

COUNCIL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

SECTION - H

MISCELLANEOUS

SUBJECT: Media Relations Policy Number H-22

APPROVAL DATE: April 13, 2011

PREAMBLE: This policy will identify:

- what constitutes “media”
- why media relations is important
- who speaks for MODG
- how staff and Council should handle a media inquiry
- how we respond to media inquiries
- how we prepare for media inquiries
- other considerations

By implementing this policy, the Municipality of the District of Guysborough should have a unified and consistent voice in the media.

Who Constitutes “Media”?

The media is an evolving audience. It used to be clear who was a bona fide reporter and which media they represented. Today, the line is blurring, with convergence of media and the advent of “citizen journalism”. Anyone can record an idle comment, host an online blog or website, or otherwise provide commentary.

For the purpose of this policy, “media” shall mean any reporter or correspondent working for a publication, broadcaster or online service listed in Communications Nova Scotia’s current media list: (<http://gov.ns.ca/cns/pubs/Media-List.pdf>).

Why Media Relations is Important

MODG’s relationship with the media should reflect its values of being accountable for its decisions, actions and results, being progressive in its management and execution, and treating others with respect and dignity.

The way in which the media portrays the Municipality of the District of Guysborough can have a lasting effect on its relationship with residents, businesses, other municipalities, and the provincial and federal government.

POLICY:

Who Speaks for MODG

The Municipality of the District of Guysborough's official spokespersons are:

- the Warden
- the Chief Administrative Officer

The Warden and the CAO are the official voices of the organization. They alone should speak on policy issues or on matters involving relations with the government or residents.

In some circumstances, someone other than the CAO or the Warden may act as a spokesperson (e.g. at an open house, trade show, job fair), but that assignment will be made by the CAO and/or the Warden on a case-by-case basis.

The temporary spokesperson will contact the CAO at the conclusion of the event and report what media turned out for the event, the nature of their questions, and the spokesperson's sense of whether our message was well-received. The temporary spokesperson should also advise the CAO when the story is broadcast or published.

How Staff Should Handle a Media Inquiry

The media has been asked to direct all inquiries to the Warden or the CAO. Still, media may intentionally or unintentionally contact staff directly. Anyone who receives a media inquiry should follow this process:

Advise the reporter to contact the Warden or the CAO.

Under no circumstances should anyone in the Municipality respond to a media question requesting a personal opinion or viewpoint. This includes "man in the street" interviews away from the office. Even under those circumstances, staff are perceived as representatives of MODG by the audience.

Telephone or email the CAO to advise them that a reporter has contacted the office and that the reporter has been referred to the Warden or the CAO. Provide the CAO with as much relevant information as possible – reporter's name and phone number, the publication or broadcaster they work for, the subject of interest, their deadline, etc. Include any information or source of information that would help them respond to the inquiry. If applicable, the CAO will contact the Warden with the information.

As a follow-up, staff should advise if they see or hear a report on the topic. The report may or may not be from the reporter who contacted MODG.

How Elected Officials Should Handle a Media Inquiry

The media has been advised to direct all inquiries on MODG items of interest to the Warden and the CAO. The Warden and the CAO are the official spokespersons of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough and will speak on the formal position of MODG on any issue.

Elected officials are permitted to speak on issues from their district.

The Warden may ask an elected official from any district to act as the official spokesperson of the Municipality.

How We Respond to Media Inquiries

Reporters are often on tight deadlines, although many newspapers in Nova Scotia publish once a week. Most reporters are working on more than one story at a time and they often interview several people before filing their report. It is critical that MODG respond in a timely manner; this increases the chances of our message being heard.

The official spokesperson(s) will often need to contact staff to gather information for a reporter and/or to help prepare for a media interview. Any request for information from them, to respond to a media inquiry, should be treated as a high-priority.

Other Considerations

In the event that both official spokespersons are unavailable (sick leave, vacation, etc.), media inquiries will be directed either to the Deputy Warden or the Acting CAO.