SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to outline revisions made to revised Council Policy 199 (Communications) as a result of Council direction at the April 10, 2012 Committee of the Whole meeting.

The changes are as follows:

- Under the Communications section (page 2), bullet 3 was deleted, as it was redundant on the subject of City spokespersons.

- Under the Public Relations section (page 3), bullet 1 was amended to read: “The City shall issue media releases and conduct news conferences as might be appropriate in a timely manner on all matters considered to be in the public interest, including but not limited to circumstances of emergency, special event, significant expenditure and matters arising out of Council meetings that may affect a significant number of Williams Lake residents, as approved by the Mayor.”

- Under the Media Releases and Media Relations section (page 4) bullet 1 was deleted as it was redundant, and addressed under Public Relations. Bullet 3 was amended to read: “The City shall issue a Media Corrective on occasions where a matter has been reported inaccurately.” Bullet 4 was deleted as it is redundant.

- Under the Emergency Communications section (page 8), bullet 1 was amended to read “At the onset of an emergency, Council and staff will be reminded of the need to follow the emergency communications guidelines in the Emergency Information Response Plan.” Bullet 2 (formerly bullet 1) was amended to read “In the event an emergency is declared, the Information Officer will be the central role for communications to and from the media and public.”

The revisions reflect Council’s direction that the Mayor is the final arbiter in City communications, and direct Council and staff to follow emergency communications guidelines in the provincial Emergency Information response Plan in the case of any emergency, regardless of whether the Emergency Operations Centre is activated.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND (if applicable)

Council Policy 199 was issued on November 4, 2008 by the Manager of Council and Community Relations. Since that time, that position has been eliminated, and the City has expanded its communications tools to include social media, online surveys, and budget mailouts. At the April 10, 2012 Committee of the Whole meeting, Council directed staff to revise the policy further to ensure the Mayor is the final arbiter of public communications.
SECTION 3: DISCUSSION

SECTION 4: DETAILED ANALYSIS

a. Financial Considerations – Cost and Resource Allocations:

b. Legislative Considerations (Applicable Policies and/or Bylaws):

The Social Media Policy would be required to be repealed, as it would now be included in the Communications Policy.

The Communications Policy would be adopted as revised.

c. This project most closely supports the following ICSP Priority Areas:

N/A

d. This project potentially conflicts with the following ICSP Priority Areas (also list mitigation measures)

N/A

e. Environmental Considerations:

None

f. Social Considerations:

A clear communications policy provides certainty and transparency to Council, staff, and the public concerning communications procedures and service standards.

g. Economic Considerations:

None

SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Council rescind the Social Media Policy; and further, that Council approve the revisions to Council Policy 199.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Carruthers
Chief Administrative Officer
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>This report has been prepared in consultation with the following:</th>
<th>Initials</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director of Financial Services</td>
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<td>General Manager of Planning &amp; Operations</td>
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<td>Manager of Economic Development</td>
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**ATTACHMENT(S):**

Attachment A – Draft revised communications policy
Attachment B – Council Policy 199
Purpose

1. To provide effective and efficient two-way communication between the City of Williams Lake (City) and its principal constituent organizations, including residents, employees, businesses, media and other government organizations.

2. To encourage an informed electorate and expanded community understanding of City matters, while supporting accurate media reporting of City issues.

3. To support an objective of improved customer service, through processes to encourage customer feedback and to understand customer perceptions and expectations.

4. To provide guidelines regarding the effective and efficient use of media releases and media relations as part of the City’s overall Communications Strategy.

5. To provide guidelines regarding the use of social media and video as part of the City’s overall Communications Strategy.

6. To provide guidelines regarding the effective and efficient use of Communications resources during the lead-up period to municipal elections as part of the City’s overall Communications Strategy.

Procedures

The Chief Administrative Officer, through the Communications Coordinator, shall be responsible for administering the policy and ensuring continuity of the values, principles and procedures contained herein.
Communications Policy

1. Communication between the City and its stakeholders shall be honest, open and transparent, without deliberate bias.
2. City communications shall be comprehensive and inclusive of all aspects of City operations.
3. The City shall employ communications strategies that are both efficient and effective.
4. The City encourages robust two-way communication between its operations and its stakeholders.
5. The City will employ innovative best practices in its communications programs.
6. The City shall maintain a proactive and preemptive public relations program.
7. The City is committed to the principles of continuous improvement in its communications strategies.

