Corporation of the Town of Cobourg

Division: **Office of the CAO**

Department: **Communications**

Policy Title: Media Relations Policy

Effective Date: **May 28, 2025**

Approval Level: Council

Section #
Policy # COMM – OPS2
New Policy #: CAO-035

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The Town of Cobourg is committed to open and transparent communication with the media and members of the public. However, to ensure that information disseminated to the media is accurate and consistent with the Municipality's strategic objectives, all media interactions must be managed by the appropriate staff. This centralized approach helps to maintain message consistency and protects the Municipality from the potential risks of misinformation or unauthorized disclosures.

1.2 The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that the Town of Cobourg maintains a consistent, coordinated, and professional approach to all interactions with the media. This policy seeks to safeguard the Municipality's reputation by ensuring that all communications with the media are accurate, timely, and align with the strategic objectives and policies of the Town of Cobourg.

2.0 Definitions

Authorized Spokesperson – Refers to any Town representative appointed as an authorized media spokesperson with the role of contributing to discussions relating to their field of work or area of expertise, as outlined in this policy.

Social Media – Defined as any web application, website, or web account, including but not limited to Facebook, X, YouTube, Flickr, and blog sites, created and/or maintained by Town of Cobourg staff which facilitates an official Corporate environment for staff to share information about subjects, events or issues relating to the Municipality.

3.0 Policy

3.1 Authorized Spokespersons

3.1.1 Communications Manager

Role: The Communications Manager is the primary point of contact for all media inquiries. They are responsible for preparing and delivering official responses, coordinating interviews, and issuing media releases and public notices.

Authority: The Communications Manager is authorized to speak on behalf of the Municipality on routine matters, provide information that has been pre-approved, and manage the dissemination of public information.

3.1.2 Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

Role: The CAO may speak to the media on matters of strategic importance, organizational changes, or issues that require a higher level of authority. The CAO may authorize divisional Directors or Managers to respond to media requests as the appropriate subject matter experts.

Authority: The CAO may speak to operational matters regarding the Corporation of the Town of Cobourg. Their statements reflect the overall direction and management of the Municipality, and they are authorized to address any media inquiries that have significant implications for the Municipality.

3.1.3 Mayor and Council

Role: The Mayor is the official spokesperson for Municipal Council. Media requests seeking a quote or information from Cobourg Council will be delegated to the Mayor. If the Mayor is not available for comment, the request will then go to the Deputy Mayor followed by individual members of Council as determined by the Mayor.

Authority: Elected officials may speak to the media regarding Council decisions, governance, policy, and other matters of public interest in their official capacities.

While elected officials are encouraged to coordinate with Communications staff, they retain the discretion to comment on issues related to their roles as representatives of the public. However, they must ensure that their statements are aligned with Council decisions and do not contradict established municipal policies.

3.2 Media Inquiry Procedure

3.2.1 Receiving Media Inquiries

All media inquiries must be immediately forwarded to the Communications Manager.

Employees who receive media inquiries should refrain from providing any information or statements and should direct the media to the Communications department, informing the media that all inquiries must be handled by authorized personnel.

The official method of communication for requests from the media is email, phone call or in-person.

3.2.2 Response to Media

Communications staff will consult with relevant department heads, the CAO, and other officials as necessary to gather accurate information and formulate a response.

The Communications department will strive to respond to media inquiries promptly, usually within 48 hours, to ensure that the Municipality is represented accurately and effectively in the media.

All responses must be consistent with the Municipality's official policies, positions, and messaging. Communications staff are responsible for ensuring that information provided to the media aligns with the Municipality's strategic objectives.

3.3 Media Releases and Statements

All media releases, official statements, and public announcements on behalf of the Town of Cobourg must be prepared and distributed by the Communications Department. The Communications Manager will ensure that information has been pre-approved by the appropriate Director or manager. Drafts may be reviewed by the CAO, department heads, or legal counsel as necessary.

3.4 Prohibited Actions

No employee, or individual associated with the Town of Cobourg, except those authorized under this policy, is permitted to speak to the media on behalf of the Municipality. This includes any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information or comments on town operations that have not been approved by the Communications Manager, CAO or appropriate Director. Unauthorized communication may lead to misinformation, conflicting messages, and potential reputational damage.

Unauthorized individuals who provide statements to the media may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with Town policy.

3.5 Social Media and Online Communication

The Town of Cobourg's social media presence is managed by the Communications department. The Communications Manager and authorized staff are permitted to post content, respond to comments, and engage with the public through official municipal social media accounts.

The Communications Manager will have administrative access to all Town of Cobourg

social media accounts. The Communications Department will share access to all accounts, passwords and account information with IT. To ensure continuity of operations, where possible, social media accounts will be linked to Town of Cobourg Communications email communications@cobourg.ca and not to the personal email addresses of account administrators.

Employees or departments are prohibited from creating or eliminating any Town of Cobourg social media account without the approval of the Communications Manager.

3.6 Incident Response

When an crisis occurs, the media have a duty to keep the public informed. The Town of Cobourg is committed to working collaboratively with members of the media to get accurate and important information to residents. However, will do so in a manner that keeps media and Town of Cobourg personnel safe.

When the Town of Cobourg is responding to a call for service, only the Incident Commander, Officer in Charge, Public Information Officer (PIO) or a designated point person, should communicate with media. Personnel responding to the incident must remain focused on their work for the safety and security of themselves and the individuals they are responding to.

3.6.1 Creating a Safety Zone

Due to health and safety, protection of personal or identifiable information, and to ensure the integrity of a potential crime scene, members of the media should not be allowed to enter an active incident site. If it is unclear where the active scene ends and public space begins, the use of scene tape is recommended to cordon off the restricted area. If tape is not used, it is the responsibility of the Incident Commander or designated point person to create a safety zone for media.

Once the incident has been cleared and the scene is safe, the Incident Commander or designated point person may give media a tour of the incident scene.

4.0 Scope

This policy applies to all employees and elected officials of the Town of Cobourg. It governs all forms of media interaction, including but not limited to print, broadcast, and online media, as well as social media platforms.

The policy is applicable in all situations where the media seeks information, commentary, or interviews related to the Municipality's programs, activities, policies, or positions.

In a declared emergency, the roles and responsibilities of staff and Council would follow the Town of Cobourg Emergency Plan.

5.0 Administration

5.1 The Chief Administrative Officer shall designate the Municipal Clerk to implement and administer the terms of this policy and shall establish related operating procedures as required.

5.2 The Manager of Communications oversees the implementation of this policy.

6.0 Cross Reference

All Personnel – Administration - Social Media: HR-AP-A6

All Personnel – Administration – Social Media "Netiquette": HR-AP-A6.1 (procedure)

All Personnel – Administration – Code of Conduct: HR-AP-A11

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