

Section 2: Employment

Policy #8: Media Relations

Effective Date: July 1, 2011

I. Purpose

The Town of Mooresville seeks to inform its residents, businesses, and visitors by engaging in pro-active communications. One of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate Town policies and activities is by working in partnership with the news media.

II. Scope

This policy shall apply to all persons holding a paid position as an employee of the Town, except the Town Manager, Town Attorney, a member of any appointed or volunteer board or committee, or any others that may be hired or appointed by the Town Board. For this purpose, and subject to the exceptions set out herein, Town employees shall be defined as those employees in departments and offices for which the Town Board serves as the final budget authority.

III. Background

None

IV. Definitions

None

V. Legislation

None

VI. Policy

Inquiries from the news media are given a high priority by the Town of Mooresville and should be responded to as quickly and efficiently as possible. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and to ensure that all information released is accurate.

The Town Manager is responsible for the Town's media relations, with the exception of most public safety issues. All Town employees should notify the Town Manager about all media inquiries. Because the media often works on tight deadlines, it is important that all departments respond appropriately.

VII. Provisions

A. Town Spokespersons

Unless otherwise authorized, the Town's spokespersons are:

1. Mayor and Town Commissioners
2. Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager
3. Town Attorney, Town Clerk
4. Department Directors
5. Designees of any persons listed in 1 – 4 above
6. Community Information Coordinator
7. Exceptions regarding spokespersons may be made at the discretion of the Town Manager.

B. Media Inquiries

Any media inquiries received by Town staff should be referred immediately to their Department Director. An appropriate response to the media would be, "I'm sorry I don't have the full information regarding that issue. I will give your request to my Department Director who will respond to you as soon as he/she is available." Please obtain the reporter's name, phone number (cell too if "in the field"), topic of story, and deadline.

C. Sensitive Or Controversial Issues

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Town Manager and the employee's Department Director. The Town Manager and Department Director will coordinate a response.

D. Litigation, Personnel and Election Issues:

Generally, the business conducted by the Town of Mooresville is public and therefore is public information. Inquiries regarding pending litigation, matters involving a significant exposure to litigation, and certain personnel-related information are exceptions.

Inquiries regarding pending litigation or exposure to litigation should be referred to the Town Attorney. Inquiries regarding personnel-related information should be referred to the Director of Human Resources.

Inquiries regarding election and campaign issues should be referred to the Town Clerk.

E. Personal Points Of View

It is recognized that all employees have the right to their personal points of view regarding any issue. However, personal points of view may conflict with the Town of Mooresville's official policy. Therefore, Town employees who write letters to the editor of any newspaper may not use official Town stationary. If an

employee chooses to identify himself or herself as a Town employee in any personal letter or email to the editor, he or she must include language which states the views set forth in the letter do not represent the views of the Town, but rather, are the employee's personally held opinions. Similar disclaimers must be given if an employee addresses a public meeting, participates in a radio talk show, or is interviewed for a radio or television program unless the employee is officially representing the Town. Employees who are representing the Town in any of the above formats must identify themselves as an official spokesperson for the Town.

F. General or Routine Issues

Broadcast media: Calls from broadcast media (TV and radio) should always be referred immediately to the employee's Department Director.

Local print media: Calls from local print media regarding most departmental issues and programs may be handled by each Department's Director. On occasion the Director may designate an employee in their department to respond to specific questions from print media. The Town Manager should be informed of these media requests---including the reporter and topic---either before or immediately following these interviews.

G. Town-Initiated Information

Most proactive media contact is initiated through the Town Manager's Office. This includes issuing press releases and media advisories and personal contacts with reporters and editors for coverage. Departments seeking publicity for events or activities should discuss their needs with the Town Manager as soon as possible to ensure the best media coverage of their activities.

Departments should not initiate news media contacts before notifying the Town Manager's Office.

H. Public Safety Issues

Because the Police and Fire Departments operate 24/7 and their work generates a high volume of media calls, those departments have designated personnel as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information. Any media calls to other Town staff regarding a Police or Fire issue should be referred immediately to the Police Department or Fire Department, as appropriate. All information released to the media by the Police and Fire Departments should be provided to the Town Manager's Office; and, when appropriate, the Town Manager should be contacted at the time of major incidents.

I. Crisis Or Emergency Issues:

During a crisis or major emergency (e.g., flood), the procedure for handling the media is highlighted in the Town's Emergency Plan. The plan designates the Town Manager as the main point of contact for the media. The Town Manager is assisted by alternates including the Police Chief and Fire Chief who prepare and disseminate emergency public information.

VIII. Authorization

Approved by:

Erskine Smith

Town Manager

July 1, 2011

Date