

Haldimand County Police Services Board

(The Board)

Public Communication / Media Relations Policy

Purpose:

A strategic approach to external communication and media relations is required to build mutually beneficial and trusting relationships with the news media and public in order to foster accurate and fair reporting, increase positive news coverage and protect and enhance the Haldimand County Police Services Board's ("Board") reputation and integrity. This policy provides:

- General principles and guidelines to facilitate the Board's public release of information and its interaction with the media regarding the Board's issues, policies, programs and services affecting Haldimand County; and
- Procedures for the Board to follow upon receipt of expressions of concern or complaint or questions about the Board's public communications.

This policy identifies the Board's spokesperson and outlines who can interact with the media in an official capacity on behalf of the Board and when, how, and why they are to initiate or respond to inquiries from members of the public, or from print, broadcast, online and social media outlets. The Board is responsible for their information / media relations activities and the Board must build professional and cooperative relationships to ensure media inquiries are responded to in a timely manner. The Board is responsible to ensure that any and all information released to the media is clear, factual and accurate.

The Board must also ensure that any and all information released is in compliance with its statutory mandate pursuant to the *Police Services Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.15 ("PSA") and the PSA's regulations as well as policies and procedures of Haldimand County as they apply to the Board and/or its members.

The Board will post this policy on its webpage.

Scope:

Media relations and public communications involving the activities of the Board are managed by the Board.

This policy applies to all Board members, any full-time and part-time workers, casual and temporary staff, as well as students, volunteers and interns. It addresses how the Board interacts with traditional (i.e., print, radio, TV), online and social media sources and communicates with the public.

Definitions:

"Media" includes traditional news sources (print, radio, and television), online (websites) and social media (including but not limited to blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter) and other sites where content is generated by users.

“Public Communication(s)” include all documents, records, statements and communications from the Board that are made publicly available through such means as print, posting to the Board’s webpage, to the Haldimand County website, on the Board’s calendar, through social media, by mail or email to members of the public, as statements read out loud at open sessions of Board meetings, and through any other means that result in the Board issuing a communication that is publicly-accessible.

The “Board Spokesperson” is the Chair of the Board or any designated person authorized by the Chair to make statements to the Media on behalf of the Board or to issue Public Communications.

Media Communication Guidelines:

The Board’s Media relations are conducted in conformance with the following principles:

- Work collaboratively to respond to all Media queries in a timely way. This may include responding outside traditional office hours or days of work.
- Make available the Chair to address the needs associated with each unique circumstance.
- The Board reserves the right to time news releases and events in ways that are most beneficial to its own interests. This recognizes that Media have different timing requirements.
- Communications prepared by the Board conform to professional journalistic practices and standards in terms of style, content and timing and will support two-way symmetrical communication engagement opportunities with the Media.
- The Board recognizes that the Ontario Provincial Police (O.P.P.) Detachment Commander and the Mayor of Haldimand County should have the opportunity to learn about the Board’s Media releases first. Accordingly, efforts will be taken to keep the Detachment Commander and the Mayor apprised prior to any release of information to Media which may have an impact or pertain to their respective areas of responsibility.

Responding to Media Contacts:

Any Board employee who receives Media calls or requests for information or interviews shall refer them to the Board Spokesperson as soon as possible and shall also inform the Board Spokesperson of the request.

The Board Spokesperson will determine when it is appropriate to refer communication issues or questions to others such as the O.P.P. Detachment Commander, any other stakeholder or a member of the public. If the request is beyond the scope of responsibilities of the Board, the Board Spokesperson will direct the Media to contact the appropriate responsible agency for any clarification or additional comment.

The Board Spokesperson will ensure all applicable stakeholders are apprised of any Media release and remain informed of any developments that occur in relation to any Media release. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, the Municipality of Haldimand County and the Haldimand O.P.P. Detachment.

The Chair’s Role as Spokesperson:

The Chair may share or delegate the Board Spokesperson responsibility. This may occur if the Chair is unavailable or when the subject matter is beyond the scope of the Chair’s responsibilities or expertise.

Public Communications Guidelines:

The Chair or his or her designate shall ensure any Public Communication is honest and factual and **it must not:**

1) Breach confidentiality and individual privacy, for example:

- Reveal confidential information that is the subject of a closed Board meeting, in accordance with the *PSA*;
- Release confidential information protected under the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56, including but not limited to personal information about an individual.

2) Do anything that could be perceived or considered to be bullying or to be discriminatory or harassing, including making offensive comments on the basis of any prohibited grounds, as defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, R.S.O 1990, c.H.19, in accordance with Members of Police Services Boards – Code of Conduct (O. Reg. 421/97 to the *PSA*); or

3) Do anything that would discredit or compromise the integrity of the Board or the O.P.P.

Board's Guidelines in Developing Public Communications / Media Relations:

In any of its communications, the Board must deliver messages that are on target, accurate and effective. It is best for developing positive media and public relations when the Board has one spokesperson. The Chair who, through his or her designation as the Board Spokesperson, speaks on behalf of the Board and will develop a working relationship and respect with local media and other stakeholders.

