



The Corporation of the Town of LaSalle

To: Mayor and Members of Council

Prepared by: Dawn Hadre, Director of Strategy and Engagement

Department: Strategy and Engagement

Date of Report: March 14, 2024

Report Number: SE-01-2024

Subject: SE-01-2024 Policy Updates: Media Relations, Social Media, Municipal Digital Signs and Lobby Screens, Advertising

Recommendation

That the report of the Director of the Strategy and Engagement Department dated March 14, 2024 (SE-01-2024) regarding Policy Updates: Media Relations, Social Media, Municipal Digital Signs and Lobby Screens, and Advertising be received;

And that Council approves the Media Relations Policy;

And that Council approves the Social Media Policy;

And that Council approves the Municipal Digital Signs and Lobby Screens Policy;

And that Council rescinds the Advertising Policy.

Report

Media Relations Policy

In consultation with Mayor Crystal Meloche, a change is being recommended to the Media Relations Policy (attached to this report). This policy was introduced in 2015 and outlines the guidelines for how the municipality communicates with members of the media.

When the policy was introduced, the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and all members of Council were designated as official spokespersons. The change being recommended is that the Mayor be designated as the official spokesperson on behalf of all members of Council.

In this scenario, all media inquiries made to any member of Council should be directed to the Mayor for an official comment. The Mayor, at their discretion, may choose to designate another Council Member to respond to a media inquiry.

This change will ensure that all information being shared with the media is current and relevant. There are times when the Mayor may be aware of information that members of Council are not aware of at the time of the request. Based on time restrictions to respond to a media request to meet deadlines, this would be the most appropriate procedure to follow. Department Heads and the Corporate Communication and Promotions Officer will remain as official spokespersons for the Town as they provide professional information in their fields of expertise.

Social Media Policy

The Town of LaSalle's Social Media Policy (attached to this report) was adopted in 2015. The policy has served its purpose over the years, and now requires some updates based on the current online atmosphere. The Strategy and Engagement Department oversees 11 social media accounts, as well as one online engagement platform. Followers and likes have consistently increased over the years, and social media has become one of the most used resources to communicate with the public.

One major change on social media is misinformation and the overwhelming negativity about Town facilities, programs, services, events, staff, and Council Members. This type of commentary is often unnecessary and disheartening for staff. When negative comments are made on the Town's accounts, the Department addresses the comments and has asked some members of the public to remove their comments. Following the guidelines of the Social Media Policy, the Department has also deleted comments from some posts.

The Department continues to encourage the public to follow the Town's official pages, and to use those to communicate with administration. Unfortunately, some people prefer to post to community pages to solicit advice and information from the community. While these pages are generally useful, at times they become extremely negative. It is not productive to debate about issues on social media. As such, administration will continue with the current practice and will not interact on community pages.

The changes to the policy include some minor wording changes and the following points have been added to the policy:

4.1.5 Third parties are not permitted to have access to the Town's Social Media to post content unless they receive written permission from the Director.

Only authorized Town of LaSalle employees have access to the backend of the social media accounts to ensure confidentiality. For consistency of voice, authorized staff develop content.

4.1.17 While the Department will make every reasonable effort to respond to concerns and questions directed to the Town's Social Media, the conversation may be redirected to email and/or phone. This will ensure that any privacy concerns are addressed, character limitations for messages are not inhibiting the response, and the amount of detail required is possible.

At times, it is difficult to have an engaged conversation on social media and another method may be more appropriate. This is especially important when the discussion involves a department other than Strategy and Engagement.

4.2.4 The use of a member of Council's title on Social Media signifies that the member of Council is acting in an official capacity. Members of Council should exercise good judgment when responding to questions on Social Media. If a question posed on any Social Media should be answered by administration, members of Council should direct the public to the Town's Social Media for a response.

Members of Council shall identify where they are expressing personal views, and not the views of all of Council. Members of Council should adhere to the *Code of Conduct for Council Members and Local Boards* when posting to any Social Media.

