



Openness and Public Accountability Policy (Municipal)

Intent

The Town of Thorsby is committed to conducting business in a transparent and open manner. As such, the Town of Thorsby has pledged to foster a culture of transparency and accountability where all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities, and information is available, whenever possible, to concerned citizens. This policy will outline the steps undertaken by the town in an effort to promote an open, transparent and accountable government.

Definitions

Accountability: the quality or state of being accountable, especially an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

Openness: completely free from concealment: exposed to general view or knowledge.

Transparency: applies to being able to see through an object. In the case of the government, it includes open meetings, financial disclosure statements, budgetary review, audits and freedom of information.

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 the 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.

Open Meetings

An essential component of the Town of Thorsby's efforts to increase transparency involves the opening of meetings to the public. The following procedures will apply to meetings held on the behest of the Town of Thorsby:

- As the Town of Thorsby is committed to this spirit of trust, it will be opening town council meetings and making them available to townspeople;
- This includes offering appropriate notice to the citizens of the town of the meeting occurring (where possible). This will occur either on the website or in print (newspaper);

- In addition, council will make every attempt to ensure that the subjects under discussion in the meeting are restricted to those which were outlined in the notice of the meeting;
- Citizens are invited to provide feedback on the meetings to the Town of Thorsby.

Confidentiality

- In all communications, spokespersons and departments will comply with all legislated requirements regarding access and disclosure of information.
- Openness and accessibility do not supersede personal privacy legislation.

Informing Citizens

Information on the 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. The of Town of Thorsby will utilize every resource at its disposal to ensure transparency and accountability while ensuring to keep the citizens' needs and priorities in the forefront.

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 the 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.

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.

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 the Town of Thorsby department of 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 such as the Police Services Board.

Financial Accountability and Reporting Expenses

- In order to ensure that interested parties understand the reasoning and the distribution of funds, the Town of Thorsby will ensure that all financial transactions are transparent and the details are available to the public (unless releasing the contents would violate an individual's right to privacy).
- This includes, but is not limited to annual financial statements, budget reports, etc.
- In addition, the Town of Thorsby will ensure that there is a set series of checks and balances for all funds. These records will be verified by qualified personnel and the records of verification will be retained.
- The Town of Thorsby will also ensure that the reporting of any council expenses is accurate and the disbursement of funds has been approved by a qualified person, not part of the town council.
- The Town of Thorsby will also ensure that information regarding any reported expenses by town councilors is made available to citizens on the website (so long as the release of information does not tread upon a citizen's right for privacy).

Communication Plans

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.

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.

Managers/Supervisors & Employees

Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility, led by senior managers with support from all members of the Town of Thorsby's council.

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 the Town of Thorsby. This may include the 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.

Responsibilities

Mayor and Council - The Mayor and Members of Council are the 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 the Town of Thorsby Council and for the 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 appropriate Media Liaison or Manager.

Performance Management

- The Town of Thorsby will also ensure that it is continually measuring its own progress in this transparency initiative and the attempt at openness.
- The Town of Thorsby will solicit the opinions of citizens and request suggestions for improvements to its policies and procedures.
- Where possible, the Town of Thorsby will make every effort to implement the suggestion.

Acknowledgement and Agreement

I, _____ (Employee Name),
 acknowledge that I have read and understand the openness and Public Accountability 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: _____