
Title: Communications Policy**Number: GOV-24-04****Approved By: City Council****Administered By: Corporate Communications****Effective Date: November 25, 2024****Revision Date(s): N/A**

1.0 Purpose/Background

The purpose of this Policy is to establish consistent and clear guidelines for the City of Oshawa's communications activities, including defining roles and responsibilities for City Spokespersons.

This Policy is part of a broader communications framework that works to enhance the City of Oshawa's profile and encourage effective communications to inform the community, Media and our audiences.

2.0 Policy Statement

The City of Oshawa acknowledges the valuable role of the Media to assist in informing the public about our programs, events, services, projects, and initiatives; promote City achievements and successes; and ensure that accurate and consistent information is communicated regarding City Business and during an Emergency/ Significant Incident.

3.0 Scope/Application

This Policy applies to all City Employees and Elected Officials in their capacity as members of Council.

In the event of an Emergency/ Significant Incident, the City's Municipal Emergency Plan and its related protocols supersede this Policy.

This Policy does not apply to External Partners and Local Businesses as it is the responsibility of the External Partner or Local Business to prepare, coordinate and disseminate their respective communications activities and openings / events and announcements.

Effective: November 25, 2024	Revised: N/A	Page 2 of 11	Number: GOV-24-04
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4.0 Definitions

Campaign Period means the period between May 1 and Voting Day in the year of a municipal election year.

City means the Corporation of the City of Oshawa and, where the context allows, its officers, officials, Employees and agents or any of them.

City Business means a core, central or basic function of the City, as related to the City's mandate and functions. Examples include City events, programs, initiatives or issues as well as action taken as per Council direction.

City Story promotes or celebrates an event, program or initiative using content and supporting visuals. The objective is to engage the community through storytelling with messages, images and video that can be shared with the Media for positive news coverage.

City Notice provides interesting, factual and timely information on City events, programs, services, including community service notices and disruptions in City services.

Elected Official means a **member of Council** for the City of Oshawa.

Emergency/ Significant Incident means a natural or human-caused imminent or actual emergency within Oshawa affecting human health, property or the environment. Emergencies may vary in size and severity and may affect localized businesses, residential areas and/or the general welfare of Oshawa residents.

Employee means all full-time, part-time, temporary, seasonal, and staff hired on a contract basis for a defined period of time, of the City of Oshawa, as well as students. For the purpose of this Policy only, the definition shall include paid or unpaid volunteers, students and interns but does not include Oshawa Senior Community Centres.

External Partner means external organizations, entities, business or corporations. Examples include community organizations, local partner organizations and other entities including post-secondary and health care institutions, and other levels of government.

Facility means City property and facilities. Examples include public buildings, parks, trails and sport fields.

Local Business means a company, store or restaurant or business-related organization with a physical address or its main operations in the City of Oshawa.

Media means print (e.g. newspapers, newsmagazines), broadcast news (e.g. radio, television) and online media outlets (e.g. news blogs, online newspapers, social channels) that focus on delivering news and feature stories to the general public or a target audience. This includes national, regional, local, community media outlets and their respective reporters, photographers and editors.

Media Materials means documents or files that provide information about City Business to the Media and may be also shared with the public or key partner organizations. Examples include News Releases and News Advisories.

Effective: November 25, 2024	Revised: N/A	Page 3 of 11	Number: GOV-24-04
-------------------------------------	---------------------	---------------------	--------------------------

Neighbourhood Event Opening means events that are less formal in structure to celebrate the completion of smaller-scale capital projects impacting a Ward or neighbourhood with a specific audience (e.g. local area residents, a surrounding neighborhood or user group). Examples include community park redevelopments and new parkettes and may include significant new park or Facility features (e.g. feature garden).

News Advisory is an invitation to the Media to an event or announcement with the objective of generating Media interest during the event or announcement.

News Release is issued for newsworthy stories such as large-scale, city-wide projects, initiatives and partnership announcements and may include funding. Factors that increase the likelihood of Media pick-up include prominence, impact and timeliness.

City Produced Special Event means special events coordinated by the City's Special Events and Culture Services team.

Official City Opening means officials openings for large-scale projects with large capital budgets. Examples include community buildings and destination parks.

Special Event Opening Ceremony means opening ceremonies for City Produced Special Events coordinated by the City's Special Events and Culture Services team.

Spokesperson means a person who is authorized to speak to the Media regarding City Business, as further described in Section 5 of this Policy.

