

Municipality of South Huron Policy

Policy Name: Communication Policy
Policy Number: A09-COR-01-2018
Corporate Services
Effective Date: 2018-18-2018
Supersedes:
Last Modified:

Purpose:

As cited in the Municipal Act, 2001 “it is the role of Council to ensure the accountability and transparency of the operations of the municipality, including the activities of the senior management¹”. Furthermore, in its Strategic Plan, South Huron Council has affirmed a commitment to providing exceptional public service to the community through enhanced communication with stakeholders².

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines that ensure communication with stakeholders of the Municipality is open, efficient, effective and timely.

Scope:

The Municipality’s success in meeting its mandate and mission depends on creating a culture of communication within the organization and with the community. The Municipality of South Huron will adopt a proactive mindset with respect to communication planning, respond to the information needs of stakeholders and focus on two-way communication with the community.

This policy will apply to all internal and external communications issued by the Municipality of South Huron on all platforms.

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the Municipality of South Huron to:

1. Provide citizens with accurate, objective, clear, complete and timely information about policies, programs, services and initiatives of the Municipality;

¹ Municipal Act, 2001 s. 224 (d.1)

² Communication is an important theme in the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, and both the Phase 1 (Policy) and Phase 2 (Implementation Plan) provide the core of an overall communications strategy.

2. Use a variety of communication means to accommodate diverse communication needs;
3. Ensure Municipal information, both online and in print, is accessible, identifiable and responsive to the needs of our community;
4. Ensure stakeholders know where to find information about their local government and are able to complete routine business transactions with the Municipality in a timely manner;
5. Ensure citizens are able to attend and participate in public meetings; and,
6. Provide citizens with opportunities to participate and impact local decision making.

Corporate Identity and Visibility:

A clear and consistent visual identity assists the public in recognizing and understanding the work of the Municipality. The Municipal logo will be used on municipal vehicles, on letterheads, on agendas, on municipal publications, on the website and on signage when appropriate.

External use of the corporate logo must receive prior approval from the CAO.

Corporate Spokesperson

News media play an important role in disseminating information to the public. All media inquiries will be directed to the CAO for response or delegation.

The CAO will direct all appropriate inquiries regarding Council matters to the Mayor, who is the Municipality's chief spokesperson regarding policies, priorities, and decisions.

While it is recognized that Council members are able to speak to the media in their capacity as individual councillors, members will be honest and respectful of each other in their communications, and will communicate accurately with the media regarding municipal business.

Municipal Website

The website southhuron.ca is the Municipality's primary repository of public information. It will be maintained with current information, archive agendas and minutes of official meetings, and include a calendar of municipal meetings and events open to the public.

The website will redirect comments from the public to appropriate collection methods to ensure they are received and reviewed by staff.

The website will contain the e-mail contact information of municipal officials to promote effective two-way communication.

Online municipal services will be expanded where appropriate, as resources allow, to enhance customer service.

Press Releases and Communication Products

The Municipality of South Huron will issue press releases regarding municipal issues and activities. Press releases will be issued by the CAO regarding administrative, operational and procedural matters. For press releases regarding Council business, the Mayor is the signatory.

Advertising

The purpose of advertising is to help the Municipality achieve its objectives in serving the public interest. The Municipality will place advertisements in any medium deemed appropriate to inform residents about their rights, responsibilities, municipal policies, programs, services, initiatives, upcoming meeting, dangers or risks to public safety.

The Municipality does not purchase ads for general promotion of the Municipality.

Citizens Communicating with Council

Citizens requesting action from the Municipality or wishing to ensure their communication is addressed formally by all of Council must send their communication in writing to the Municipal Clerk's office and be addressed to all of Council.

Any communication in writing addressed to all members of Council will be added to a Council agenda, subject to the Municipality's Procedural By-law³, so that Council can formally deal with the matter. Formal written responses will be sent to all communications listed on a Council agenda.

Citizens communicating verbally with any member of Council is considered to be general in nature and will not receive a formal response.

