

BYLAW No. 03/20

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY AND GUIDELINES¹

A BYLAW TO GUIDE THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY OF THE 501 UTILITY AUTHORITY INC. AND THE CONDUCT OF ITS DIRECTORS, STAFF AND STAKEHOLDERS

1.0 EXTERNAL MEDIA RELATIONS / COMMUNICATIONS

PURPOSE:

- To establish a framework for achieving an effective working relationship with the media since local, provincial and national media are vital partners in achieving the Utility's goals
- To maximize the advantages of media presentation, and minimize the risks of media misrepresentation
- To ensure that all the Utility communications must be made with one united voice representing the organization. This policy is not to be construed as limiting opposing opinion or curbing freedom of speech and advice before a decision is reached by the Board or its committees.

PRINCIPLES:

- The Utility operates on the values of
 - *Honesty*: The Utility will never knowingly mislead the public, media or staff on an issue or news story.
 - *Transparency*: The Utility will promote openness and accessibility in our dealings with the media while at the same time complying with the law and maintaining confidentiality when appropriate.
 - *Clarity*: all communications with the media will be written in plain English
 - *Balance*: information provided to the media by the Utility will be objective, balanced, accurate, informative, and timely as far as possible.

POLICY AND EXPECTATIONS OF BOARD MEMBERS:

- It is the responsibility of all board members to ensure that effective media relations are maintained in order to achieve the aims of the Utility.
- Board members should be willing to engage in communication activities from time to time including; answering local media calls about the Utility issues, providing contributions to the *Rural Councillor*, *Urban Voice* and/or *Urban Update*; as well as attending and speaking at news conferences.

SPOKESPERSON:

¹ Excerpts and context as outlined in the SUMA and/or SARM Board of Directors Governance Policies

- The recognized spokespersons for the Utility are:
 - the Chair or Vice Chair, (or the Administrator if applicable and authorized),
 - any other Director or Officer designated in consultation with the Board of Directors.
 - The municipalities' employees are not authorized to speak on the Utility's behalf.
- All media inquiries that are seeking the official position or reaction of the Utility should be referred to the Chair or Vice Chair.
- Background/fact checking information can be given by the chair as long as they are not quoted without prior notification of the Board
- Committee Chairs are only authorised to speak on behalf of the Utility with Board approval and only regarding subjects on which their Committees have been approved to act.
- The Board shall be notified every time the Utility directors or staff have their communications attributed to them in the media

GENERAL GUIDELINES AS TO THE CONTENT OF COMMUNICATIONS:

- The Utility welcomes the opportunity to talk to the media and, in this respect, will endeavor to respond promptly.
- All public communications by elected officials from the Board shall be consistent with the majority decisions of the Board of Directors and established policy positions.
- When members of the Board are responding to inquiries from the media, other members or interested persons, in order to protect the Utility's interests all respondents shall refrain from expressing personal opinions.
- The Chair or designated spokesperson is limited to providing official Utility positions on matters previously considered or to providing factual background information.
- In general, any media contact, initiated or responsive, should be confined to matters of policy decided by the Board of Directors.
- It is generally not wise to speculate or respond to hypothetical questions posed by interviewers.
- When asked to comment on issues for which the Utility does not have a developed policy, spokespersons are generally well advised to refer the matter to the Chair, Vice-Chair or other person with particular expertise.
- Board members are advised to ensure that they are properly briefed and guided by relevant staff if applicable, contractors or directors before talking to the media on any issue related to the Utility

GENERAL GUIDELINES AS TO THE METHODS AND MEANS OF COMMUNICATION:

- All news releases shall be approved by the Chair or Vice-Chair, and if applicable, the director of the affected issue.
- Any filming or recording on the Utility property or of the Utility proceedings by the media requires the prior permission of the Board.
- Board members should avoid making comments or participating in photo opportunities that may damage the Utility's reputation.

- Board members are encouraged to deliver public presentations (e.g. at Council meetings or Conferences) that discuss the Utility's work and its goals while keeping in mind that there is the chance that the comments will reflect upon the Utility.
- Where a board member has had any significant interaction with media representatives on issues related to the Utility, it is the responsibility of the person concerned to notify the Board and to provide the name of the reporter or writer and the media outlet they represent.
- Any significant media contacts with the Utility's board members on any issue likely to prove contentious shall be recorded when possible.

