

COMMUNICATIONS

SECTION: Administration / Council

DEPARTMENT: Administration / Public Works / Finance / Community Services

COUNCIL APPROVAL DATE: September 6, 2023

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POLICY STATEMENT

The Town of Bon Accord strives to communicate effectively with all stakeholders. Strategic, planned, and proactive communications can make a difference in achieving organizational, political, sustainable, social, and cultural goals. Components of Town communication include Visual Identity, Photography, Internal and External Communications, Media Relations, Town and Non-Profit Events, and Social Media. This policy is complementary to any policies regarding the use of technology and the internet.

PURPOSE

To ensure current, accurate, transparent, and efficient transmission of information to the public, Council, and Employees regarding Town business and to establish guidelines to ensure that all communication is timely, responsive, accurate, secure, and well-coordinated.

SCOPE

This policy relates to communication from Employees and Council.

DEFINITIONS

"Authorized User" means any individual who has the authority, as given by the Town Manager, to manage Social Media platforms.

"Communications Coordinator" means the designated individual responsible for overseeing Social Media accounts and the website.

“Community Events and Programs” refers to the Community Events and Programs offered by the Community Services department and does not include public engagement events or initiatives that are governed by the Public Participation Policy.

"Council" means the Council of the Town of Bon Accord.

"Councillor" means a Council member of the Town of Bon Accord.

“Emergency Coordinator Centre (ECC)” means the location that functions as a point of coordination addressing the needs of the municipality or the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Partnership (SREMP) as a whole, exercising the authority of the local officials, as well as anticipating and supporting the needs of one (1) or more incident sites.

"Employee" means any individual employed by the Town of Bon Accord.

"External Communications" means the transmission of information with external parties including the public and organizations.

“Information Officer” means a member of the Command Staff within the Incident Command System (ICS) or Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) structure. The IO is responsible for communication information to the public, media, other agencies, and stakeholders to provide incident -related information and updates based on changes in incident status.

"Internal Communications" means the transmission of information within the organization.

"Media Relations" means the relationship between the Town and the media.

"Local Emergency Response Plan" means a plan adopted by the Town in the event of an emergency, which may include the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Management Plan (SREMP).

"Photo Release" means verbal consent and/or written consent signed by the subject of a photograph granting permission to publish the photograph in one form or another.

"Post or Posting" means any written comment, content, or image including but not limited to photographs, video, clip art, scanned images, documents and emoticons.

"Personal Profile" means a Social Media account associated with an individual.

"Regular Business Hours" means the hours outlined in the Town Hours of Operation and Locations Policy.

"Social Media" means a third party hosted and interactive web-based technology that is used to interact via text, video, photos and/or audio to collaborate or promote information. Social Media forums include but are not limited to Facebook and YouTube.

"SREMP" means the Sturgeon Regional Emergency Response Plan.

"Town" means the Town of Bon Accord.

"Town Manager" means the Chief Administrative Officer as appointed by Council, or the Chief Administrative Officer's designate.

"Town Information" means any corporate information related to Town operations, service delivery, projects, activities and events or information acquired through employment with the Town.

"Visual Identity" means the Town logo or any visual that is recognizable as originating from the Town of Bon Accord.

I. OVERALL GUIDELINES

1. This policy integrates the Town's goals and values and identifies target audiences, both internally and externally. It recognizes strategies, objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required, and evaluation methods to facilitate clear communications.

II. STRATEGIES

1. Effective communication requires the coordination of information throughout the Town.
2. Streamlined communication will heighten the presence of Town business in the community and influence the way the Town works together with the community to achieve the shared vision.
3. Well-executed communication efforts will help to create ideal conditions for organizational success.
4. All Employees and Councillors are expected to be aware of the importance of effective communication.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. Establish clear communications standards both internally and externally.
2. Inform the community about the Town's policies, programs, services, and initiatives through communication that is timely, responsive, accurate, secure, and consistent.
3. Consult and inform stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies, programs, and services.
4. Ensure the Town is visible and responsive to the community it serves.
5. Engage in proactive communications programs that use a variety of formats to

accommodate the diverse needs of the community.

