Town of Yarmouth

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Effective: November 12th, 2026

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1.0 PURPOSE

This policy establishes the Town's approach to timely, accurate, accessible, inclusive, and consistent public communications concerning municipal services, programs, events, opportunities, notices, and emergencies.

1.1 OBJECTIVE

The primary goals are to raise public awareness, support public safety, and strengthen community engagement while using plain language and accessible formats.

2.0 SCOPE

This policy applies to all official Town communications, including the Town websites, social media channels, newsletters, print materials, signage, and media releases.

3.0 DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy:

a. "Accessible formats" are formats that enable people, including people with disabilities, to access and understand information, in accordance with applicable accessibility requirements.
b. "CAO" means the Chief Administrative Officer of the Town of Yarmouth or the CAO's designate.
c. "Communications Coordinator" means the Town employee responsible for coordinating and managing the Town's public communications.
d. "Designated spokesperson" means a person authorized to speak publicly or to the media on behalf of the Town on specified matters.
e. "Eligible content" means community events, programs, services, opportunities, or other public-interest information that meets this policy's criteria for sharing, including the requirements in Section 7.0. It may include Town-sponsored or Town-supported activities, qualifying government information, and information from businesses or commercial organizations that supports public safety, public service, tourism, economic development, or another clear public interest. Eligibility does not guarantee publication or imply Town endorsement.
f. "Public interest" means a matter that informs, benefits, protects, or affects the community or a significant segment of the public.
g. "Town" means the Town of Yarmouth.

h. “User-generated content” means comments, replies, posts, images, videos, links, or other material submitted or posted by members of the public on a Town communication channel.

4.0 PRINCIPLES

Town communications must:

a. be accurate, factual, and appropriately verified;
b. be issued promptly, subject to necessary review and approval;
c. use plain language and accessible formats;
d. be respectful, inclusive, and non-discriminatory;
e. protect personal and confidential information and comply with applicable legislation.

5.0 TYPES OF CONTENT

5.1 Information the Town may share through its communication channels includes:

a. municipal services, programs, hours, fees, and service changes;
b. funding awards, grant opportunities, partnerships, and program or project updates;
c. Council agendas and minutes;
d. public notices, including road closures, transit service changes, water advisories, bylaw changes, public hearings, and information sessions;
e. eligible community events, programs, services, opportunities, and public-interest information under Section 7.0;
f. emergency and public-safety information;
g. promotional campaigns for Town programs, services, initiatives, and engagement opportunities; and
h. planning and development applications, proposals, hearings, approvals, permits, development agreements, construction timelines, participation information, and related guidance.

5.2 The Town will not publish confidential or unnecessary personal information. Complex, technical, legal, or binding matters will be addressed through the applicable official process.

6.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1 Council

Council establishes strategic direction and approves communications policies and other matters requiring Council approval. Council members may communicate the decisions and positions of Council in accordance with applicable legislation, policies, and Council direction.

6.2 Chief Administrative Officer

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) has overall responsibility for Town communications and may approve exceptions or urgent communications, or delegate that authority.

6.3 Communications Coordinator

The Communications Coordinator manages day-to-day communications, channels, style, accessibility, submissions, publication workflow, media contacts, and public inquiries concerning communications.

6.4 Department Heads and Staff

Department heads and staff must provide accurate and timely content, meet submission deadlines, and comply with this policy.

6.5 Media Relations

The Town will respond to media inquiries in a timely and professional manner. The Mayor is the official spokesperson for the Town. The CAO, department heads, and other appropriate staff may be designated by the Mayor or CAO to provide supplementary technical or detailed information within their areas of responsibility. Such information must be coordinated with the Mayor or CAO and must not contradict the Town's official position.

The Mayor may authorize the CAO to designate a technical expert to speak on a specific matter. The Communications Coordinator will coordinate media inquiries, prepare media releases, and arrange interviews. All other staff must refer media requests for official comment to the Communications Coordinator or the CAO.

