

## COMMUNICATION POLICY

POLICY NUMBER: CEMS-037

APPROVAL: Eden E. Freeman, City Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

### PURPOSE:

To ensure that communications across the City of Winchester organization are well coordinated, effectively managed, accurate, accessible, and responsive to the diverse information needs of the public. To serve as a guideline to cultivate open, honest, effective communication with the community in order to nurture better understanding and support of City goals, programs, projects services and initiatives.

### POLICY:

The City of Winchester exists to serve the public. Communication, the giving and exchanging of information, is important to that mission. All City employees, volunteers and interns are expected to abide by this Communications Policy.

It will be the policy of the City of Winchester to foster and encourage an atmosphere of openness and transparency and to:

- Provide the public with timely, accurate, clear, objective and complete information;
- Employ a variety of ways and means to communicate, and provide information in multiple formats to accommodate diverse needs;
- Identify and address communication needs and issues routinely in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, services and initiatives;
- Consult the public, listen to and take account of people's interests and concerns when establishing priorities, developing policies, and planning programs and services;
- Deliver prompt, courteous and responsive service that is sensitive to the needs and concerns of the public and respectful of individual rights.

#### **A. Roles and Responsibilities**

The City Manager or his/her designee is responsible for administering the City's public communication programs and shall be the official staff spokesperson for the City.

##### Communications Department Responsibilities:

1. Be aware of all activities in, and all actions of, the City.
2. Assist media in gaining information from department directors, City Council members, Board and Commission members, and public records.
3. Track media coverage of City-related meetings, events, projects, programs, services, and issues.
4. Disseminate all news releases.
5. Manage the City's official web presence via social media sites and the City's websites.
6. Manage the City's government access cable channel, mobile apps, notification system, records management programs, newsletters, service requests systems, podcasts, and news shows.
7. Provide design and video creation services to all City departments.
8. Conduct the City's community survey every three years.

#### Role of Department Directors:

1. Keep the Communications Department informed of employee or department accomplishments, and items of human interest to promote positive public relations.
2. Disseminate City information to the Department's employees to keep them informed.
3. Notify the Communications Department of activities, positive or negative, that are likely to draw media or public interest.
4. Inform the Communications Department immediately when contacted by the media. All contacts to and from the news media must be channeled through the Communications Department prior to interview or the exchange of information.

#### Role of City Employees:

1. Inform the Communications Department or Department Director immediately when contacted by the media. All contacts to and from the news media must be channeled through the Communications Department prior to interview or the exchange of information.
2. Immediately forward all requests for public documents to the City's FOIA Officer or Department Director.

The responsibility for assuring complete compliance with the provisions of this policy rests with the Department Director, supervisors and the individual employee involved. It is the responsibility of social media users and those engaged in social networking to stay informed regarding City policies related to this activity.

#### **B. Expectations**

When interacting with the general public, the values shared by the City of Winchester and its network of professionals must be upheld at all times:

1. Customer Service
2. Transparency
3. Quality
4. Responsibility
5. Participatory
6. Timely
7. Respectful

Authorized employees representing the City government while using any of the City's communications outlets must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City (refer to the City's Acceptable Behavior in the Workplace Policy and the City Manager's Expectations). While acting in this capacity, employees:

1. Shall not make insulting or offensive comments, engage in harassment hate speech or libel.
2. Are prohibited against disclosure of confidential information or information that could breach the security of the City in any way.
3. May not attribute personal statements or opinions to the City.

Employees that fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner will be subject to the disciplinary action outlined in the Comprehensive Employee Management System.

Use of any of the communications medium used to communicate information to the public must comply with applicable federal, state and City laws, regulations and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), First Amendment, privacy laws, and information security policies established by the City.

**C. Media Relations:** It is in the City's interest to provide the public with accurate and timely information. Print, television, radio and internet media play a critical role in providing City-related information to the community. Only designated City employees can provide the media with an official statement on behalf of the City. City employees who are not authorized must not provide information to the media without the approval of the Communications Department.

The City employees must follow the City's media relations procedures:

- The City's Communications Department must be notified about all media inquiries without delay.
- All City press releases, media notices, media outreach and advisories must be coordinated by the Communications Department and approved by the City Manager.
- The Communications Department approves and schedules interviews between media and staff.
- A staff member shall not attribute his or her personal views as those of the City when talking with the media.
- Employees authorized to speak to the media should not guess or speculate about City policy, services or programs.
- The City Manager grants approval on a very limited basis for commercial filming and photography on public property. Requests must be coordinated through the City's Special Event Permit process.

Unless otherwise required under applicable law, reports prepared by staff for submission to City Council shall not be shared with the media or the general public until the agenda packets have been delivered to City Council and authorization has been provided by the City Manager or his/her designee. This shall not be construed to apply to reports submitted to City Council. With regard to these reports, it shall be the responsibility of the respective Board or Commission liaison to ensure that all significant or sensitive matters are discussed with the City Manager or his/her designee prior to release of the information to the media, general public or the applicable Board or Commission.

