



Media Relations

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Department: Administrative	Authority: CAO
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Supersedes: Press Releases- News Media Information M90/1/11/91	
Related Policy No.: ADM-11	
Related Policy Name: Media Relations	

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 These procedures will provide operational guidance for achieving the goals of the Town of Taber Media Relations Policy.

2.0 OPERATING GUIDELINES

- 2.1 Scope of Procedure:
 - 2.1.1 This Procedure and its corresponding Policy applies inclusively towards the following designations:
 - 2.1.1.1 Mayor and Council of the Town of Taber;
 - 2.1.1.2 All Town of Taber Management positions;
 - 2.1.1.3 All CUPE employees of the Town of Taber (full time, part time, casual, and seasonal);
 - 2.1.1.4 All volunteers of any Town boards, commissions, or committees;
 - 2.1.1.5 The Chief Returning Officer appointed for Town of Taber elections and by-elections.
- 2.2 Treatment of Media:
 - 2.2.1 All media personnel shall be treated with respect and professionalism at all times.
 - 2.2.2 Media personnel shall never be disparaged by any member of Council, Administration, or Town Boards either publicly or privately.
 - 2.2.3 Media personnel or representatives shall never be willfully ignored, dismissed, or disregarded by any person as noted in Section 2.1.1. Should



official spokespersons not wish to engage with media personnel, they shall do so in accordance with Section 2.11 of this Procedure.

2.2.4 If designated spokespersons choose not to speak on an item of interest to the media or are unable to provide the requested information, this shall be relayed to the media in a timely fashion.

2.2.5 The information provided to media personnel shall always be factual, and shall never serve to willfully mislead media or to damage the reputation of the Town of Taber, its Council, Administration, or members of official committees or outside organizations and committees they have requested to be involved with.

2.3 Designated Spokespersons:

2.3.1 A spokesperson is a Town of Taber-affiliated individual who has the authority to make statements to the media on behalf of the Town of Taber.

2.3.2 Unless otherwise noted or authorized (by the Mayor, Chief Administrative Officer, or the Chair of a Committee for their respective group) the following are the official spokespersons of the Town of Taber:

2.3.2.1 Council:

2.3.2.1.1 The designated spokesperson of Council shall be the Chief Elected Official (the Mayor);

2.3.2.1.2 Should the Chief Elected Official be unavailable or circumstances render the Mayor unable to provide comment to media, the Deputy Mayor shall be the primary spokesperson of Council;

2.3.2.2 Administration:

2.3.2.2.1 The primary spokesperson for Town Administration shall be the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), particularly in cases of major staff or administrative issues or initiatives;

2.3.2.2.2 Directors and Chiefs of the Town of Taber (for their own respective departments);

2.3.2.2.3 Communications Staff;

2.3.2.2.4 Directors may designate knowledgeable staff (including technical or subject matter experts), to speak on specific topics if required and if they have received prior permission from the CAO.

2.3.2.3 Town Boards, Commissions, and Committees:

2.3.2.3.1 For official Town of Taber Board, Commissions, or Committees, the Chairperson of their respective organization shall be the spokesperson;



- 2.3.2.3.2 The Chair of any Town boards, commissions, or committees may appoint another spokesperson or designate an alternative spokesperson from the board members if they see fit.
- 2.3.2.4 Elections:
 - 2.3.2.4.1 The Chief Returning Officer shall be the spokesperson for all matters regarding municipal elections in the Town of Taber.
- 2.3.3 Once a person becomes an authorized spokesperson, they must:
 - 2.3.3.1 Disclose that they are an official spokesperson of the organization they represent when approached by media personnel;
 - 2.3.3.2 Comment on and disclose only information which pertains to their organization, project, or the topic at hand, and that which is able to be publicly disclosed;
 - 2.3.3.3 Ensure that they are not the first to make the announcement of the information they are discussing (unless otherwise authorized to do so by the Chief Administrative Officer or the Mayor). When the information requested by the media is already public (ie: discussed in public meetings, a resolution has been made, or other situations as may be similar), designated spokespersons are able to discuss the information in question;
 - 2.3.3.4 Refrain from discussing any issues that do not pertain to their authorized area of dialogue;
 - 2.3.3.5 Always provide information that is factual.
- 2.3.4 Official spokespersons are encouraged to ask Communications Staff for training opportunities to assist with their duties as spokesperson.
- 2.3.5 Members of Administrative Staff who are not official spokespersons who are contacted by media personnel shall indicate they are not authorized to speak on behalf of the municipality, and shall direct the representative to Communications so they may assist in the request.
- 2.3.6 Councillors who receive requests from the media may respond in accordance with their official Council Code of Conduct Bylaw.
- 2.3.7 Occasionally, members of Boards, Committees, and Commissions may be contacted by media personnel for comment when there are situations that ask for the opinions or viewpoints from someone other than the Chairperson. This can include (but is not limited to) contentious issues, split votes, debates, etc. In this instance, committee members are authorized to speak on their own behalf, but must make it clear to media



personnel that they are representing their own opinions, and not the official stance of the organization the committee member belong to.