IV. RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The Town Manager is responsible for overseeing all External Communication.
2. The Communications Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the flow of information to the media and public.
3. All External Communications, Media Relations and Social Media will be coordinated and flowed through the Communications Coordinator and in their absence, directly to the Town Manager.
4. In all communications, the Town must comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information as per the Protection of Privacy Act and appropriate consent as per the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL).

V. VISUAL IDENTITY

1. A clear and consistent Visual Identity assists the public in recognizing and accessing the policies, programs, services, and initiatives of the Town or those that the Town may be associated with.
2. The Town strives to provide communication that is recognized as originating from the Town and reinforces a positive image.
3. To present a strong, unified, consistent identity, all Town Employees must maintain brand standards as determined by the Communications Coordinator.

VI. PHOTOGRAPHY

1. Employees will make every effort to capture photographs of day-to-day activities, events, and other milestones.
2. Photographs must be accessible internally.
3. Town photographs are to be uploaded to the shared computer network in a timely and organized manner to ensure ease of access.
4. Photo Releases will be collected by the applicable department when required, including but not limited to, when the subject of the photograph is identifiable.

Photo Releases will be saved to the shared computer network for ease of access and reference.

5. Photographs will be shared with the media and the public where applicable.

VII. INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

1. Whenever possible and if applicable, Town Employees will receive information internally before it is communicated externally to the media or public.
2. Internal Communications include but are not limited to:
 - a. Bulletin boards
 - b. Company computer network
 - c. Email
 - d. Meetings
 - e. Pay slips
 - f. Shared calendars
 - g. Verbal
3. Information sharing is the responsibility of all Employees.
4. Internal Communications will be mutually respectful at all times, whether verbal or written.
5. In the case of an emergency, ensuring all Employees and Councillors are informed is a priority.
6. All Employees will be considered when determining how to disseminate information, remembering that not all Employees have access to electronic communication methods.

VIII. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

1. Ensuring all External Communications are accurate and professional is essential for achieving positive community relations.
2. The Town will strive to present a consistent quality message through all aspects of External Communications.
3. Organizational news, disruption of service, and other appropriate

information regarding the Town will be made available internally first so that it can be appropriately distributed externally.

4. External Communications between Employees and the public will be mutually respectful at all times, whether verbal or written.
5. External Communications and forms of communication include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Brochures and reports
 - b. Council meetings
 - c. Electronic sign
 - d. Email
 - e. Letters
 - f. Mail
 - g. Press releases
 - h. Public notices
 - i. Newspaper advertisements
 - j. Newsletters
 - k. Posters
 - l. Promotional items
 - m. Public meetings, open houses & other public events
 - n. Signage
 - o. Social Media
 - p. Surveys
 - q. Verbal
 - r. Website – www.bonaccord.ca
6. Information about the Town's policies, programs, services, and initiatives will be available to the public in a variety of formats, subject to available resources. The Town website, Social Media, and newspaper advertisements will be the most utilized forms of delivering communications.
7. The Town may use available web tools or services to obtain non-identifying anonymous, aggregate, or statistical information concerning its programs,

services, or marking efforts from Social Media sites.

8. All records posted to Town Social Media sites are subject to access and privacy provisions of the Access to Information Act and Protection of Privacy Act. However, third party sites hosting Town content and comments are not subject to these Acts in any way.

9. CRISIS AND EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

- a. In a crisis, coordinated Internal and External Communication must be used to maintain or restore confidence and safety. In the event of a smaller scale emergency, the Local Emergency Response Plan will be implemented in part, or in whole. In the event of a larger scale emergency, the SREMP will be implemented in part, or in whole.
- b. In the event of an emergency that requires communications support, emergency Social Media communications will take priority over all other Town Social Media content. Once the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) is activated, the Town's designated Information Officer(s) will manage all emergency Social Media communications for the duration of the emergency.
- c. Any images, video and/or audio taken in relation to an emergency by Town Employees as a result of their employment with the Town are the property of the Town and will be provided to the Town Manager. Any images, video and/or audio taken in relation to an emergency by a Town Employee, even if the Employee is off duty, is still subject to the confidentiality and professionalism requirements described in this policy.