Newsletters and other publications

The City shall publish and distribute newsletters to each household in the City, subject to funding. The newsletters shall also be available to the public in electronic form via the City website. The Chief Administrative Officer shall authorize the form, content and size of the newsletter and shall direct its distribution to select outside individuals and organizations. In addition, other published or digital communications tools such as flyers and mailouts may also be distributed at the CAO’s direction and subject to funding.

Website

The City shall maintain a website for purposes of publishing City Council agendas and minutes, administrative information (including bylaws, details with respect to permits and applications), and Council committees while providing other matters of general information to the City’s constituent organizations. The website shall provide easy-to-use information for its residents regarding leisure services, public works and other city business. The website shall also provide relevant tourism information, economic development data and contact information. The maintenance of the website shall be as directed by the Manager of Information Technology.
Public relations

1. The City shall issue media releases and conduct news conferences as might be appropriate in a timely manner on all matters considered to be in the public interest, including but not limited to circumstances of emergency, special event, significant expenditure and matters arising out of Council meetings that may affect a significant number of Williams Lake residents, as approved by the Mayor.

2. The principal spokespersons for media statements of a policy nature shall be the Mayor or alternates. The principal spokesperson for administration items shall be the Chief Administrative Officer or his or her designate. Administration items shall be referred to staff. Information deemed to be in the public interest shall be disseminated in as timely a manner as possible, with accommodation given when possible to media deadlines. The City shall not respond to letters to the editor, callers to open line radio programs or to other forums of opinion, except in the case where clear factual errors have been made as determined by the Chief Administrative Officer.

Purchased Media Advertising

1. The City will purchase media space and/or time for purposes of advertising information considered to be of public interest, including but not limited to City Council meeting agendas, public hearings, administrative and development applications brought before Council, operation of civic facilities and programs, public works and development information, proclamations and other content as determined by the Chief Administrative Officer.

2. The purchase of media advertising shall incorporate objectives of cost efficiency and message effectiveness while reaching as much of the public as possible.

3. Media advertising shall be fact based, and not used to advance a partisan opinion or to engage in debate with persons or organizations which may hold a contrary view on any matter of City business.

4. The City may purchase advertising for special purposes, including, but not limited to, the external marketing of the City including tourism and economic development.

Surveys

1. The City shall conduct periodic surveys of Williams Lake residents for the purpose of evaluating perceptions regarding the quality of City services, as well as to seek public opinion on City matters. The
surveys shall be conducted in a timely manner as directed by the Chief Administrative Officer, through the Communications Coordinator, and as authorized within operating budgets.

2. The results of public opinion surveys will be released to the public and will be published by the City on its website.

Cable television

1. The City values the contribution to the public information process by Shaw Cable through the television broadcasts of Council meetings, and shall make every effort to ensure that such broadcasts continue to be available. Support for the content of regularly scheduled programming shall be directed by the Chief Administrative Officer.

2. The City shall take advantage, wherever possible, of opportunities for the production of other special programming through the local cable channel.

Commitment to continual improvement

1. The City encourages its employees and customers to provide feedback and suggestions to improve the flow of robust two-way communication. The City recognizes there are further initiatives that can be taken and additional tools that may be developed to assist in this regard, and will expand the communications policy as resources permit.

Media Releases and Media Relations

1. Media releases shall be issued where complex issues arise that may give rise to public confusion or misunderstanding.

2. The City shall issue a Media Corrective on occasions where a matter has been reported inaccurately.

3. The City may issue a Media Clarification if a matter is reported and is not essentially wrong, but may be incomplete or have left room for possible misunderstanding.

4. Accommodation will be made, where possible, to media deadlines.

5. The City shall be responsive to media inquiries and requests for information, and shall answer media requests for interviews within one hour whenever possible. Every attempt will be made by the Communications Department to maintain a strong, friendly working relationship with the media.
6. The Communications Department will continue with an “open-door” policy and communicate media requests to Mayor and Council.

