



## **THE CORPORATION OF THE UNITED TOWNSHIPS OF HEAD, CLARA & MARIA**

### POLICY ON NEWSLETTERS, MEDIA AND PRESS RELEASES

#### PURPOSE

To provide guidelines on how to maintain high standards and professionalism in all external correspondence including newsletters, media and press releases and to set rules and guidelines for accurately and consistently disseminating Council information.

To ensure that municipally related announcements receive the desired results while preserving the integrity and public image of The United Townships of Head, Clara & Maria.

Since any external communication that originates from Council, staff or a Council sponsored group is an "official" United Townships of Head, Clara & Maria communication in the eyes of the recipient(s) and the public, certain standards must be established and met.

The standards are to be set by Council with the Clerk's office being responsible for maintaining those standards.

**Remember: everything that is published by or about the municipality, online or otherwise, affects the organization's image and reputation.**

#### POLICY

##### GENERAL

Effective media relations best serve the municipality by:

1. informing the public of what Council and staff are doing for them;
2. promoting the municipality's achievements, activities and events of significance;
3. expanding the general visibility of the municipality;
4. ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to the public regarding incidents and issues of a controversial and/or sensitive nature.

##### GUIDELINES

1. The Clerk's office is ultimately responsible for the tone, quality and relevance of external Municipal communications. As such, individuals or groups in the employ of, or sponsored by, the municipality, including members of Council, who wish to issue any external announcement must follow the following process for issuing press/media releases.
2. Press/media releases by any council sponsored group, staff or Council member.
  - a. Review the attached HCM Press Release Template;
  - b. Insert your copy into the template.

- c. Make sure you cover:
    - i. What is happening?
    - ii. Why it is important to the municipal community, and/or of broad interest to other people in our area?
    - iii. When and where is it taking place? Is there a local angle?
    - iv. Who is involved and/or invited, and on what scale?
    - v. Why should someone be interested?
    - vi. Are there costs or registration involved?
    - vii. Where can people go for more information?
  - d. Omit needless words, jargon and subjective phrases (except as part of a quote). All essential information must be summarized in the first paragraph.
  - e. Obtain written (email is fine) approval for all quotes. Confirm titles and ensure spelling is correct.
  - f. Review carefully for grammar, spelling and style.
  - g. Save and submit your release, along with any attachments (e.g. photos) electronically, to Melinda Reith, Municipal Clerk. Hard copy may be accepted in limited circumstances.
  - h. Upon receipt, your announcement will be edited and distributed to the appropriate news outlets.
  - i. The vast majority of municipal events lend themselves best to print media.
3. For radio or TV coverage, consider:
- a. Does your announcement/event involve either a controversial or quirky issue, compelling visuals, a prominent/well-known figure, something where the stakes are high, or a matter of broad and immediate interest to the public?
  - b. Is your announcement/event on a reasonably large scale, open to the public, and of interest to a broad range of people?

#### NEWS/PRESS RELEASES

1. It shall be the general policy of the Municipal Council that all press releases or information provided to the news media shall be initiated at the request of the Reeve and/or Members of Council.
2. Press releases will be issued by the Clerk on behalf of Council when required and as directed by Council.
3. In cases of critical significance to the municipality, the Clerk will work with other staff and Council to develop a "position paper" to detail the known facts of the situation and summarize the municipality's position.
4. Press releases may be initiated and prepared by staff from time to time and reviewed by Council prior to submission to the local news outlets.

5. The issuance of a press release does not guarantee publication.
6. Aside from emergency communications, which are dealt with specifically in the Emergency Plan, employees shall only provide information to the news media when it has been pre-authorized by Council.

#### NEWSLETTERS

1. The Clerk will ensure a newsletter is drafted at a rate of one per (6) six weeks or (8) eight per year at a minimum.
2. Individual members of Council or members of the public may request or contribute articles or items of interest to be placed in the newsletter. Any ideas for articles or pieces that would inform or positively portray the municipality, its work, residents or its community should be directed to the Clerk for inclusion.
3. The newsletter may include items of general interest, capital projects, bylaws, new programs and policies, information from local clubs, community input and profiles of members of the community.
4. The Clerk shall maintain editorial responsibility for the newsletter ensuring adequate Council coverage as well as community content.

#### NEWS MEDIA

1. As per legislation, the Reeve is the official spokesperson for Council and when consulting with the news media shall convey the position of Council on any topic discussed.
2. All news media should be directed to the Reeve for questioning and any information released shall then be by a press release through the Clerk's office.
3. In the absence of the Reeve, the Alternate Head of Council will answer questions from the media and information released shall be by a press release through the Clerk's office.
4. All media inquiries should be referred to the Council if they involve issues with Council-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature.

#### DEFINITIONS

1. Newsletter – a written report, usually issued periodically, prepared by or for a group or institution to present information to employees, contributors, stockholders, or the like, and often to the press and public.
2. News media - personnel employed by newspapers, radio, television or magazines.
3. Press release - written statement(s) issued to the news media as the event occurs.

## COMMUNICATING WITH MEDIA

1. Guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to the council/staff member's area of expertise:
  - a. Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast. This information should then be provided to the Clerk and Council.
  - b. The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible, in deference to reporters' deadlines. At the most, a call should be returned within a half-day. If that is not possible, an alternate employee (if appropriate) or Council member should be asked to handle the call.
  - c. Make sure you understand each question from the media before answering. If you cannot answer the question, or are uncomfortable providing a response, take the reporter's number and advise him/her that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible. Then follow-up by contacting the clerk who will assist in determining who is in the best position to answer the question.
  - d. Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." Do not be condescending or underestimate the reporter's intelligence, but make sure the reporter understands your responses. Provide your phone number and/or e-mail address for follow-up questions.
  - e. Remember that in responding to the media, you will be seen as representing and speaking for the Municipality. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
  - f. Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are 1) legal issues, 2) personnel issues, 3) questions that involve municipal or Council integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or 4) a municipal crisis or emergency. Refer all such inquiries to the Clerk/SAO.
  - g. Any media inquiries that involve information about personnel or individual Council members should be directed to the Clerk. Such inquiries will be handled in strict compliance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. (MFIPPA) This provincial law protects the confidentiality of personal information.
  - h. Any media inquiries regarding staff or Council should be referred to the Clerk. Only public information may be provided without the employee's or Council member's written approval. Public information is the following: verification of employment/council membership, name of job title/position, full or part-time status, municipal address and phone number, salary range or phone number if in the directory.