



Communications Policy (Municipal)

Intent

Town of Thorsby is obligated under legislation and policy to inform residents of certain municipal government actions and decisions, such as annual reports, tax bills, election information, public hearings, bylaws, borrowing and spending decisions.

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines to facilitate communications that are coordinated and consistent as well as open and responsive.

Definitions

Consultation: To seek advice or information. This may, where warranted, involve a formal consultation process designed to seek the views of citizens and community stakeholders or the public at large, including collecting and analyzing public input and feedback.

Crisis: A situation, present or future, or major issue that may disrupt service or impact on public trust in Town of Thorsby.

Departmental Communicator: Staff assigned by the Town Manager or designates to facilitate departmental communications such as media liaison, communication planning and implementation.

Emergency: An unusual situation that requires prompt action to limit damage to persons, property or the environment.

Media: Representatives of the print and electronic Media.

Media Advisory: A notice to the media to announce an upcoming Media event such as a news conference, a special meeting of Town of Thorsby Council, or a photo opportunity.

Media Backgrounder: A document or set of materials that provides technical information or historical background and, when used, generally accompanies a Media Release or Media Advisory or Corporate Report.

Media Conference: A meeting of News Media representatives arranged for the purpose of making a statement, announcement or replying to questions from the Media.

Media Liaison: A communicator who facilitates Media relations and communication between the News Media and the appropriate spokesperson.

Media Release: A factual written summary of information issued to the Media for the purpose of making a statement or announcement or replying to questions from the Media.

Outside Boards and Agencies: Organizations recognized by Town of Thorsby through the Budget process as an outside board or agency.

Plain Language: Effective communication that is clear, concise, relevant and easy to understand.

Public Events: An event arranged by Town of Thorsby directly, or in partnership, to release information, raise awareness, or to celebrate a civic milestone. Some of the most common include: award presentations, dinners, conference greetings, dedication ceremony, ground breaking, official opening, program launch, ribbon cutting, sod turning, major announcements.

Public Service Announcement: A brief factual written summary to draw attention to an event, program or resources offered to the public.

Public Statement: A statement made verbally or in writing by spokespersons or civic employees to the Media, collectively or individually.

Stakeholder: Any individual, group of individuals, elected representative or organization with a specific stake or interest in the outcome of a decision.

Guidelines

It is the policy of Town of Thorsby to:

- Inform citizens regarding policies, programs, services and initiatives through communication that is timely, accurate and consistent.
- Consult and inform Stakeholders when establishing or developing priorities, policies, programs and services.
- Ensure visibility and responsiveness for our citizens.
- Anticipate the needs of the community for timely and relevant information.
- Engage in a proactive communications program that uses a variety of formats to accommodate the needs of the community.

Confidentiality

In all communications, spokespersons and departments must comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information.

Informing Citizens

Information on Town of Thorsby's policies, programs, services and initiatives should be generally available to the public in a variety of formats, subject to the available resources.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- Information is provided to the public by trained and knowledgeable staff.
- Service is timely, courteous and efficient.
- When information is unavailable, a prompt and clear explanation is provided.
- Information in all formats is well identified as being from Town of Thorsby.
- Published information is provided in Plain Language.
- A record of any published information is maintained and the published information includes the publication date.
- Information is available on the standard of service a department provides, including timelines for response to inquiries, mail and complaints.
- Information is available for review or on the website where it is needed by a citizen to use a service for which they are eligible, to inform citizens of risk(s) to health and safety, or to explain a major new policy, program, service or initiative. Copies of material may be subject to Fees.

Emergency Communications

- The Town of Thorsby Emergency Preparedness Plan details the protocol for emergency media communications.

Media Relations

The media play an important role in providing information to the public on matters of civic interest.

Media inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, should be addressed promptly to accommodate publication or broadcast deadlines, wherever possible, subject to the policies and guidelines established by the Town of Thorsby council.

Town of Thorsby communications and/or departmental communicators ensure that media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated as spokesperson(s) for their department or division.

Guidelines for Departments are as follows:

- Respect the authority and responsibility of the Town of Thorsby council, whose members are entitled to learn about proposed policy initiatives or major new programs, services or initiatives before information about them is released to the media.
- Consult with Town of Thorsby communications when preparing campaigns or strategies that require participation by the mayor or members of council, or when preparing a response to a media inquiry that could have implications for the mayor or members of council.
- Keep confidential information that is related to matters before the courts, or under the jurisdiction of another authority.