Subject Matter Expert (S.M.E.) means an Employee who has an authority in a particular area or topic. S.M.E.s may be spokespeople following approval from their respective member of the Corporate Leadership Team or their Director.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Media Relations Activities

5.1.1 Members of Council

The Mayor, as head of Council, will act as Council official Spokesperson. If the Mayor is not available, the Mayor will designate another member of Council.

All members of Council may conduct media relations activities on behalf of themselves as Elected Officials with it being understood that comments from the member of Council represent the views of the member of Council and not necessarily the official position of the City.

Upon request, for matters related to City Business, Corporate Communications will provide media relations support to members of Council in their capacity as Elected Officials.

5.1.1.2 Remarks and Quotes

The following members of Council may be invited to provide the following:

- As Head of Council, the Mayor (or designate) may provide:
 - Greetings and Remarks (including emcee Remarks) on behalf of City Council, when applicable and outlined in an event itinerary (as per the Official Openings Policy)
 - Quotes and media contact information for City News Releases and other media materials on City Business
 - Video story remarks
- On matters directly related to their respective Committee, the Standing Committee Chair, or when unavailable the Vice-Chair, may provide:
 - Quotes and media contact information for City News Releases
 - Emcee remarks, when applicable and outlined in an event itinerary (as per the Official Openings Policy)
 - Video story remarks
- During Neighbourhood Event Openings, the respective Ward Councillors may provide:
 - Welcome greetings (as per the Official Openings Policy)
 - Video story remarks

5.1.2 Employee Spokespersons

Authorized Employee Spokesperson roles are:

- A member of the Corporate Leadership Team (C.L.T.) or designate may be the Spokesperson for their respective department.
- A Director (who may also be a Subject Matter Expert) may be the Spokesperson on matters of City Business for their respective Department if they have been designated by their respective C.L.T. member.
- A Subject Matter Expert (S.M.E.) may be the Spokesperson if they have been designated by their respective C.L.T. member or Director.

5.1.3 Other Employees

All other Employees shall direct Media inquiries to the Corporate Communications Branch (communications@oshawa.ca, or ext. 5686) and their respective Supervisor/Manager and/or Director to facilitate a timely and accurate response.

5.2 Responding to Media Inquiries

Members of Council who receive a Media inquiry may conduct media relations activities on behalf of themselves as Elected Officials with it being understood that comments from the member of Council represent the views of the member of Council and not necessarily the official position of the City.

Upon request, for matters related to City Business, Corporate Communications will provide media relations support to members of Council in their capacity as Elected Officials.

All Media inquiries received by City Employees should be addressed as per this Communications Policy or immediately directed to the Corporate Communications Branch. Corporate Communications will contact the Media outlet, confirm the request and the deadline.

If a reporter calls or arrives in-person at a City Facility without making prior arrangements, City Employees should assist the Media in contacting Corporate Communications.

6.0 Procedures

The Corporate Communications Branch is responsible for the development and implementation of the City's communications strategies and related procedures.

6.1 Preparation and Distribution of Communication Materials

Effective communications require a quick turnaround due to tight deadlines. Depending on the topic and communications strategy and target audience, Corporate Communications will tailor its communication tactics to promote City Business, respond to Media inquiries or address misinformation.

6.1.1. News Advisory

News Advisories should aim to be no more than one page in length and provide logistical details such as:

- a brief summary of the event/announcement/photo-opportunity
- names of dignitaries who will be in attendance with respective titles (if applicable)
- time, date and location of the event/announcement
- parking instructions and directions
- contact information (typically communications@oshawa.ca) to track R.S.V.P.s and direct inquiries to Spokespersons for more information

Process

The Lead Branch staff completes a News Advisory template to include the details outlined above. Corporate Communications will review and, if required, edit the draft News Advisory in consultation with the Lead Branch staff.

Effective: November 25, 2024	Revised: N/A	Page 6 of 11	Number: GOV-24-04
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Contact Information

The media contact specified in the News Advisory should be Corporate Communications for the purpose of tracking R.S.V.P.s.

Timing

Completed News Advisory templates must be emailed to Corporate Communications 10 business days prior to the identified distribution date.

Approval

Corporate Communications will finalize the draft and request approval from the Manager and Commissioner and/or Director.

Distribution

Once approved, Corporate Communications will distribute the News Advisory by email to members of Council and their support staff, the Corporate Leadership Team and their support staff, and Service Oshawa, as well as to Directors and Branch staff involved in the project, prior to the Media. Distribution timing will be at the discretion of Corporate Communications as Media Materials will be issued strategically to avoid competing with other news related announcements. Typically, News Advisories are not posted on the City's website or distributed through the City's social media channels.