- 2.3.8 Those who are not designated spokespersons of the Municipality or its official organizations have the right to speak to the media as private individuals, but must not speak on behalf of the municipality or provide information they are not authorized to disclose on the municipality's behalf.
- 2.3.9 Should media personnel ask for opinions, spokespersons may choose whether they are comfortable giving their personal opinion. Best practices indicate official municipal spokespersons should stick to facts, but some stories and interviews may require opinions, and so the decision to offer one shall be at the discretion of the spokesperson. Should the spokesperson choose to give their opinion, they shall make clear that it is their personal opinion and not necessarily the official position of the Town of Taber, its Council, Administration, or various boards, committees, or commissions.
 - 2.3.9.1 When spokespersons are in doubt about whether they should provide an opinion or not, it is best practice that they refrain from giving personal opinions and choose instead to stick to the facts of the story.

2.4 Media Request Process:

- 2.4.1 Communications Staff shall be responsible for directing the media to the correct spokesperson, or alternately providing the requested information when contacted by media personnel.
- 2.4.2 Media shall be responded to within 24 hours of submitting a request during business hours, however, Administrative Staff shall strive to assist media personnel as soon as possible so as to respect the fast nature of the news cycle.
- 2.4.3 Should the information or spokesperson be unavailable within 24 hours, this shall be communicated to the representative of the media. Other options for spokespersons or other sources of information may also be provided as another option.
- 2.4.4 Communications Staff shall also be responsible for contacting the Mayor and/or Chief Administrative Officer should they deem the request to be of particular interest or sensitivity that may require comment from either spokesperson. What is deemed to be of interest or of a sensitive nature shall be at the sole discretion of the Mayor, the CAO, and Communications Staff.
- 2.4.5 The Town of Taber recognizes the 24-hour media environment, and designated spokespersons may at times have to be available to the media outside of working hours. Wherever possible, however, media personnel shall be answered during regular business hours for matters that are not emergencies, matters of security, or deemed of high enough importance for the public's immediate knowledge (as judged by Council, the Chief



Administrative Officer, Communications Staff, and/or the Director of Emergency Management).

- 2.5 Media Relations Tools:
 - 2.5.1 The following are the types of tools the Town of Taber can use to provide information to media:
 - 2.5.1.1 Media Release;
 - 2.5.1.2 Media Advisory;
 - 2.5.1.3 Media Backgrounder;
 - 2.5.1.4 Media Conference;
 - 2.5.1.5 Interviews (in-person, on-camera, over the phone, etc.);
 - 2.5.1.6 Public Statement;
 - 2.5.1.7 Media Events/Photo Opportunities;
 - 2.5.1.8 Letter to the Editor;
 - 2.5.1.9 Correction Advisories;
 - 2.5.1.10 Social Media Posts;
 - 2.5.1.11 Media Toolkits
 - 2.5.2 The Town of Taber reserves the right to use any combination of the above methods or any other methods as necessary to provide information to the media.
- 2.6 Sharing of Information:
 - 2.6.1 The Town of Taber shall strive to provide transparency to the media by providing access to information as often as possible.
 - 2.6.2 Where information gathering may take a large amount of time to gather and/or compile, this shall be relayed to media personnel as soon as possible with the anticipated timeframe for receiving the requested information.
 - 2.6.3 Should the requested information reach the level of requiring a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) Application, Communications Staff shall inform media personnel and direct them to the appropriate channels for FOIPP requests for the Town of Taber.
- 2.7 Privacy of Information:
 - 2.7.1 Town information pertaining to any legal matters shall be bound by the strictures put forth by the law or courts and must not be disclosed to media if so ordered.