News releases shall not contain information which is confidential pursuant to provisions of State or Federal law, or has which been received by the City pursuant to a representation of confidentiality. Documents or information exempt from disclosure shall not be contained in any news release without City Manager approval.

**D. Social Media:** The City of Winchester engages customers through many digital outlets. Communicating through social media further enables customers to contact the City of Winchester in a direct and meaningful way. All official City of Winchester social media sites are considered an extension of the City's information network and are governed by the Communications Policy.

- The City's Communications Director will serve as the official spokesperson for the City on official City of Winchester social media sites.
- Use of social media sites as a spokesperson for the City or for a department/division of the City must be authorized by the employee's Department Director and coordinated with the City's Communications Director.
- The City Manager or his/her designee will review department requests to use social media sites.
- The Communications Director will monitor content on each of the department social media sites to ensure adherence to the Communications Policy for appropriate use, messaging and branding consistent with the goals of the City.
- The Communications Director will use social media as a public education and communication tool while advocating to help departments reach their stated goals.
- Electronic information posted to a social media site by the City, or a member of the public, may be considered a public record subject to Virginia's Freedom of Information Act.
- Site content shall be maintained in accordance with its respective Records Retention Schedule and in accordance with City Information Technology policies and procedures.
- Posts deemed technically harmful or inappropriate pursuant to Section E of this policy shall be promptly documented and saved according to record retention guidelines and removed.

- Use of social media sites:
  - Personal use of social media sites is prohibited during working hours.
  - Use of City computers or devices to access personal social media sites is prohibited.
  - The City logo or City Seal may not be used on personal social media sites.
- Employees representing the City government via social media outlets must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City (refer to the City's Acceptable Behavior in the Workplace Policy): While acting in such capacity, employees:
  - Shall not use a personal email or social media account to set up or utilize City of Winchester social media sites. In turn, City of Winchester email addresses cannot be used in conjunction with a personal social networking site.
  - May not comment on work-related matters unless they have been designated as an official spokesperson and have the approval to do so.
  - Shall not post images, files or text depicting City property, equipment or personnel in any manner that would adversely affect the reputation of the City or a City department.
  - Shall not make insulting or offensive comments or engage in harassment, hate speech or libel;
  - Are prohibited against disclosure of confidential information or information that could breach the security of the City in any way.
  - May not attribute personal statements or opinions to the City when engaging in private blogging or postings on social media sites.

Employees that fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner shall be subject to the disciplinary action outlined in the Comprehensive Employee Management System.

**E. Social Media Public Posting Policy:** The goal of the City of Winchester social media pages is to be a helpful medium that is conducive to real-time discussions and useful feedback. Some of the City's social media pages allow public interaction in the form of comments. The City of Winchester shares information, images and video with the public through external social media websites. Comments made by the public to these sites are reviewed and, while comments will not be edited by City personnel, a comment may be deleted or hidden if it violates the comment policy described below (subject to amendment or modification at any time):

- Obscene, indecent or profane language, pictures and/or videos;
- Threats, personal attacks or defamatory statements;
- Hate speech directed at race, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity, age, religion or disability;
- Fraudulent, deceptive or misleading information;
- Comments not related to the posted topic for the City of Winchester social media page or post;
- Multiple successive off-topic posts by a single user or repetitive posts copied and pasted by multiple users, or spam;
- Promotion or endorsement of services and products;
- Comments advocating illegal activity or posting of material that violates copyrights or trademarks of others;
- Violate any local, state or federal laws and/or otherwise unlawful;
- Campaign materials promoting or opposing an individual in an election for political office.

Users are welcome to submit or post content, including photographs and videos, to an official City site where users are allowed to post comments, however, the content must meet the standards articulated in this policy and pertain to the subject of the social media site. Users may only post their own, original content. Reproduced or borrowed content that reasonably appears to violate third party rights will be deleted. Users should have no expectation of privacy when posting to a City site.

**F. Blogs:** Blogs are considered a type of social media. All City blogs must adhere to this Communications Policy, specifically Section D titled "Social Media" in this policy.

The establishment of a City blog must have prior authorization by the City Manager and all blog content must be pre-approved by the City Manager or his/her designee prior to posting.

### **G. Podcasts**

Podcasts are considered a type of social media. All City podcasts must adhere to this Communications Policy, specifically Section D titled “Social Media” in this policy.

The establishment of a City podcast must have prior authorization by the City Manager and all podcast content must be pre-approved by the City Manager or his/her designee prior to posting.

### **H. Website:** The City of Winchester recognizes the value and potential of the City’s websites as a tool to support and communicate the City’s mission, services, programs and initiatives.

Information presented on City of Winchester websites is collected, maintained, and provided for the convenience of the community. The City of Winchester website must adhere to the Communications Policy. City of Winchester staff makes a considerable effort to ensure that information published on the City websites is accurate and current.