**Video content**

1. The City shall make use of video to record content in the public interest, such as bylaw explanations, public works programs such as recycling, or other issues that require explanation or demonstration.
2. The Mayor and/or Councillors may, as determined by the Chief Administrative Officer, record videos making formal announcements and greetings, such as holiday greetings or greetings to new residents.
3. When feasible, City Council Meetings will be recorded by City staff and archived in accordance with the Records Management Policy.
4. Videos shall be posted on the City website and on the City’s YouTube channel.

**Elections Period Communications**

1. Media releases or other communications tools promoting the efforts or could be perceived as promoting the efforts of individual Council members will not be employed for three months prior to Election Day.
2. Staff will not provide or be directed to provide advice, staff time, or resources to any election candidate, including current members of council. Staff shall not provide assistance to members of council and/or candidates in website, social media, or other communications strategy development to support any election campaigns.
3. City staff will not take or distribute photos or videos of any election candidates, including members of council for a period of three months before Election Day.
4. City staff shall not appear in pre-arranged photos with any candidates for election for a period of three months before Election Day.

**Social Media**

1. For the purposes of this policy, social media means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation blogs, wikis, social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube.
2. The following positions will be authorized to post content to the City of Williams Lake Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter websites:
   - Chief Administrative Officer
   - Communications Coordinator
   - Events & Marketing Coordinator
   - Manager of Information Technology

3. The following positions will be authorized to post content to the City of Williams Lake Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter websites in the event of an emergency, as determined by the CAO, and with permission from the CAO:
   - Chief Administrative Officer
   - Communications Coordinator
   - Manager of Information Technology
   - Director of Protective Services
   - Deputy Fire Chief
   - General Manager of Planning and Operations
   - Director of Municipal Services

4. The Mayor, Councillors, and City staff members are not permitted to post content on City of Williams Lake social media sites, except to respond to questions and comments from the public as directed by and with permission from the CAO or Communications Coordinator.

5. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary. All uses of social media must follow the same ethical standards that City employees must otherwise follow. No City employee, Mayor or Councillor shall divulge confidential information on social media sites, including but not limited to: in camera items and personnel matters.

6. All content posted to City social media sites must not contradict content on the City website at www.williamslake.ca, and must be consistent with all other City messaging.

7. The City of Williams Lake’s Commenting Policy shall be clearly displayed on all applicable City of Williams Lake social media sites, and shall read as follows: “The City of Williams Lake has created this page to provide an additional means for updating the community on City initiatives and operations, and to receive comments from the public. Please note this is a public page to serve the residents of the city, maintained by the City of Williams Lake.”
As such, comments containing the following will not be permitted:

- Comments not related to this particular City site.
- Slanderous or defamatory remarks, obscene language or sexual content;
- Content that could, in the sole discretion of the City of Williams Lake, constitute harassment of a City of Williams Lake elected official, staff member or any other person;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, colour, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation;
- Promotion of commercial services of any variety;
- Promotion of political candidates;
- Promotion of illegal activity;
- Information that may compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems;
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

Comments that violate the standards above will be deleted. Those who violate these standards three times will be blocked from the site.

Comments will be monitored during City Hall hours of operation (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, excluding statutory holidays).

For your protection, please do not post personal information such as telephone numbers or e-mail addresses.

Direct responses from the mayor, councillors, or staff will not be available on this site. For inquiries, please use the regular appropriate channels, such as telephoning City Hall at 250-392-2311. Questions for the Mayor can also be sent to mayor@williamslake.ca.

For social media inquiries, please contact Communications Coordinator Ken MacInnis at kmacinnis@williamslake.ca or 250-392-8488.

8. Users who violate the Commenting Policy will have their comment removed and warned. Users who violate the Policy a second time will be blocked from the site. Users who violate Facebook’s Terms Of Use will be reported to Facebook for possible disabling of their account.

9. Where applicable, comments on City of Williams Lake social media sites will
be pre-moderated by the Communications Coordinator, using the Commenting Policy as the guideline for approving comments.

10. The Chief Administrative Officer and/or a designated alternate may also moderate comments at the CAO’s discretion.

**Emergency Communications**

1. At the onset of an emergency, Council and staff will be reminded of the need to follow this emergency communications guidelines in the Emergency Information Response Plan.

2. In the event an emergency is declared, the Information Officer will be the central role for communications to and from the media and public, and the City will follow the communications guidelines in the Emergency Information Response Plan.