- 2.7.2 All spokespersons shall abide by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act when speaking to the media.
 - 2.7.3 Should a spokesperson have any doubts as to whether information they are privy to is protected, they shall confirm with Communications and/or the Town's FOIPP Coordinator before releasing any information to the media.
 - 2.7.4 Media personnel shall be encouraged to submit a FOIPP request to the municipality for information spokespersons are unable to provide.
- 2.8 On-Camera or In-Person Interviews:
- 2.8.1 Spokespersons for the Town of Taber may be requested for on-camera or in-person interviews from time to time. All efforts shall be made to acquiesce to these types of requests. Wherever possible, spokespersons will try to schedule enough time to adequately prepare the necessary information for the media for presentation on camera.
 - 2.8.2 Interviews are able to be granted for specific locations, buildings, and events upon request. Due to safety or access concerns for some municipal buildings, prior permission from the Director of the Department and/or the CAO for access to specific locations may be required prior to the interview.
- 2.9 Media Corrections:
- 2.9.1 There may be occasions where incorrect or incomplete information must be rectified by the Town of Taber. Should the need arise, Communications Staff will be responsible for contacting the appropriate media personnel to provide them with the correct or complete information and request an update.
 - 2.9.2 Although all efforts to contact the correct media organization will be made to correct the information, if contact is unable to be made, the Town of Taber may provide a correction on our official platforms.
 - 2.9.3 The Town of Taber reserves the right to correct misinformation using any of the tools aforementioned in this procedure.
- 2.10 Addressing Media Relations Concerns:
- 2.10.1 Spokespersons must never treat media personnel with anything other than professionalism. However, if spokespersons feel the need to end the interview or contact with the media representative, they must do so politely and without bringing the Town of Taber into disrepute.
 - 2.10.2 If any spokespersons find a media representative has behaved in an abusive, threatening, or harmful manner, they must notify Communications Staff and the Chief Administrative Officer as soon as possible. The Chief Administrative Officer and/or Communications Staff will then be responsible for contacting the editor, manager, or human relations department of the company/organization the individual belongs to in order to seek a solution to the problem.



2.10.2.1 Media personnel asking difficult or complicated questions, or asking about matters that are controversial or contentious does not constitute abusive behavior. The media are responsible for asking tough questions, and the Town of Taber as a public body is responsible for providing transparency to the public. Spokespersons will respect the role of the media in this regard and attempt to answer the questions with facts and respect.

2.11 Declining Media Requests:

2.11.1 Acceptable reasons for Town of Taber spokespersons to decline a media request shall be the following (though not an exhaustive list):

2.11.1.1 The matter is protected by privacy laws and/or court order;

2.11.1.2 The matter involves pending litigation or encompasses an active criminal investigation;

2.11.1.3 When legal counsel has advised against communications;

2.11.1.4 During any active emergency where the Information Officer has created other communications plans for addressing the situation;

2.11.1.5 When the request is for information that may otherwise compromise the security or safety of any Town of Taber Council members, staff, residents, or any infrastructure or property of the Town of Taber;

2.11.1.6 When there are no acceptable spokespersons available;

2.11.1.7 When a resolution of Council does not permit further comment on a matter;

2.11.1.8 When the Chief Administrative Officer does not authorize any spokespersons from Administration to speak on the matter;

2.11.1.9 When the topic is not relevant to the Town of Taber;

2.11.1.10 In a circumstance that requires Council and/or staff to be notified of an issue prior to it being made public;

2.11.1.11 In negotiations where the Town of Taber and other participating parties have entered into an agreement whereby they shall mutually agree not to speak to the media on the matter.

2.12 Breaches:

2.12.1 Breaches of this Policy and its corresponding Procedure shall be dealt with in the following manner:


2.12.1.1 Should there be any laws broken in regards to privacy, harassment, or ethicality in the context of this Procedure or its Policy, the Town of Taber encourages anyone with information



to submit to the Town's Whistleblower Hotline or contact the proper authorities;

- 2.12.1.2 Breaches by Administrative Staff shall be investigated by Communications and/or the Chief Administrative Officer;
- 2.12.1.3 Administrative Staff who have been found to have willfully breached this Procedure and its Policy shall be subject to appropriate discipline up to and including dismissal. What is considered appropriate shall be at the sole discretion of the Chief Administrative Officer;
- 2.12.1.4 Any members of Council found to be in breach of this Policy shall be subject to the discipline outlined within the Council Code of Conduct Bylaw;
- 2.12.1.5 Any members of an official Town Board, Committee, or Commission who have been found to have willfully breached this Procedure and its Policy shall be subject to discipline up to and including dismissal from their organization. Discipline for any member of the Town's official Boards, Commissions, or Committees shall be at the sole discretion of Council;
- 2.12.1.6 Those who disclose information about breaches of this Procedure and its Policy shall be protected in the same manner that is outlined in the Town of Taber's official Whistleblower Policy.


CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER


DATE