In consultation with Mayor Crystal Meloche, and based on previous situations on community pages, it would be beneficial for Council Members not to engage in debates on social media, but rather encourage the public to contact Town administration for information and clarification.

Some members of the public negatively post or comment about the Town, Council, and employees. It is important to note that these are a minority and rarely represent the majority of residents. Social media is not an accurate gauge of the pulse of the community.

The best-case scenario is to allow the public to debate among themselves. There has been an increase in members of the public who are questioning posts and responding in defense of the Town. In most cases, the issue ends on its own. If it is directed to the Town through one of the official channels, administration will respond.

4.2.6 Members of Council shall not post or comment on the Town's Social Media. These pages are used to share information on behalf of the Town.

The Department works with all municipal departments to provide responses to comments/questions on the Town's social media accounts. Administration may provide different responses than a member of Council.

4.2.7 Members of Council may be subject to action for violation of this Policy and/or may be subject to investigation by the Integrity Commissioner.

There has been an increase in investigations by Integrity Commissioners across Ontario for the use of social media by council members.

4.2.8 The Town is not able to control comments posted on third-party Social Media sites and does not monitor or comment on these sites. Should the Department become aware of a post and/or comment that negatively affects the

public's perception of the Town, or Employees or members of Council, the Department may contact the page owner to request removal of the content.

The Town will not interact on third-party social media pages, save and except on an authorized community partner page as deemed appropriate by the Director. The Department continues to encourage the public to follow the Town's official social media accounts for current information. Should an employee or member of Council participate on a third-party social media page, they are doing so in a personal capacity, and not in an official capacity on behalf of the Town.

4.3.2 The Department may choose to turn off comments on any post at any time.

The Department understands the importance of sharing information on social media. There is no intention to turn off all comments on social media. From time to time, however, it may be necessary to turn off comments on a specific post. For example, when sharing information from the Windsor Essex County Health Unit about COVID, comments on some posts were turned off to reduce the amount of negativity about COVID protocols. It was more important to ensure accurate information was being shared with the public, rather than responding to misinformation and negativity in the comments.

4.3.3 In the event of an emergency, all regularly scheduled posts may be paused. Official messaging about the emergency will be posted on the Town's Social Media.

In the event of an emergency, all social media accounts will be used to send out official information about the emergency. This information is prepared in collaboration with the Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC) and/or the official contact for the emergency.

In times of emergency, the messages from the Town's accounts must be shared (rather than creating individual posts) to ensure that identical information is always conveyed to the public. Sharing posts from the Town's accounts will also help maintain the Town's messaging as any previous posts that are edited will reflect those changes.

4.3.4 The Town promotes respect in the workplace and is committed to providing a safe and positive experience with all internal and external contacts. It is expected all interactions be courteous, professional, considerate, and respectful.

The public must be aware that there are rules for engagement on the Town's social media accounts to ensure an enjoyable experience for all. The Town appreciates feedback including constructive criticism, suggestions, and questions in a respectful manner. The Town will hide or delete any comments or posts that do not follow the rules included in the policy.

Additions to inappropriate content that will be removed from the Town's social media pages includes:

- **Spam**
- **The sale of goods by a third party, including tickets.**

During the Last Call Before Fall event, the Town experienced several comments on their posts with spam and the sale of fake tickets. Those comments will always be deleted.

Promoting Community Events

There has been an increase in requests from the public to post third-party event information on the Town's social media pages. The Department does recognize the value and importance that this plays in supporting the initiatives of our community and region. The Department has outlined a process for this, and it is included in the Social Media Policy. Please note that the Department will share event information from credible social media pages when asked, however, will not author a new post about a third-party event.

Additions to Criteria for Promoting Community Events

Event organizers are encouraged to advise the Department about upcoming public events at least three weeks prior to the event date. Event organizers are encouraged to tag the Town of LaSalle on their own social media pages with the event flyer and/or details. The Department may share posts from third-party social media sites to the Town sites with relevant event information when time permits. Event organizers can also upload information to the event calendar on the Town's website. The Department will approve all event calendar submissions prior to being publicly posted.