3. The Information Officer is responsible for:
   - Ensuring that the public within the affected area receive complete, accurate and consistent information about life-safety issues, and response and recovery activities
   - Ensuring that the local authority has suitable capacity to receive and address enquiries from the public
   - Liaise with and support Information Officers who may be located at other sites or response facilities
   - Developing and providing local authority personnel with relevant and accurate event information
   - Writing and coordinating news releases with officials representing other responding agencies or authorities
   - Maintaining positive media relations
   - Facilitating news conferences and media briefings
   - Monitoring and correcting media broadcasts to ensure accuracy

4. During the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre, all public releases of information must be reviewed and approved by the EOC Director. Depending on the nature of the information, the EOC Director may also require that this information be reviewed and approved by the Policy Group.

5. The spokesperson for the City of Williams Lake will be the Mayor or his or her designate.
6. Whenever possible, the Information Officer will prepare speaking and briefing notes for the designated spokesperson, following the guidelines set out in the Emergency Information Response Plan.

7. Any elected official or EOC staff member should as closely as possible, follow the following guidelines when dealing with the media and the public:

**General Considerations:**
- Acknowledge the media’s presence
- Avoid blocking a camera or saying “no comment”
- If you have other urgent matters to attend to, tell them and redirect them or provide a timeframe when comments can be made
- Whenever possible, direct the media to the Information Officer or agency media/communications contact
- Don’t forget the local media if overwhelmed by provincial, national or even international media outlets. The local folks will be with you for the long haul
- When required to make an unprepared statement remember to express:
  a. **Concern** – Make sure the reporter knows that you and your organization are concerned about the health and well-being of those involved and of the overall event.
  b. **Action** – Outline the steps/processes that are being taken to help people during and after this emergency. Answer factual questions about what is happening.
  c. **Commitment** – Emphasize that the goal of your organization/the response/recovery is to support those impacted to the greatest extent possible.

- Stick to the facts - don’t offer personal opinions or speculate
- If you don’t know, offer to find the answer, or refer the reporter to someone who might know
- Don’t comment on the investigations of others, even if you might know the answer
- Do not disclose personal/confidential information about those involved or the event, unless authorized to do so
- If key messaging or an “issues note” is available for the topic being discussed — use it and stick to the key messaging whenever possible
- Whenever possible, respect the timelines/deadlines of the different media outlets
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Procedures

The Chief Administrative Officer, through the Manager of Council and Community Relations, shall be responsible for administering the policy and ensuring continuity of the values, principles and procedures contained herein.
Communications Policy

1. Communication between the City and its stakeholders shall be honest, open and transparent, without deliberate bias.

2. City communications shall be comprehensive and inclusive of all aspects of City operations.

3. The City shall respond to urgent situations, including public emergency, as quickly, thoroughly and openly as possible. In such circumstances, the Chief Administrative Officer, the Mayor, or in their absence their alternates shall be the designated media spokesperson(s).

4. The City shall employ communications strategies that are both efficient and effective.

5. The City encourages robust two-way communication between its operations and its stakeholders.

6. The City will employ innovative best practices in its communications programs.

7. The City shall maintain a proactive and preemptive public relations program.

8. The City is committed to the principles of continuous improvement in its communications strategies.

Newsletters

The City shall publish and distribute newsletters up to (3) three times per year to each household in the City, subject to funding. The newsletters shall also be available to the public in electronic form via the City website. The Chief Administrative Officer shall authorize the form, content and size of the newsletter and shall direct its distribution to select outside individuals and organizations.

Website

The City shall maintain a website for purposes of publishing City Council agendas and minutes, administrative information (including bylaws, details with respect to permits and applications), and Council committees while providing other matters of general information to the City’s constituent organizations. The website shall provide easy-to-use information for its residents regarding leisure services, public works and other city business. The website shall also provide relevant tourism information, economic development data and contact information. The maintenance of the website shall be as directed by the Manager of Information Technology.
Public relations

1. The City shall issue news releases, issue media advisories, and conduct news conferences as might be appropriate in a timely manner on all matters considered to be in the public interest, including but not limited to circumstances of emergency, special event, significant expenditure and matters arising out of Council meetings that may affect a significant number of Williams Lake residents.

