions to grant anonymity to sources when they deem it necessary to do so. City staff will not ask journalists to identify individuals who have been granted anonymity under any circumstances.

All other text in the policy remains as presented to the February 15, 2023 General Issues Committee.

Staff are recommending that the initial implementation date be delayed by one month to allow for appropriate training and preparation.

Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Training expenses, which are anticipated to come from existing operational budgets.

Staffing: No staffing implications beyond reprioritization of existing headcount

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

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For historical background and analysis on the updated Media Relations Policy, Council and members of the public should review report [CM23007](#), presented to Hamilton’s General Issues Committee on February 15, 2023.

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The updated policy was amended following the February 15, 2023 meeting to incorporate changes asked for by members of the General Issues Committee.

In particular, the policy was updated to reflect Council's wish to have all press conferences streamed and archived, including those that happen outside the City's new press conference centre, and that the City affirm its commitment to continue to respect any decisions by journalists to cover City Hall to offer anonymity to sources in the course of their reporting.

These elements will be implemented through the City's ongoing support for the media through its Media Relations Program, which will include three dedicated full-time-employees (existing staff complement) and the use of a new media centre and press conference centre in City Hall.

The updated policy is largely the same as it was when it was approved as a staff policy in 2012, save for the following changes:

- That the City will prioritize offering media interviews with subject matter experts over written responses when requested;
- That the City will stream and archive all press conferences online for view by media and members of the public;
- That the City will ensure it provides clear rationale to members of the media when the City asks members of the press to go through a Freedom of Information Process when requesting information from the City.

The updated policy follows consultation with local media, including media outlets that most used the City's core media relations services, a review of feedback by members of the press on social media, and a review of approximately 3,000 documented interactions with members of the press who used the City's media relations service.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

- The updated Media Relations Policy as approved by Council would replace the 2012 Media Relations Policy as approved by the Senior Management Team;
- The updated Media Relations Policy is designed to complement the intent of The Routine Disclosure and Active Dissemination Policy by providing clarity to the media on occasions when the City is unable to release City-owned information to them upon request.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.
OUR Mission: To provide high-quality, cost-conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community in a sustainable manner.
OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

City of Hamilton Corporate Communications Staff

Interviews with corporate communications staff responsible for media relations provided an overview of their experience serving members of the press and confirmed the validity of concerns expressed by the media.

Hamilton-Area Media

Hamilton-Area media were invited to participate in several rounds of consultation in the Media Relations Program Review. An initial contingent of media (CHCH, Hamilton Spectator, Hamilton Community News, and CBC) was invited to participate in the program review of the Media Relations Program’s core services and associated service levels.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis for the initial recommendations in the media relations report can be found in report CM23007.

The changes requested by members of the General Issues Committee on February 15, 2023 should not materially change the City’s updated policy or the services and privileges it provides members of the media who are reporting on City Hall.

The change of requiring all press conferences to be live streamed will require additional preparation and analysis for off-site press conferences, such as the media tour of the Burlington Street sewage spill location. Staff will seek to use technology outside the press conference centre, including the use of cell phones and their video cameras, to ensure it can accommodate Council’s direction to ensure all press conferences are streamed and archived.

The City does not anticipate any changes to its operations as a result of Council request for clarity around the use of anonymous sources. While City staff does ask for clarifications around the source of information in media’s reporting, staff do not request the identification of sources used in reporting where anonymity has clearly been granted and will continue to follow this practice.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

N/A

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Our People and Performance

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

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Report CM23007(a) – Proposed City of Hamilton Media Relations Policy updated from 2012