The Chair must stay informed about Board-related activities in Haldimand County in order to respond quickly to any Board or policing issue or Board operation questions that may arise. In addition, the Chair would benefit by staying apprised of policing issues and trends throughout the province. In doing this, the Chair will not be caught 'off guard' if the media brings any Board-related issue to his or her attention and requests a comment.

Media Releases:

The Board may release media releases when the Board has determined that it has information that is appropriate to be made available to the public through the Media. The content of the message must be Board-related, and the Board must consider:

- That the information being released is of interest to the citizens of Haldimand County.
- A media release as an introduction to a subject, inviting the Media and others to make further enquiries or to seek an interview on a subject-matter related to the Board
- That a media release should be limited to one page
- Avoiding technical or complicated jargon. As a rule, keep paragraphs to two to three sentences in length.
- Using direct quotes from the Board Spokesperson to make the release more effective and relevant.
- Spelling out numbers one through nine (except for dates, times, age or money). For all other

numbers, use numerals (e.g., 10, 11, 12 etc.)

- Proofreading, spell checking and date and time verification
- Being mindful of news media deadlines
- Additional background information may be provided in the form of a media kit that may include fact sheets, background information, multimedia content and contacts.

Media Advisory:

A Media advisory invites the Media to an event happening at a specific date, time and place.

Public Service Announcement:

A public service announcement is a message in the public interest with the objective of raising awareness of an upcoming Board-related event, activity or a Board concern.

Media Events / Photo Opportunities:

Media events provide an excellent opportunity for Media to see a Board initiative, service, or program in action. Such events allow the Board to communicate directly with or support community initiatives with community partners and the Media.

News Conferences:

A news conference is a means of conveying more information than can be carried in a single Media release. It is also a way of providing a venue for all media to gather and ask questions of the Board.

Interviews:

One-on-one interviews allow the Media to have a more in-depth and focused discussion with the Board Spokesperson. It is best if interviews are scheduled through the administrative assistant of the Board. The Board Spokesperson may benefit from reviewing talking points to guide his or her answers prior to participating in the interview and should be confident and relaxed when talking with the media.

Website:

The Board's Media/communication releases along with other public information will be placed on its website. This will provide a one-stop location for the Media and the public and will be updated by the addition of any new information as it becomes available: <https://www.haldimandcounty.ca/police-services/police-services-board/>

For all communications and media inquiries, contact: psbadministration@haldimandcounty.on.ca.

Procedure for Addressing Concerns about the Board's Public Communications:

The following information identifies the Board's procedures for receiving and responding to expressions of concern, complaints or feedback about the Board's Public Communications. The Board notes that the procedures outlined in this section do not supersede or replace other relevant policies and procedures for submitting expressions of concern, complaints or feedback by the public about the Board or its members, including but not limited to, the procedures contained in the *PSA* and the County Code of Conduct, Haldimand County Policy No. 2008-02.

To submit an expression of concern or complaint or to provide feedback to the Board in relation to a Public Communication(s) by the Board, a submission detailing the concern or complaint or providing

feedback may be sent to the Board's attention via psbadministration@haldimandcounty.on.ca or by telephone at (905) 318-5932.

The Board will apply the following procedures to all expressions of concerns, complaint or feedback it receives regarding the Board's Public Communication(s):

1. The Board will acknowledge in writing all expressions of concern, complaint or feedback in relation to its Public Communication(s) to the party who submitted such;
2. The Board will consider the expression(s) of concern, complaint or feedback at its next Board meeting during an open session;
3. Following consideration, the Board will decide whether the subject Board Public Communication(s) complied with this Policy;
4. The Board will communicate its findings, with reasons, to the party(ies) who submitted an expression of concern, complaint or feedback within 30 days of receipt of the submission. In this communication, the Board will provide further information about the process for the party(ies) to submit their expressions of concern, complaint or feedback in relation to its Public Communication(s) through the County Code of Conduct and/or the Ontario Civilian Police Commission (or its successor); and
5. If the Board has determined non-compliance, its response will include information as to how the Board will address the non-compliance.

Related and Referenced Policies

This policy relates and/or refers to other policy and procedure documents, including those listed below. Subject to statutory amendments to the *PSA* and/or its Regulations, where there is a conflict between the policies and procedure documents listed below and the *PSA* and/or its Regulations, as amended from time to time, the *PSA* and/or its Regulations and/or the statute which may supersede the *PSA* and/or its Regulations takes precedence:

- *Police Services Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.15
- O. Reg. 421/97 – Members of Police Services Boards – Code of Conduct
- *Ontario Human Rights Code*, R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19
- County Code of Conduct, Haldimand County Policy No. 2008-02
- Expectations of Council Appointees to Corporate Bodies, Haldimand County Policy No. 2005-02
- Respect in the Workplace Policy, Haldimand County Policy No. 2001-18

Approved: February 16, 2021