Citizens communicating with any single member of Council in writing is considered to be general in nature and will not receive a formal municipal response unless specifically requested in writing addressed to the Clerk, or

³ Section 6 of the Procedural By-law details procedures for handling Council communications, delegations and petitions.

unless the member of Council puts the matter before Council on a Council meeting agenda.

Citizens Attending Meetings

The current Council meeting chamber is not always large enough to accommodate the public in attendance. When large numbers of attendees are anticipated, meetings will be moved to a suitable Municipal facility to provide appropriate seating for the public.

Except as required by section 239 of the Municipal Act, all Municipal Council meetings will provide an opportunity for members of the public to speak through a listed delegation procedure as outlined in the Municipal Procedural Bylaw.

Members of the public will be provided an opportunity to delegate/present matters to Council according to the Municipal Procedural Bylaw.

Social Media use by Council and Committee Members

The Municipality recognizes the importance of social media as an additional communication tool for the purpose of sharing information and encouraging dialogue with the public. Council and committee members engaging in social media should follow the same principles and guidelines as engaging in traditional forms of communication - by using sound judgment, common sense and by adhering to the Municipality's Code of Conduct (Schedule "A" to By-law #42-2016).

Council and Committee Members will also abide by the following guidelines when using social media:

- a. Voice of Council
 - i. Since Council Members are perceived to represent the will and opinions of Council when speaking in any public forum, Council members are strongly encouraged not to submit posts to social media that are not reflective of, or that contradict, the will or position of Council on a given matter.
- b. Maintain Confidentiality & Privacy
 - i. Council Members will not post information discussed during closed or in-camera sessions of Council, private or confidential information about members of Council or Municipal employees, or information or situations involving named or pictured individuals without their permission.
- c. Ensure Accuracy

- i. Members have an obligation to ensure their posts are accurate and not misleading.
 - ii. Members should refrain from cutting and pasting emails from staff or others into posts without clear context and permissions as these are written for a specific audience for a specific purpose.
- d. Self-Monitoring for Personal Sites
- i. It is recommended that Members with personal web or social media sites maintain them with current information. Static sites quickly fall into disuse and pose a risk of confusing the public with outdated information.
 - ii. It is recommended that Members post “Terms of Use” on personal sites that reflect how a Member will deal with abusive, hateful, defamatory, anonymous, profane or otherwise inappropriate comments or content, including information that may jeopardize the privacy of others or harm or jeopardize the reputation of the Municipality, Council, or Administration.
- e. Official Municipal Websites
- i. No Member will create, operate or manage any website or social media site on behalf of the Municipality.

Internal Communication

Open communication within the organization – between Council and Administration and staff – is vital to the effective operation of the Municipality.

- a. Council and Administration:
- i. Requests for decision and information packages are the formal means of communication between Administration and Council. Clear, concise, relevant reports provide Members of Council with the information they need to make decisions on policies, programs, services, and initiatives.
 - ii. Public Announcements will be distributed concurrently to Members of Council, except in urgent situations affecting public health, safety, or danger to persons or property, where every attempt will be made to distribute as soon as possible after distribution to the Media.
- b. Inquiries Made by Members of Council:
- i. The CAO is the contact for all Councillor inquiries.
 - ii. Formal inquiries are directed to the CAO.

- iii. Informal inquiries may be delegated by the CAO to individual staff members who are knowledgeable in the specified area of inquiry.
 - iv. Where a response is required to an inquiry that is expected to attract media attention, the response will be provided to all members of Council and the CAO.
 - v. At no time will a member of Council direct operations or employees of the Municipality.
- c. Foremen, Managers, or Supervisors and Employees:
- i. Effective internal communication is a shared administrative responsibility, led by the CAO and senior administrators.
 - ii. Foremen, Managers, and Supervisors must communicate with employees openly, often, and before information is made public, whenever possible.
 - iii. The communication needs of all employees will be considered including any employees who may not have access to electronic information.
 - iv. Staff will incorporate communication planning into all operations and special projects.