7.0 COMMUNITY INFORMATION, EVENT AND SERVICE PROMOTION — SUBMISSION AND CRITERIA

7.1 Purpose

This section establishes fair, consistent, and transparent criteria for sharing community events, programs, services, opportunities, and other public-interest information.

7.2 Community Calendar Submissions

a. Eligible information may be submitted for the Town's community calendar at townofyarmouth.ca using the Town's submission form. Paper copies will be available at Town Hall.
b. The Communications Coordinator may add eligible events and information from reliable sources to the calendar or newsletter without a formal submission. For this purpose, sources are limited to partner organizations and Town-affiliated or local government entities (for example, municipal or regional agencies and Town-managed programs).
c. Calendar or newsletter inclusion does not guarantee social media promotion or imply Town endorsement.

7.3 Requests for Social Media Sharing

a. Requests should be submitted to comms@townofyarmouth.ca at least five business days before the relevant date or deadline. Requests received outside regular business hours may not be reviewed immediately.
b. Social media sharing may be considered for:

i. Town-sponsored or Town-supported events, programs, services, and initiatives, including those delivered through:
    a. inter-municipal agreements and joint service boards; and
    b. other organizations receiving direct financial support or formal sponsorship from the Town, where the information relates to the supported activity or service;
ii. Any official federal or provincial government notices, advisories, announcements, publications, and communications from agencies at those levels that relate to the interests or well-being of Town residents. Such material may be shared on Town channels and will be clearly attributed to the originating government source; where helpful, the Town may add brief local context or links to Town resources.

c. Information from businesses or commercial organizations may be considered where it supports public safety, public service, tourism, economic development, or another clear public interest.
d. The CAO or their designate may approve an exception to these content categories where doing so is in the public interest.

7.4 Exclusions

a. The Town will not normally share:
    i. promotional, advocacy, fundraising, recruitment, or campaign material primarily intended to advance a religious, political, ideological, or commercial position, except where the information qualifies under this policy because of a clear public-service or public-interest purpose, or where permitted under Section 7.3 c;
    ii. personal opinions, disputes, complaints, or grievances;
    iii. information about private or narrowly restricted activities that do not demonstrate a clear public benefit;
    iv. information that is inaccurate, misleading, unlawful, discriminatory, defamatory, threatening, harassing, obscene, or otherwise offensive; or
    v. requests that require the Town to manage registrations, inquiries, ticketing, fundraising, or customer service on behalf of a third party.
b. The CAO or designate may approve an exception where it is in the public interest.

7.5 Review, Priority, and Discretion

a. The Town may establish administrative procedures and submission requirements for community information.
b. The Communications Coordinator may assess submissions for accuracy, relevance, accessibility, public benefit, timing, and consistency with this policy.
c. The Communications Coordinator may request revisions, determine the communication channel, or limit the frequency of third-party promotions.

d. The Communications Coordinator determines whether information is shared, as well as its wording, format, timing, and frequency. Submission does not guarantee publication or a particular posting date.
e. The Communications Coordinator may share third-party content without a formal submission where it is accurate, relevant, timely, and consistent with this policy. Such sharing does not constitute endorsement, and the Town may edit, limit, or remove the content.

7.6 Responsibility of Submitters

a. Submitters are responsible for ensuring their information is accurate, current, lawful, and accessible and for managing related inquiries, registrations, cancellations, and follow-up.
b. The Town may edit, update, postpone, or remove information that is inaccurate, outdated, cancelled, or inconsistent with this policy.

8.0 SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE GUIDELINES

8.1 Content and Accessibility

a. Official communications must be clear, accurate, respectful, professional, and appropriate to the intended audience. Plain language should be used and unnecessary jargon avoided.
b. Communications will minimize barriers to access and comply with applicable accessibility legislation, standards, Town policies, and recognized practices. This includes readable formatting, sufficient colour contrast, alternative text for images, captions or transcripts for audio and video, and accessible document formats. Alternative formats or communication supports will be provided upon request where reasonably possible.
c. Communications should include links to source materials or further information where appropriate. Social media posts are summaries and do not replace official notices, records, processes, or decisions.