2. The principal spokespersons for media statements of a policy nature shall be the Mayor or alternates. Administration items shall be referred to staff. Information deemed to be in the public interest shall be disseminated in a timely manner as possible, with accommodation given when possible to media deadlines. The City shall not respond to letters to the editor, callers to open line radio programs or to other forums of opinion, except in the case where clear factual errors have been made as determined by the Chief Administrative Officer or Manager of Council and Community Relations.

Purchased Media Advertising

1. The City will purchase media space and/or time for purposes of advertising information considered to be of public interest, including but not limited to City Council meeting agendas, public hearings, administrative and development applications brought before Council, operation of civic facilities and programs, public works and development information, proclamations and other content as determined by the Chief Administrative Officer.

2. The purchase of media advertising shall incorporate objectives of cost efficiency and message effectiveness while reaching as much of the public as possible.

3. Media advertising shall be fact based, and not used to advance a partisan opinion or to engage in debate with persons or organizations who may hold a contrary view on any matter of City business.

4. The City may purchase advertising for special purposes, including, but not limited to, the external marketing of the City including tourism and economic development.

Surveys

1. The City shall conduct periodic surveys of Williams Lake residents for the purpose of evaluating perceptions regarding the quality of City services, as well as to seek public opinion on City matters. The surveys shall be conducted in a timely manner as directed by the Chief Administrative Officer, through the Manager of Council and Community Relations, and as authorized within operating budgets.
2. The results of public opinion surveys will be released to the public and will be published by the City on its website.

3. The City shall utilize customer comment cards, for the purpose of soliciting user feedback, at all locations where City services or programs are offered. The Communications Supervisor shall direct a process of providing customer feedback to Council through the comment card program, while administration will use the findings of the program to develop improvements in customer service.

Cable television

1. The City values the contribution to the public information process by Shaw Cable through the television broadcasts of Council meetings, and shall make every effort to ensure that such broadcasts continue to be available. Support for the content of regularly scheduled programming shall be directed by the Chief Administrative Officer.

2. The City shall take advantage, wherever possible, of opportunities for the production of other special programming through the local cable channel.

Commitment to continual improvement

1. The City encourages its employees and customers to provide feedback and suggestions to improve the flow of robust two-way communication. The City recognizes there are further initiatives that can be taken and additional tools that may be developed to assist in this regard, and will expand the communications policy as resources permit.

News Releases and Media Relations

1. The City shall issue news releases, issue media advisories and conduct news conferences as might be appropriate in a timely manner on all matters considered to be in the public interest, including but not limited to circumstances of emergency, special event, significant expenditure and matters arising out of Council meetings that may affect a significant number of Williams Lake residents.

2. News releases shall be issued where complex issues arise that may give rise to public confusion or misunderstanding.

3. News releases will be released based on the best decisions made by the Chief Administrative Officer and the Manager of Council and Community Relations (MCCR).
4. The City shall issue a Media Corrective on occasions where a matter has been reported inaccurately, and where in the opinion of the Chief Administrative Officer and the MCCR, the public interest would be served by providing the media with accurate information.

5. The City may issue a Media Clarification if a matter is reported and is not essentially wrong, but may be incomplete or have left room for possible misunderstanding.

6. The principal spokespersons for media relations shall be the Chief Administrative Officer, the Mayor or, in their absence, their alternates. The Mayor may designate a Councillor as spokesperson on a specific item if it falls directly under that Councillor’s portfolio.

7. Accommodation will be made, where possible, to media deadlines.

8. The City shall be responsive to media inquiries and requests for information, and shall answer media requests for interviews within one hour whenever possible. Every attempt will be made by the Communications Department to maintain a strong, friendly working relationship with the media. The Communications Department will continue with an “open-door” policy and communicate media requests to Mayor and Council.

**Elections Period Communications**

1. News releases or other communications tools promoting the efforts of individual Council members on specific tasks will not be employed for three months prior to Election Day.

2. City staff shall not appear in pre-arranged photos with any candidates for election for a period of three months before Election Day.

3. The last edition of the (recommended) newsletter in any election year shall be published by no later than September 1st, except in cases when special editions are required to provide information deemed important to taxpayer on a specific subject.