10. NEWSPRINT AND GENERAL ADVERTISING

Advertisements in local newspapers will be used as needed to inform Bon Accord and area residents of upcoming events, bylaw and policy changes, licensing requirements, committee vacancies, employment opportunities and

other general information. The Town logo will appear on all public notices and advertisements.

11. PUBLIC EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. Public events are arranged to develop and support a sense of community within the Town and/or to provide important information.
- b. Announcements will communicate new and important information about municipal services, programs, events, and initiatives as well as any public health, safety, or essential services updates. Announcements include press releases, public notices, electronic signs, email, newsletters, letters, newspaper advertisements, posters, signage, Social Media, and website.

12. COMMUNITY EVENTS AND PROGRAMS ADVERTISING

- a. Free or low-cost advertising opportunities will be utilized for Community Events and Programs that do not have an advertising budget and as supplemental advertising for all Community Events and Programs.
- b. A consistent process will ensure increased awareness of Community Events and Programs, promote a positive Town image, and improve visibility of local government.
- c. Administration will determine which advertising opportunities will be most effective for each Community Event and Program and record the utilized advertising opportunities on the internal “Free or Low-Cost Advertising Checklist” for each community event and program.
- d. The Free or Low-Cost Advertising Checklist will be used for future analysis of cost, environmental impact, accessibility, efficiency, and effectiveness and will be reviewed and updated as needed to ensure that all advertising opportunities listed are current.

13. NON-PROFIT ADVERTISING

- a. Non-profit organizations are vital to Bon Accord's growth and community

spirit. Allowing them to advertise on the Town's media outlets provides a wider audience which in turn benefits the Town as a whole.

- b. Non-profits may advertise free of charge on the following Town media outlets:
 - i. Town of Bon Accord Facebook page
 1. When a non-profit organization posts to their Facebook page, they may request that the Town share the same post on the Town Facebook page.
 - ii. Community bulletin board (located by the Community Hall on 50th Ave.)
 1. Non-profit organizations may hang posters on the community bulletin board. The poster must have the date on which it was posted. An organization may not remove posters that do not belong to them.
 - iii. Bon Accord's Online Event Calendar
 1. Non-profit organizations must provide all event details required to advertise on the online calendar to the Communications Coordinator a minimum of 3 weeks prior to the event.
 - iv. Community Events Sign
 1. Please see the Community Event Sign Policy for advertising details.
 - v. If the non-profit organization is partnered with the Town for an event, partnership acknowledgement will be included in advertising on all Town media outlets, where possible.
- c. Restricted locations that non-profit organizations are unable to advertise on are:
 - i. The Town bulletin board located in the Town office foyer, and
 - ii. The Commercial Electronic Sign, unless the non-profit fulfills the eligibility requirements to advertise in accordance with the

Commercial Electronic Sign Policy.

IX. MEDIA RELATIONS

1. Media releases will be utilized for all major events of the Town.
2. Press releases will be issued as needed to local newspapers and/or to other news sources as required by legislation.
3. Media inquiries will be handled in accordance with the internal “Media Relations Procedure”.
4. Press releases, public notices, advisories, and backgrounders will be prepared and distributed in accordance with the Media Relations Procedure.

X. SOCIAL MEDIA

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. The primary purpose of Social Media is to share information including but not limited to:
 - a. Emergencies
 - b. Employment opportunities
 - c. External activities that may benefit the community
 - d. General operational changes
 - e. Health & wellness
 - f. Road closures or updates due to weather or construction
 - g. Town activities and projects
 - h. Town news
 - i. Upcoming events
2. Information and knowledge must be offered in a professional, accurate and timely manner.
3. Any communication via Social Media is not considered official or formal.
4. It is the responsibility of the Communications Coordinator and Authorized User(s) to express that if the communication received from a third party is intended to be official, it must be received in writing and not through Social Media.

5. When the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s) are unable to answer third party communication appropriately, that communication will be directed to the appropriate department.
6. Social Media use by the Town must abide by the Town's Code of Ethics and strategic values. When posting to Social Media forums, the Communications Coordinator and Authorized User(s) are ambassadors of the Town and will act in good faith.
7. No Employee or Councillor will operate or manage a Town Social Media forum without direct, written authorization from the Town Manager. No Town Social Media forum will be created or managed through an Employee's or Councillor's Personal Profile. In addition, Town Information will not be communicated directly through Personal Profiles; this includes posting on private groups and pages with the exception of section 10, below.
8. Disciplinary procedures will be followed if Employee Personal Profiles are used on behalf of the Town or if Town Information is communicated through Personal Profiles. Once Town Information has been communicated through the Town's Social Media or released through other External Communications, only sharing or re-posting Town Information is permitted by Employees.
9. Councillors will adhere to the Code of Conduct when posting to Social Media.
10. If a Councillor or an Employee deems it necessary to respond to a question or comment through a Personal Profile on a private group or page, only the following statements, or statements of similar nature, should be used:
 - a. Please see the Town's website for additional information on this topic: www.bonaccord.ca (or any direct link).
 - b. If you have a concern, we encourage notifying the Town directly at 780-921-3550 or info@bonaccord.ca.

RULES FOR MAINTENANCE

1. Inappropriate Postings will be removed by the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s). Inappropriate Postings include:

- a. Any content deemed inappropriate by the Communications Coordinator or Town Manager
 - b. Copyrighted information
 - c. Defamatory, offensive, inappropriate, or inaccurate comments
 - d. Discrimination
 - e. Personal opinions
 - f. Profanity
 - g. Promotion of illegal activities
 - h. Sexual content
 - i. Statements about Employees
2. The Town does not commit to responding to every communication received through Social Media, however, the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s) will make every effort to comment when appropriate during Regular Business Hours.
 3. If login information (password and username) is changed on a Social Media account, the Town Manager and Communications Coordinator must receive all updates.
 4. The Communications Coordinator and Authorized User(s) will not post comments or maintain comments from third parties on Town Social Media that jeopardize the Town's reputation or credibility.
 5. As much as reasonably possible, information will be confirmed by the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s) for accuracy before posting on Town Social Media.
 6. Postings on Town Social Media will be maintained by the Communications Coordinator and/or Authorized User(s).
 7. When appropriate, Social Media created or operated on behalf of the Town will link to the Town's website.
 8. The Town may post photos with Employees' names provided that a Photo Release has been received.
 9. The Town owns the rights to pictures and videos created or taken by Town

Employees in their employment capacity with the Town.

10. Social Media accounts will be monitored at least once a day during Regular Business Hours by the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Only the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s) will post on Social Media on behalf of the Town.
2. If an Employee wishes to create an additional Town branded Social Media account, they must submit a written proposal to the Town Manager outlining the purpose, time, costs, maintenance, and strategy.
3. If a Councillor wishes to create a Social Media profile on behalf of the Town, the Councillor must submit a written proposal to the Town Manager outlining the purpose, maintenance, and strategy which will be presented to Council for approval prior to implementation.
4. When negative comments are posted, the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s) along with the Town Manager will assess whether the comment is constructive and act reasonably to engage in conversation or remove the comment.
5. If a third party posts incorrect information, the Communications Coordinator or Authorized User(s) will correct such information.
6. Any perceived favouritism or unprofessionalism is not permitted.

LEGAL LIABILITY, COPYRIGHT, AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

1. Any content placed on Social Media sites should be Town-owned or, if licensed to the Town, should contain provisions which would allow the Town to provide worldwide, fee-free, non-exclusive licenses to third parties in perpetuity.

PROTOCOLS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

1. No opinions; use a disclaimer.
2. Think twice before you post; you cannot take back a post. Some Social Media

sites do not have a delete option and posts could be copied and saved by third parties.

3. Ensure accuracy; if you would not say it to a reporter, do not say it online.
4. Be the first to correct your own mistakes.
5. Never disclose confidential information.
6. Be prepared for comments and questions; Social Media is two-way.

REFERENCES

Access to Information Act

Protection of Privacy Act

Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL)

Public Participation Policy

Commercial Electronic Sign Policy

Community Events Sign Policy

Free or Low-Cost Advertising Checklist

Media Relations Procedure