8.2 Moderation

The Town encourages public dialogue but requires that comments on Town social media accounts be relevant and respectful. The Town reserves the right to limit, disable, or remove comments and to block users to prevent further comments when necessary.

a. We may remove or restrict comments that include, but are not limited to:
    i. profane language of any kind;
    ii. language that is not respectful of other users (including harassing, aggressive, or abusive language);
    iii. comments that encourage or suggest illegal activities;
    iv. repetitive comments or spam, including business solicitations;

v. abusive or oppressive language, content, or links (including racist, sexist, homophobic, misogynistic, transphobic, or other language that promotes bigotry);
vi. sexually explicit or violent imagery or links;
vii. harassing or abusive language directed at individuals or groups;
viii. information that violates an individual's or group's privacy;
ix. off-topic, irrelevant content;
x. misinformation, unproven claims, or inaccurate accusations.

b. The Communications Coordinator may limit, temporarily suspend, or disable comments for operational, safety, or moderation reasons, including when:
i. a post is strictly informational, and comments would not add meaningful value;
ii. there are insufficient staff or resources available to moderate comments, including outside regular operating hours;
iii. the volume or nature of comments makes effective moderation impracticable; or
iv. comments create a risk to the safety, security, privacy, or effective operation of the Town's communication channel.

c. The opinions, comments and content shared by members of the public on Town social media channels are their own. The Town does not endorse, nor is it responsible for, any user-generated content. We disclaim all liability associated with public comments and submissions.

8.3 Sharing and Amplification

a. The Communications Coordinator, on behalf of the Town, may share or amplify information from partners and other organizations where it serves a clear public interest and meets the criteria in Section 7.0. Sharing or amplification does not constitute Town endorsement.

9.0 EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS — COORDINATION AND PRACTICE

9.1 Lead Agency

The Regional Emergency Management Office (REMO) Yarmouth County is the lead agency for major emergencies in Yarmouth County.

9.2 Town Role

The Communications Coordinator, on behalf of the Town, will coordinate with REMO, amplify official messages, and issue Town-specific notices concerning municipal infrastructure impacts or localized evacuation requirements where appropriate.

9.3 The Communications Coordinator may serve as the Public Information Officer within the emergency management organization.

9.4 During emergencies, normal approval procedures may be bypassed where necessary to disseminate life-safety information promptly.

10.0 RECORDS, RETENTION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

10.1 Official communications, drafts, approvals, and release records must be retained in accordance with Town retention schedules and applicable legislation.

10.2 Published materials should be available in accessible formats upon request and meet applicable accessibility standards where feasible.

11.0 EXCEPTIONS AND DISCRETION

11.1 The CAO or designate may approve exceptions, expedite urgent communications, or address circumstances not covered by this policy where the decision is consistent with the public interest and the policy's principles.

11.2 Exceptions should be documented and reviewed.

12.0 CORRECTIONS AND UPDATES

The Communications Coordinator, on behalf of the Town, will make reasonable efforts to correct significant errors in published information as soon as practicable. Where appropriate, corrections will identify the corrected information and, when feasible, indicate that the original information has been amended.

13.0 COLLABORATION AND EXTERNAL GUIDANCE

The Communications Coordinator, on behalf of the Town, may consult comparable municipalities, provincial guidance, community organizations, and emergency agencies to improve public communications and extend the reach of public information while maintaining message consistency and appropriate attribution.

14.0 TRAINING AND REVIEW

14.1 Communications staff and designated spokespersons will receive training on this policy, plain-language writing, accessibility, and emergency communications procedures.

Clerk's Annotation for Official Policy Book	
Date of Adoption: November 12th, 2026 I certify that this 'Public Communications Policy' was adopted by Council as indicated above.	
Town Clerk:	Date: