



TOWN POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY:

Council Communications Policy

POLICY NUMBER: C-15-3

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 2017-257

ADOPTED: October 10, 2017

REFERENCE:

Town of Cardston Communications Plan

SUPERSEDES:

Policies #C/15, #C-15-1, #C-15-2, #C22

PREPARED BY: Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: October 4, 2017

UP FOR REVIEW: October 4, 2022

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the Town of Cardston to:

- 1) Inform citizens about the Town's policies, programs, services, projects, and initiatives through communication that is effective, timely, accurate, and consistent.
- 2) Consult and inform stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies, programs, and services where reasonable and practical.
- 3) Anticipate the needs of the community, Council, and Administration for timely and relevant information.
- 4) Engage in a proactive communications program that uses a variety of formats to accommodate diverse needs and that reflects the diversity of the community.
- 5) Ensure the Town is visible and responsive to the citizens it serves.

The purpose of this policy is to:

Establish guidelines to ensure that communication with the stakeholders and residents of the Town of Cardston is efficient, effective, consistent, timely, and open. This policy will apply to all internal and all external communications of the Town of Cardston.

External Inquiries

1) Media Inquiries

- (a) The media play an important role in disseminating information to the public. Due to the delicate balance that must be struck between freedom of information and protection of privacy when dealing with the media, all media inquiries shall be directed to the CAO or their designate.





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- (b) The Mayor is generally the Town's chief spokesperson regarding policies, priorities, and decisions to the public, unless another member of Council is designated by Mayor and Council. The CAO shall direct all appropriate inquiries regarding Council matters to the Mayor.
- (c) Committee Chairs are normally the spokesperson for regular matters dealt with under the jurisdiction of their particular committee.
 - i. If a committee issue becomes controversial, or is likely to become controversial, the Mayor may be the spokesperson for the committee.
- (d) The CAO is the spokesperson for administrative and operational matters, but may direct inquiries of a technical nature to the foreman or director of individual departments, programs, or projects. With the approval of the CAO, foremen may designate technical experts to present information on specific programs or projects with which they are intimately familiar.

2) Legal, Personnel, and Election Inquiries

- (a) Inquiries regarding pending litigation, or involving a significant exposure to litigation, should be directed to the CAO.
- (b) Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be directed to the CAO.
- (c) Inquiries regarding municipal election and campaign issues should be directed to the Returning Officer or the CAO.

3) Inquiries of Council Members

Inquiries made to Council members, whether by phone, email, social media, letter, or in person, must be addressed as soon as reasonably possible.

(a) Formal Inquiries:

If citizens are requesting action from the municipality, or wish to ensure their communication is addressed formally by all of Council, they must submit their inquiry or request in writing.

- i. Formal inquiries received by members of Council must be forwarded to the CAO or designate as soon as reasonable.
- ii. All formal inquiries requesting Council decision or policy formulation shall be forwarded to Council, or the appropriate committee for recommendation to Council, as an agenda item at the meeting following the date the request was received by the CAO.
- iii. Any formal inquiries that can be handled internally will be dealt with by the CAO. The formal inquiry and information regarding action taken by Administration will be forwarded as information to Council at a subsequent meeting.

(b) Informal Inquiries:

An informal inquiry would be defined as citizens communicating verbally with any





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member of Council where the discussion is general in nature and does not require any action.

- i. Informal inquiries may be responded to by the Council member who receives the request.
- ii. Where a response is provided to an informal inquiry that is expected to attract media attention or become part of a Council or committee agenda in the future, the response shall be provided to all members of Council and the CAO.
- iii. The will of Council must be represented in response to all informal inquiries, unless explicitly prefaced as an individual council member's personal opinion.

External Communications

1) Coordination

- (a) The CAO is responsible for the overall coordination of communication and the carrying out of this policy.
- (b) The Communications Clerk is normally responsible for carrying out external communications.
- (c) General guidelines for external communications include:
 - i. Respect the authority and responsibility of the Town Council, whose members are entitled to learn about proposed policy initiatives, or major new services, programs or initiative before information about them is released to the general public or the media.
 - ii. Consult with the CAO when preparing information campaigns or strategies, or when preparing a response to a media inquiry.
 - iii. Keep information that is related to matters in draft form, under investigation, before the courts, or under the jurisdiction of another authority in strict confidence.
 - iv. Represent the will of Council in all communications.