Crisis Communications

In a crisis, coordinated communication must be used to maintain or restore confidence. Departments must advise the CAO's Office and corporate communications as soon as they identify an event or situation occurring in or affecting their department that may attract widespread interest to the media. Communications staff will contact the CAO's office and coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson after consultation with the CAO's office and the appropriate department.

Public Events and Announcements

Public events are arranged to communicate about major developments or to release information that is new and important to municipal services, programs and initiatives and especially to public health, safety and essential services.

Departments must:

- Determine whether they will arrange, or participate in an event, or announcement.
- Prepare a public event or media conference plan to ensure well-managed communication. The plan should take into account appropriate recognition of partners and funders. Such recognition may include use of partner or funder corporate names and logos.
- Provide in advance an agenda or copy of the public event or news conference plan and briefing notes to Council representative(s) taking part, together with an advance copy of any media advisory, release or backgrounder.
- Coordinate participation through Town of Thorsby communications when multiple departments, community partners, and/or other levels of government are involved, or as requested by the mayor or CAO.

Internet and Electronic Communications

The internet and other electronic communication are important tools, which allow 24-hour access to information and support two-way communication.

Departments must:

- Make publications of interest to citizens that are widely distributed in paper copy available on the website as soon as possible after distribution to the public.
- Incorporate mechanisms for receiving and acknowledging public inquiries and feedback.
- Maintain a record of information posted to Town of Thorsby's website prior to changes.
- Establish ongoing updates and regular reviews of departmental pages and sub-sites so that information on policies, programs, services, initiatives and related third-party links is accurate and easy to understand.
- Follow the standards for the look and feel of Town of Thorsby's website.

Links to Third Party Sites

This type of link, which will generally open a new browser, is provided for the convenience of the visitor. Inclusion of the link does not imply endorsement by Town of Thorsby, and Town of Thorsby accepts no responsibility for the content found on any third party website. Links are subject to the approval of the appropriate department and may be removed without notice at the discretion of the department.

Factors affecting approval or removal may include business case considerations, an assessment of the needs of the intended audience, the relevance to Town of Thorsby or appropriate department and technical or legal considerations.

Consultations

Open and effective communication is the key to successful public consultations.

Departments must:

- Inform citizens and stakeholders about opportunities to participate in public consultation and citizen engagement processes (such as surveys, town hall meetings and committees). This may be done through Town of Thorsby's website, reports to citizens, letters of invitation, posted notices, notices to the media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
- Clearly identify public information materials as being from Town of Thorsby.
- Inform participants, in summary form, of the results of the public consultation and outcomes. This may be done through Town of Thorsby's website, reports to citizens, letters, posted notices, notices to the media, advertising and other formats normally used by departments.
- Collaborate with Town of Thorsby communications who provide support and advice to management staff who plan, implement and evaluate public consultation processes. Town of Thorsby communications and/or departmental communicators prepare and help to implement communication plans and strategies.
- Prepare public consultation plans for any significant changes in service levels, notify council in advance of the consultation plan and report back to council on the results.

Communication Planning

Communication planning must be part of the annual business planning process and evaluation of communications must be part of business operations.

Town of Thorsby communications must develop a communications plan, with input from departments, that integrates Town of Thorsby's mission and goals, identifies target audiences, both internal and external, as well as strategies, objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required, evaluation.

Departments must develop and implement a departmental communications plan that integrates Town of Thorsby's mission and goals, identifies target audiences, both internal and external, as well as strategies, objectives, tools, messages, responsibilities, resources required, evaluation.

Town of Thorsby Communications is available to General Managers to provide support and advice in the development of Departmental plans, which shall be filed with Town of Thorsby Communications on an annual basis. In the development of communication plans, external partnering arrangements should be considered including appropriate recognition and the inclusion of themes relative to the partnership.

Internal Communication

Open, two-way communication, between council and administration and among managers/supervisors and employees is vital to the effective operation of the corporation and to achieve the mission and goals of Town of Thorsby. Internal communication is an integral part of the annual Town of Thorsby communications plan.

Council & Administration

Corporate Reports are the formal means of communication between administration and council. Clear, concise, relevant reports provide members of council with the information they need to make decisions on municipal policies, programs, services and initiatives.