As required, Corporate Communications will follow up with the Media to increase opportunities for news coverage. When appropriate, and only if the lead department's budget allows, News Advisories on significant City Business may be distributed via newswire to increase reach of the media invitation.

6.1.2 News Release

News Releases should aim to be no more than one-and-a-half pages in length and be written in plain, everyday language, avoiding technical jargon. News Releases must answer the "who, what, when, where, why and how", with the information ordered from most important to least important.

Process

The Lead Branch staff completes a News Release template to include the details outlined above. If applicable, the Lead Branch staff is to include related images and video in an electronic format along with a brief descriptive sentence.

Photos and videos that contain identifiable people must be accompanied by electronic copies of the signed photo consent form along with names and titles, if applicable. Corporate Communications will review and, if required, edit the draft News Release in consultation with the Lead Branch staff.

Quotes

City of Oshawa News Releases may include quotes from:

- The Mayor as the Spokesperson for the City as Head of Council on City Business. The Mayor may designate another member of Council.
- The Standing Committee Chair, or when unavailable the Vice-Chair, on City Business related to their respective Committee.
- In instances when a News Release is announcing a significant partnership with an External Partner, the External Partner may include a quote.

Quotes are to be prepared by the Spokesperson. Upon request, Corporate Communications will provide media relations support when preparing quotes.

Contact Information

The media contact person(s) specified in the News Release will be determined by the Spokesperson(s) who provided quotes.

Timing

Completed News Release templates and related images must be emailed to Corporate Communications 10 business days prior to the identified distribution date.

Approval

Corporate Communications will finalize a draft and request approval from the Lead Branch staff, Manager/Supervisor, and Director of the Branch before sending the News Release for approval to the Director, Corporate Communications and to the Department Commissioner and/or Chief Administrative Officer. The draft will also be sent to those who are included as the media contacts. Authority to approve and issue a News Release is the responsibility of either the Chief Administrative Officer, Commissioner or Director of Corporate Communications.

Distribution

Once approved, Corporate Communications will distribute the News Release as information by email to members of Council and their support staff, the Corporate Leadership Team and their support staff, Service Oshawa, as well as to Directors and Branch staff involved in the project, prior to the Media and community stakeholders.

Corporate Communications will post the News Release on the City's website and appropriate social media channels as well as share the content with City newsfeed e-subscribers. The communications plan may include other communications tactics and channels. When appropriate, and if the lead department or branch budget has allocated funding, News Releases on significant City Business may be distributed via newswire to increase coverage.

Distribution timing will be at the discretion of Corporate Communications as communication materials will be issued strategically to avoid competing with other news-related announcements.

Measurement

Corporate Communications will monitor traditional news coverage and social media engagement and share applicable metrics with City Branch staff.

6.1.3 City Story and City Notice

City Stories and City Notices should be no more than one page, written in plain, language without jargon and may include content formatted in a bullet list to help organize content and make the information more digestible.

News Stories promote or celebrate an event, program or initiative through storytelling with messages and may include images and/or video.

Notices provide interesting, factual and timely information on City events, programs, services, including community service notices and disruptions in City services.

Process

The Corporate Communications or Lead Branch staff completes a City Story or City Notice template to include the details outlined above. City Stories will typically include related images and may include video.

Images and video that contain identifiable people must be accompanied by electronic copies of the signed photo consent form along with names and titles, if applicable. Corporate Communications will review and, if required, edit the draft City Story or City Notice in consultation with the Lead Branch staff.

Contact Information

Not applicable.

Timing

Completed City News Story and City Notice templates and related images and video are typically emailed to or prepared by Corporate Communications seven business days prior to the identified distribution date. Time-sensitive City Notices must be emailed to Corporate Communications as soon as possible as they may contain time-sensitive information.

Approval

Corporate Communications will finalize a draft and request approval from the Lead Branch staff, Manager/Supervisor, and Director. The City Story or City Notice will then be emailed as information to the Commissioner before distribution.

Distribution

Once approved, Corporate Communications will post it to the City's website and appropriate social media channels as well as share the content with City newsfeed e-subscribers. The communications plan may include other communications tactics and channels.

Once posted to the website, Corporate Communications will send an email from communications@oshawa.ca with a link to the online content to members of Council and their support staff, the Corporate Leadership Team and their support staff, Service

Oshawa, as well as to Directors and Branch staff involved in the project. City News Stories may also be distributed to the Media and community stakeholders.