2) Social Media use by Council Members

Council recognizes the importance of social media as an additional communication tool for the purpose of sharing information and encouraging dialogue with the public. Council Members engaging in social media should follow the same principles and guidelines as engaging in traditional forms of communication - by using sound judgment and common sense and by adhering to Council's values (stated in the Strategic Plan) and the Code of Conduct for Municipal Councillors Policy. Council Members should 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





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encouraged not to submit posts to social media that are not reflective of, or which contradict, the will or position of Council on a given matter.

- ii. If a Council Member does choose to post something which may not be reflective of the position of Council as a whole, they will include a disclaimer to ensure readers understand that the Member is speaking from their perspective only. An example of a disclaimer — “This is my personal opinion only and does not necessarily reflect the will of Council as a whole.”
- iii. If there is the potential that a post may pose a risk or compromise the professional integrity of the poster, Council, or that of the Town, the Council Member should check with other members of Council and/or the CAO. Information that is published online becomes part of a permanent record; there is no taking it back. Although a posting becomes a permanent record, any requests will not be deemed as official correspondence.

(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 Town employees, or information or situations involving named or pictured individuals without their permission. Do not post anything that you would not present in a public forum.

(c) Ensure Accuracy

- i. Members of Council have an obligation to ensure their posts are accurate and not misleading.
- ii. Council 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. Site maintenance is recommended to ensure content remains current and accurate. Static sites quickly fall into disuse and pose a risk with outdated information.
- ii. Post “Terms of Use” on your personal site that reflect how you as a member of Council 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 Town, Council, or Administration.

(e) Official Town Websites

- i. No member of Council will create, operate or manage any website or social media site on behalf of the Town without prior written authorization by the CAO.





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- ii. Each site that is created or operated on behalf of the Town shall clearly identify that the site is operated on behalf of the Town as well as identify the person or contact responsible for site management.

3) Council Letter to Citizens

As it is the policy of the Town of Cardston to inform citizens about the Town's policies, programs, services and initiatives through communication that is timely, accurate and consistent, the Council deems it appropriate to implement a *Council Letter to Citizens*.

In order to ensure that the Council Letter to Citizens (the letter) is prepared and sent out in an orderly and timely fashion, the following guidelines have been set:

- (a) The Deputy Mayor will set a goal to prepare at least two letters for their term as Deputy Mayor.
 - i. A Council member may volunteer to substitute as writer for the Deputy Mayor.
- (b) The assigned writer will:
 - i. Have their audience (tax payers and voters) in mind when writing.
 - ii. Remember that their writing becomes a public document that can be cited in court.
 - iii. Base their writing on the values agreed upon by Council.
 - iv. Represent a unified view with a personal professional style of writing. The writing represents the collective view of Council (re: content, use of the royal 'we') which is reflected in the signature: "Submitted by _____ on behalf of Mayor and Council."
- (c) The Deputy Mayor or writer will submit the draft letter to Mayor and CAO for initial feedback.
 - i. The Deputy Mayor will send the final draft of the letter to the CAO after receiving feedback.
 - ii. Following a check by Administration for format, grammar, syntax and fact, the letter will then be submitted for inclusion in the next issue of the local newspaper, emailed to those individuals who have signed up to receive notification from the Town of Cardston, and posted on the Town's website with links to the post featured on the Town's social media accounts.

Internal Communication

1) Inquiries Made by Members of Council:

- (a) The CAO shall be the primary contact for all Councilor inquiries.
- (b) Councilor inquiries by any medium must be addressed promptly.
- (c) Formal inquiries are directed to the CAO.





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- (d) Informal inquiries may be delegated to individual staff members who are knowledgeable in the specified area of inquiry.
- (e) Where a response is required to an inquiry that is expected to attract media attention, the response shall be provided to all members of Council and the CAO
- (f) At no time should a member of Council direct operations or employee of the Town of Cardston.
 - i. Council members may be signed up on the Action Tracking software used by Town Administration and Staff. Council members are only to use the shared list "Council Assignments" as an information tool. They are not to post comments, notes, questions, complete items, set reminders or due dates, or any other action on that shared list. All inquiries regarding specific tasks or action items must be directed to the CAO.