Members of council bring forward items for the committee agendas in accordance with the procedural guidelines. Public announcements must be distributed concurrently to members of council, except in urgent situations affecting public health, safety or danger to persons or property, where every attempt will be made to distribute as soon as possible after distribution to the Media.

Councilor Inquiries

Councilor inquiries, whether by phone, e-mail, letter, or in person, must be addressed promptly.

Formal inquiries are managed by Chief Administrative Officer.

For informal inquiries, managers, Town of Thorsby communications and/or departmental communicators are available to ensure that information requests, particularly for technical information, are directed to knowledgeable staff designated as a spokesperson for their department or division. Where the nature and scope of the inquiry is unclear, or a conclusive response is not brief and direct, departments should seek clarification by responding to the councilor using the same method of communication and/or by phone.

Where an inquiry is expected to involve detailed research on information that is not generally available, the councilor may be referred to the formal inquiry process and may require a resolution of council.

Where a response is provided to an inquiry that is expected to attract media attention or become part of a committee agenda, the response shall be provided to all members of council.

Managers/Supervisors & Employees

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and senior managers with support from Town of Thorsby communications.

Managers and supervisors must communicate with employees openly, often and, wherever possible, before information is made public.

To inform and engage employees, a variety of formats must be used, as appropriate and as resources permit, to reach the diverse audience across Town of Thorsby. This may include Town of Thorsby's Intranet, a mix of published materials including but not limited to memoranda, notices, employee newsletter and electronic bulletins, oral presentations and staff meetings.

The needs of all employees should be considered including outside workers who do not have access to electronic information and employees who work across the region. To ensure consistency and effective use of Town of Thorsby communication channels and formats, departments should consult Town of Thorsby communications for support and advice before undertaking corporate-wide communication initiatives.

Responsibilities

Mayor and Council - The Mayor and Members of Council are Town of Thorsby's chief spokespersons, explaining policies, priorities and decisions to the public.

The Mayor is normally the chief spokesperson for decisions approved by Town of Thorsby Council and for Town of Thorsby as a Corporation unless another Member of Council is designated.

Committee Chairs are normally the chief spokespersons for matters dealt with under the jurisdiction of their particular committee unless another Member of Council is designated.

On occasion, Council may designate an individual Member of Council as spokesperson on a particular issue.

Administration, CAO, Managers - The Chief Administrative Officer is the chief administrative spokesperson. General Managers and Division Managers are the spokespersons for programs, services and initiatives they administer.

Legal, Personnel and Election - Inquiries regarding pending litigation, or involving a significant exposure to litigation, should be directed to the Town of Thorsby Solicitor. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be directed to the Manager - Human Resources or designate. Inquiries regarding municipal election and campaign issues should be directed to the Town of Thorsby Clerk with the exception of election sign issues, which should be directed to Licensing and Enforcement.

Designated Spokespersons - Managers may designate departmental spokespersons including technical experts to communicate about policies, programs, services and initiatives they are familiar with and for which they have responsibility. As well, Managers should appoint Media and Community Liaisons for major construction or planning projects.

Departmental Staff - Staff may provide background information that is publicly available. Requests for interviews should be referred to the Town Manager.

Coordination

The CAO's Office, through the Town of Thorsby communications division, is responsible for strategic communication and coordination of the flow of information to the media and the public, with the exception of public safety issues.

Town of Thorsby communications, in partnership with Town of Thorsby information systems and with input from departments, manages the overall look and feel of Town of Thorsby's website and central sections. Town of Thorsby communications will meet regularly with senior management to discuss major issues to facilitate communication planning.

Departments are responsible for the release of program and service-specific information and for filing a copy of media releases and PSAs with Town of Thorsby Communications for posting to the Town of Thorsby website. Managers should appoint departmental communicators to coordinate communications of department - specific information and participate in the communications network. Training in communications and Town of Thorsby's communications policies must be available to them to ensure they are effective communicators.

Town of Thorsby Police, Fire & Rescue Service and Emergency Medical Services shall release information through their respective public information officers and conduct their own media relations.

Municipal services boards, outside boards and agencies are not subject to this policy; however, they may use the policy for guidance as required.

Acknowledgement and Agreement

I, _____ (Employee Name),

acknowledge that I have read and understand the Communications Policy of Town of Thorsby. Further, I agree to adhere to this policy and will ensure that employees working under my direction adhere to this policy. I understand that if I violate the rules/procedures outlined in this policy, I may face disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness: _____