Individual departments within the City shall not host their own websites unless authorized by the City Manager. The Communications Department maintains the City’s official website ([www.winchesterva.gov](http://www.winchesterva.gov)) content and design. Only City staff authorized and trained by the Communications Department can make updates to the City’s official websites. Departments may request updates to their web pages to authorized staff members or the City’s Communications Department. The Communications Department reserves the right to monitor and edit any modifications or additions to department web pages.

The City strives to provide as much information as possible on the official website in a clear and concise way. Providing accurate, current and accessible information is a priority. Time-sensitive information must be posted and removed appropriately.

Website content requirements:

- Use appropriate grammar, punctuation and spelling
- Follow the website’s branding requirements
- Upload only PDF and image files
- Embed videos using YouTube embed codes (must have prior authorization from the Communications Department)
- Add content to a web page instead linking to a PDF document
- Use web forms whenever possible
- Convert all PDF forms to a fillable document with the ability to be saved
- Follow all Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for websites
- Requests for Winchester-related foundation “donations” are prohibited

All public meeting dates, times, and locations must be posted at least 72 hours in advance on the City’s online meeting calendar. Agendas for the City’s boards must be posted online immediately upon approval or at the same time the members are provided the agendas. Minutes of the City’s boards must be posted online immediately following their approval by the board. Refer to the City’s Board and Commission Appointment and Operation Guidelines for more information.

The City of Winchester permits certain links to other non-City websites to provide greater public access to community information. The City of Winchester is not responsible for the content of external websites. A

link from the City of Winchester websites does not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation or favoring of any specific commercial product, viewpoint or service. External links are limited to the following:

- Official government websites including federal, state and local.
- An organization whose website primarily promotes the economic welfare and tourism of Winchester.
- An organization whose website provides recreational, health, public safety, natural disaster or weather information that affects the City of Winchester.
- Local public and regional higher educational institutions.
- Local hospital.
- Local public library.
- Local airport.
- Utility companies that serve the City of Winchester residents.

Refer to the City's website privacy policy which addresses the collection, use and security of information that may be obtained through use of the City of Winchester website, and access to that information

#### **I. Government Access Channel 6**

The City's Communications Department manages the bulletin board and video schedule, creates and approves slide requests from departments and government partners.

Refer to the City's Government Access Channel Policy.

#### **J. Publications:**

##### Newsletters

- The City utilizes electronic newsletters as a means to keep the public informed of City services, programs, events and initiatives. The City's Communications Department is responsible for the weekly CitE-News (City) and monthly ActivitE-News (Parks) and other public-facing City departmental newsletters. The Development Services Department is responsible for the monthly Old Town Winchester electronic newsletter.
- The Communications Department must review all public newsletters prior to dissemination. All public newsletters must adhere to the Communications Policy/Procedures.
- The City will not use the email addresses provided by the public for any other purpose, however, the subscription list is considered a public record and is subject to disclosure to third parties upon request.

##### Media Kits

For major projects, announcements or press conferences, media kits are an excellent way to disseminate accurate information. The kit typically includes a news release, fact sheet, architectural drawings, maps, charts, or photographs. The Communications Department will review all media kits prior to dissemination.

##### Collateral Materials

Brochures, flyers, reports and miscellaneous publications are especially effective for quick explanations of programs, projects, events and services. They should be visually interesting and include basic facts (who, what, when, where and why). The Communications Department will assist with the production of these materials.

**Emergency Communications:** During emergencies, the Communications Director serves as the Emergency Support Function 15 (External Affairs) in the City's Emergency Operations Plan and staffs the Emergency Operations Center, if activated. Refer to the City's Emergency Operations Plan.

The City utilizes a Notification System (Winchester Alerts) to notify the public of emergencies situations and non-emergency information. Winchester Alert messages are coordinated through the City's Communications Director and the Emergency Management Coordinator.

Only pre-approved and trained staff are permitted to use the notification system. Sharing login credentials is prohibited. Employees using the system must do so in a professional and responsible manner and adhere to the Communications Policy/Procedures. Refer to the Emergency Notification System Standard Operating Procedures document.

**K. City 311**

The City 311 program is managed by the Communications Department and provides local residents, businesses and visitors the ability to submit service requests and ask questions using an online portal. The request can be submitted via computer or mobile device and is automatically sent to the appropriate staff for handling.

Only pre-approved and trained staff are permitted to use the system. Sharing login credentials is prohibited. Employees using the system must do so in a professional and responsible manner and adhere to the City's Communications Policy/Procedures and the CEMS.

**L. Mobile Apps**

The City's mobile apps are managed by the Communications Department.

Only pre-approved and trained staff are permitted to make changes to the apps or use the push notification features. Sharing login credentials is prohibited. Employees using the apps must do so in a professional and responsible manner and adhere to the City's Communications Policy/Procedures and the CEMS.

**M. Special Projects/Events**

Communication is the key component of any special event or project to reduce negative impacts and to keep the community informed. Therefore, the Communications Department should be included in advance planning of all major City projects and events (i.e. groundbreaking ceremonies, news conferences, community events). In addition, the Communications Department is available to consult with each City department to promote City services and programs.

**N. Accessibility**

The City of Winchester strives to provide all information to the public in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.