PlaceSpeak and Website Changes

The Department will be launching a new page on PlaceSpeak that will provide information to the public to address misinformation. The intention is not to allow comments on the page, but solely to provide accurate information. This will be linked to the Town's website for reports, meetings, and project pages. Details about the use of the page are being developed.

The Department will also add information to the social media page on the Town's website to remind the public that there are several community pages that are not administered by the Town. Administration will not interact on those pages and encourages the public to follow the Town's official pages for accurate updates and information.

Municipal Digital Signs and Lobby Screens Policy

The Municipal Digital Signs and Lobby Screens Policy (attached to this report) was adopted by Council in 2016. It was updated in 2020 and was recently reviewed making a few changes. Currently, the outdoor digital signs are located at the LaSalle Civic Centre and at the Vollmer Complex. Lobby screens are located at the LaSalle Civic

Centre, the Vollmer Complex, and the Event Centre. The policy has been amended to include digital signs and lobby screens at all Town of LaSalle facilities.

The digital signs and lobby screens are mainly used to share information with the community for municipal messages about services, programs, and events. The Department also accepts requests from other government agencies and non-profit organizations to display messages about community events.

The following guidelines were amended or added to the policy:

4.2.4 The Town is not liable for power outages or other acts beyond its control that affect the ability to utilize municipal Digital Signs or Lobby Screens to convey information on behalf of third parties.

4.3.1 The following Messages shall not be permitted on the Digital Signs and/or Lobby Screens:

- **Material that is protected by copyright without the express written permission of the copyright holder is not permitted.**
- **Messages advocating/encouraging the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and/or drugs are not permitted.**
- **Messages advocating and/or encouraging the participation in gambling or games of chance are not permitted.**
- **Material that may violate an individual's privacy is not permitted.**

In the past, paid advertising or commercial messaging was available on the outdoor digital sign at the Vollmer Complex. The intention of this was to sell limited advertising space for individuals or groups using the Vollmer Complex. The sign has not typically been used in that capacity, and with the amount of municipal information to share, it is time to reserve the space solely for Town needs. Paid advertising or commercial messaging is no longer permitted on any digital sign, and further is not allowed on the lobby screens.

Advertisements Policy

The Advertisements Policy was introduced in 2003 and was updated in 2005. This policy outlines how the Town places advertisements and public notices in newspapers. This includes general information, events, programs, services, and legal notices etc. In addition, some departments are required to post information in newspapers to meet the legislation of certain studies and projects.

Based on the different needs, timelines, and budgets of each department, it is difficult to choose one source for advertisements. We recommend that the Advertisements Policy be rescinded and allow each department to continue with the responsibility to place advertisements in newspapers as required. Those decisions are made based on the

content, the deadline to place the advertisement, as well as financial implications. The Department will assist and provide advice in the placement of advertisements as needed.

Consultations

Senior Leadership Team, Manager of Recreation, Corporate Communication and Promotions Officer

Financial Implications

None

Prepared By:



Dawn Hadre, Director of Strategy and Engagement

Link to Strategic Goals

1. Enhancing organizational excellence - Yes
2. Strengthen the community's engagement with the Town - Yes
3. Grow and diversify the local economy - Not Applicable
4. Build on our high-quality of life - Not Applicable
5. Sustaining strong public services and infrastructure - Not Applicable

Communications

Not applicable

Notifications

Not applicable

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	SE-01-2024 Policy Updates - Media Relations, Social Media, Municipal Digital Signs and Lobby Screens, Advertising.docx
Attachments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Media Relations Policy January 2024.docx- Social Media Policy January 2024.docx- Social Media January 2024 - Appendix A Corporate Social Media Accounts.docx- Social Media Policy January 2024 - Appendix B Guidelines for Council Members.docx- Municipal Digital Signs Lobby Screens Policy January 2024.docx
Final Approval Date:	Mar 20, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:



Chief Administrative Officer

Joe Milicia