2.0 SOCIAL MEDIA AND SPEAKING PUBLICLY

- When a Utility Director or employee speaks out on a public issue or in a public forum (such as social media networking sites), they do so as an individual and should not give the appearance and/or implication that they are speaking or acting on behalf of the Utility.
- All Directors and/or employees must be aware that with the rise of social media, such services are being closely monitored by the Utility as well as our municipalities, clients, colleagues, community partners, and consumers, etc. Respect your audience.
- Therefore, all Utility Directors and/or employees are reminded that the use of ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, or reference to any conduct that would not be acceptable in a professional workplace will not be tolerated.
- Directors and/or employees should also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics or religion.
- You are personally responsible for the content you publish on-line, whether in a blog, social computing site or any other form of user-generated media.
- All Utility representatives and/or staff should be aware that what they publish online will remain public for a long time; therefore, every effort should be taken to protect your personal information as well as understand a site's terms of service and usage.
- Utility Directors, representatives and/or employees must also respect all copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws which may be applicable.
- The use of Utility logos and/or trademarks on any Directors', representatives and/or employees' personal social media websites is prohibited.
- Furthermore, Directors and/or employees are not permitted to cite confidential or other proprietary information and should never discuss the Utility's performance or the performance of Utility members or other sensitive matters on social media sites. In addition, it is not permissible to cite or reference Utility members, partners or clients without their prior written approval. It is also unacceptable to publish anything on a social media website that might allow inferences to be drawn which could embarrass or damage the Utility, our members or any of our partners.
- Directors and/or employees are not permitted to publish content online on their personal social media sites which pertains to the Utility, our members or any of our affiliates without the consent of the Chair, Vice-chair and/or the Board. If you choose to identify yourself as a Director and/or employee of the Utility on personal social media websites, you must ensure your profile and related content is professional and consistent with how

you wish to present yourself to our members and your fellow colleagues, as well as to consumers.

- If a representative chooses to list the Utility on their site, they must use a disclaimer such as: "*The postings on this site are my own and do not in any way represent the positions, strategies or opinions of the Utility.*" Failure to utilize such a disclaimer on personal social media networking sites will result in actions on behalf of the Utility.
- All Directors and/or employees are reminded that they should always use their best judgement before posting anything on a social media website, as there are always consequences to what has been published. Utility Management should be consulted in every instance where a Director and/or employee is unsure as to what is (or is not) acceptable to publish on a social media website.

3.0 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY GUIDELINES

PURPOSE:

- to assist with the dissemination of confidential and privileged information.
- to assure that communications be clearly identified as to their nature and scope of distribution.
- to protect sensitive information from unauthorized exploration or disclosure.

POLICY AND SCOPE:

- All Utility Board and Committee members are expected to adhere to the principles of confidentiality utilising professional discretion and good common sense.

DEFINITIONS:

- *Communications* includes all communications, whether verbal, written, paper or electronic.
- *Confidential* designates privileged information which has not yet been authorized for external or public distribution or which has been designated for limited distribution.
- *Confidentiality* refers to the Utility's needs, obligations and desires to protect private, proprietary and other sensitive information from those who do not have the right and need to obtain it.
- *Draft* refers to documents or communications which have not yet received final approval by the author, or by their approving authority.
- *Internal Communication* describes a communication which is intended to remain within the confined of Utility board members, Board or Committee members and/or staff of the Utility. These would typically include:
 - Strategic analysis from our Board, councils, auditor or advisors.
 - Consultations, surveys and other requests for feedback.
 - Early warnings or "heads up" from our financial or policy advisors.

- Strategic consultations from our Councils or consultants.
 - Strategic communications from our chair, vice-chair or Directors.
 - Privileged or strategic communications from our member municipalities and administrative representatives (e.g. Managers, Administrators).
 - Privileged communications from strategic partners or government agencies.
 - Draft policy statements which have not been endorsed by the Board.
- *External communication* describes those communications which have been authorized for distribution to other agencies, media, or for distribution in the public domain.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

- It is incumbent upon all of these individuals to clearly manage, frame or label their communications in keeping with these guidelines.
- Unless a specific communication has been clearly authorized for release or distribution, most communications shall be considered to be internal communications and be limited in their distribution.
- Communications impacted by privacy legislation shall be handled in the stipulated manner. If subject to consideration by the Officers and the Board, such matters shall be dealt with during *in camera* sessions. Personnel matters typically fall under this category.
- Examples of confidential information include:
 - Personnel records, including personal data such as address, date of birth, salary, Social Insurance Number and dependant information.
 - Confidential correspondence and communications identified as such or known to be confidential in nature and content.
 - Group Benefit information which may include personal data or medical information.
 - Accounts receivable information which may include name of clients.
 - Matters under litigation or known to have the potential of being under litigation.
 - Instructions from the Chair, Corporate Partners or from the Board of Directors which have been discussed In Camera and which have not been released for public disclosure.
 - Private and/or confidential communications from management regarding internal or external operational and strategic issues.
- When unsure about the status of any communication, Board members are encouraged to ask the Chair or Vice-chair.
- Conversely, when the Chair or Vice-chair are uncertain as to the position on a matter and the response to a request for same, they should seek the consensus of the Board of Directors and act pursuant to the direction of the Board.

Date March 2nd 2020

B Bonnie Mills Midgely

B Bonnie Mills Midgely, Chair

Merle Bielecki

Merle Bielecki, Vice-Chair

Section 81.1 of The Municipalities Act

Read a third time and adopted

this 28th day of January 2020

B Bonnie Mills Midgely
B Bonnie Mills Midgely, Chair