

Media Relations Policy	 Hamilton	January 2023
Communications & Strategic Initiatives Division		Supersedes Policy: Communications Policy – Media Relations (2012)
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Revised

Media Relations Policy	
PURPOSE	<p>The purpose of this policy is to ensure professionalism and consistency in how the City of Hamilton works with the members of the media. The policy also includes specific procedures for successfully delivering media relations services.</p> <p>A key priority for the City of Hamilton is maintaining strong relationships with the media to remain transparent and accountable to the residents.</p> <p>The City's Resident Survey results indicate the news media is an important and effective vehicle for communicating information about the City and its goals, increasing public awareness and education regarding municipal projects, initiatives, issues, events, bylaws, and policies.</p>
SCOPE	<p>The Media Relations Policy and all related schedules apply to all employees of the City of Hamilton, including full-time, temporary, and contract employees. This policy is also applicable to current volunteers, students and interns.</p> <p>This policy does not apply to Elected Officials or to Council appointed Citizen Members of City agencies, boards, and commissions.</p> <p>This policy was written and is maintained by the City's Communications & Strategic Initiatives Division and will be reviewed every three years.</p> <p>This policy is supported by the City's Media Accreditation Policy and Procedures to ensure that City resources used to aid the media in their news gathering and distribution are used effectively and efficiently and in alignment with the Communications and Strategic Initiatives mandate to assist members of the media.</p> <p>This policy does not apply to members of the general public whose inquiries are served by the City's Customer Contact Centre and not by the Communications & Strategic Initiatives Division.</p>

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DEFINITIONS	
Employee	City of Hamilton employees, including but not limited to, regular, temporary and contract employees (and for the purpose of this policy only, unpaid volunteers, students, and interns) will fall under the collective term of “employees”, and all programs, divisions and departments that make up the City of Hamilton.
Spokesperson(s)	<p>Individuals representing the City of Hamilton, City of Hamilton departments, programs, and initiatives in an official capacity publicly and in the media.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor or designate is the chief spokesperson for the City and shall be lead spokesperson on major new or renewed City programs/services/projects/initiatives and issues of significant public interest. • City Manager or designate shall be the spokesperson on major staff or administrative issues or initiatives. • Departmental General Manager or designate shall be the spokesperson on issues or programs that fall under the department that they serve. • Medical Officer of Health or designate shall be the spokesperson on public health matters, the provincial Health Protection and Promotion Act (and other appropriate legislation) and provincially mandated guidelines. • City Clerk or designate shall be the spokesperson regarding Council agendas, and Council decisions of record, administration of the Municipal Freedom of Information Act, and municipal elections. • Director of Communications or designate shall be the spokesperson on issues of public interest and can stand in as corporate spokesperson for any of the positions above • Spokesperson Designates such as directors/managers shall be spokespeople on issues or programs for which they are the subject matter experts • Subject Matter Experts - other staff shall be the

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Media	<p>spokesperson on issues that they are acknowledged content experts subject to approval of the program manager, director or general manager as outlined in a list of authorized departmental spokespersons. The scope of media involvement is limited to specific areas of expertise only.</p> <p>News media refers to members of the news media that provide news to the general public or targeted public and can include print media (newspapers and magazines), broadcast news (radio and television) and internet-based news (online version of traditional news publications as well as standalone online news media).</p>
Media Centre	<p>The City's Media Centre refers to the dedicated media space on the basement level of City Hall, which includes office facilities, Internet access, a broadcast media lock-up area, and the City's press conference facility.</p>
POLICY	<p>The City of Hamilton is an open, transparent and accountable publicly-funded organization and values the role of the media. This includes communicating City news and information to the public through the news media and reporting on the public's views and opinions of the City of Hamilton.</p> <p>The City of Hamilton recognizes the vital role news media has in City communications and the need to respond to media requests with promptness, courtesy, transparency, and respect. The City welcomes the opportunity to communicate accurately and clearly about City programs, services, and issues.</p> <p>The City is to maintain positive working relationships with all forms of media (e.g. print, broadcast and Internet) that reach national, regional, local, neighbourhood, community, and diverse audiences.</p> <p>The City produces and distributes information to the media that align with journalistic news values, and is timely, clear, accurate, and accessible.</p> <p>When City information and/or news is first delivered to the media, the Mayor's Office and/or Corporate Communications will be responsible for that information's release, with all supporting communications from other areas of the corporation to follow.</p> <p>The City maintains an open, transparent communications process</p>

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that enables media to have access to City decision-makers and knowledgeable staff.