Distribution timing will be at the discretion of Corporate Communications as communication materials will be issued strategically to avoid competing with other news related announcements.

Measurement

Corporate Communications will monitor traditional news coverage and social media engagement and share applicable metrics with the Branch staff.

6.1.4 Letters to the Editor

Occasionally, the City may prepare and email a letter to the editor of a specific Media outlet as a way to explain a City position or policy in response to a news article. Letters to the editor should be brief, balanced and fact-based.

Process

Corporate Communications develops the draft letter to the editor with input from Branch staff who are the subject-matter experts. Letters to the editor must be approved by the Mayor as Head of Council, Chief Administrative Officer/Commissioner, and the Director of Corporate Communications or designate and may also include Legal Services review and approval.

Contact Information

In instances when contact information is included, the contact could include the Mayor as Head of Council, Chief Administrative Officer, Commissioner and/or designate or Corporate Communications.

Distribution

Once approved, Corporate Communications will distribute the letter to the editor by email to the Media outlet. Letters to the editor may be posted to the City's website.

6.1.5 News Media Correction Request

To address factual inaccuracies in Media coverage, the City may prepare and email a correction request to the reporter and/or editor / editorial board of a specific news Media outlet. Requests for a correction are to be fact-based.

Process

Corporate Communications develops the draft with input from the Branch staff who are the subject-matter experts. The final must be approved by the Chief Administrative Officer, Commissioner and/or designate, Director of Corporate Communications or designate and may also include Legal Services review and approval.

Contact Information

In instances when contact information is included or requires inclusion, the contact could include the Mayor as Head of Council, Chief Administrative Officer, Commissioner and/or designate or Corporate Communications.

Distribution

Once approved, Corporate Communications will email the correction request to the reporter and/or editor/editorial board of the Media outlet. Correction requests may be posted to the City's website.

6.1.6 External Partner and Local Business Media Materials Process and Distribution

Preparation, content and distribution of an External Partner or Local Business News Advisory, News Release or other Media Materials is the responsibility of the External Partner.

At the discretion of Corporate Communications, News Releases provided electronically may be posted on the City's website and distributed through the City's social media channels as appropriate.

6.2 Media Relations Activities during a Campaign Period

During a Campaign Period, Elected Officials and Employees will follow the Council approved [Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes Policy](#) and these guidelines below:

For openings, events and announcements,

Members of Council:

- will continue to receive invitations to and attend openings/ events / announcements in their capacity as members of Council;
- will continue to be included in photos and videos when attending openings/ events / announcements in their capacity as members of Council;
- will not have a Spokesperson role, except the Mayor as Head of Council.

The Mayor, in their capacity as Head of Council:

- will continue to have a Spokesperson role (e.g. delivering remarks, sending greetings, remarks as an emcee);
- will not be able to designate any quote or speaking opportunities to another member of Council.

Employees:

- will avoid delivering Official City Openings, Neighbourhood Event Openings and Joint Announcements during the period between the last regular City Council Meeting of the current Council up until and including Voting Day, notwithstanding instances in which the City cannot delay announcing funding or partnerships or is obligated as per signed agreements. City Produced Special Events with Special Event Opening Ceremony components will continue to be delivered;
- will extend invitations to City-led Official City Openings, Neighbourhood Event Openings and Joint Announcements to both members of Council and Council-elects when the events are held following Voting Day and up until Council-elects

Effective: November 25, 2024	Revised: N/A	Page 11 of 11	Number: GOV-24-04
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are sworn in (the Mayor of the outgoing Council will be the only member of Council to have a speaking role in their capacity as Head of Council);

- upon approval and request from the Local Business or External Partner, will extend invitations to business openings and business celebrations and External Partner openings, announcements and special events to both members of Council and Council-elects when the events are held following Voting Day and up until Council-elects are sworn in (the Mayor of the outgoing Council will be the only member of Council to have a speaking role in their capacity as Head of Council).

7.0 Monitoring/Review

This Policy is reviewed by the Director, Corporate Communications every five years to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with legislation and current business processes or as required based on legislative changes. The Director is authorized to make minor or housekeeping amendments to this Policy, as required

8.0 References


City of Oshawa's Municipal Emergency Master Plan

Municipal Elections Act, 1996 S.O. 1996 c.32

[Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes Policy](#)

Official Openings Policy

9.0 Approval

Authority Council	Date November 25, 2024	Signature 
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