Where preferred by members of the media, the City will prioritize delivering information via media interviews with subject matter experts over written responses.

Staff will make every effort to respond information and interview requests in a timely manner and in consideration of reasonable deadlines, which are often the same day the request is made.

The City strives to be transparent by default. If the information that is not in the custody or control of the City, Media requests may need to be processed through an FOI request under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. Any referral to the FOI process shall contain specific reasons for this decision.

As a priority the City will record and make accessible the content of all press conferences and announcements to members of the media and the public via livestreaming and the cataloguing of recorded content online.

While journalism codes of ethics encourage reporters to identify the information that is informing the facts in their reporting (physical and human sources of information) in the majority of cases, the City of Hamilton will 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.

Staff are available to respond to media inquiries during regular operating hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The City will only respond to inquiries made outside business hours if the City deems them to be of an urgent operational nature or an emergency situation. Other requests will be addressed during regular business hours.

The City's media relations activities comply with provincial legislation, Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Personal Health Information Protection Act, City of Hamilton corporate policies, bylaws and council directives.

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PROCEDURE	
City of Hamilton Employee interacting with the news media in an official City of Hamilton capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff must refer media inquiries to the authorized spokesperson/subject matter expert for the department or project and notify corporate communications. City employees who are not designated spokespeople are not authorized to make statements to the media and/or in public discussion on behalf of the City. This does not include communications in the course of their regular duties, such as presentations at Council meetings or public meetings where media are present. If contacted by a media representative, City staff shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treat the reporter as a client, being courteous and professional. Advise the reporter that the request will be forwarded to corporate communications. Help provide timely responses to the media by collecting the following information, if possible, to be forwarded along to your department's Senior/Communications Officer and your manager: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> journalist's name and who they work for contact information (telephone number and/or email address) deadline topic of the interview
Corrections sought by the City of Hamilton	The City of Hamilton will seek corrections and provide factual information where reporting (print, broadcast, radio, online and social media) is believed to be factually incorrect.
Complaints by members of the media about City media relations service	Complaints by members of the media about City media relations service should be raised by the members of the media directly with the individual who provided the service. If necessary, the complaint can be forwarded to the Manager of Communications followed by the Director of Communications, as necessary.
Liaising with Communications Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications Officers act as a primary media liaison. Communications Officers shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine appropriate media spokespeople (or designate spokespeople). Ensure all relevant and available information has been provided to the media. Work with the media's deadlines, and/or advise on

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<p>Role of Designated City Spokesperson(s)</p>	<p>feasibility of meeting deadlines depending on nature of request; they can often provide factual and background information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advise and ensure the Mayor, members of Council, and senior staff (i.e. City Manager, and/or other staff/officials) are informed when appropriate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior/Communications Officers provide advice on, and develop communications strategies and plans that incorporate proactive media relations by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ coordinating, reviewing and distributing materials provided to media such as media releases, media advisories, public service announcements, media conferences, letters to editor, media tours, interviews and other tactics to communicate with media members. ▪ Reviewing media materials for accuracy and appropriateness with the designated contact person(s) and that materials are produced in Canadian Press (CP) Style. ▪ Retain copies of all media releases distributed to the media. ▪ Track media coverage, and media requests. • Follow all City of Hamilton corporate policies and procedures. • Complete the appropriate media training in consultation with the Senior/Communications Officer. • Consult with Senior/Communications Officer in advance of media interviews or providing information to the media. • Spokespeople designates such as directors/managers shall be spokespeople on issues or programs for which they are the subject matter experts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other staff can act as a spokesperson on issues that they are acknowledged content experts on, subject to approval of the Program Manager, Director, or General Manager in consultation with the designated Senior/Communications Officer. ▪ The scope of media involvement is limited to specific areas of expertise and responsibility only. ▪ Understand the distinction between general policy or program information, and personal information about an individual when responding to such an inquiry.
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HISTORY	This Policy replaces the former Communications Policy – Media Relations (2012)
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