7.17 Media Relations

A. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define the channels for media relations with City staff in order to insure accurate and timely dissemination of information. Furthermore, an established policy will reduce the likelihood of inaccurate, conflicting, unauthorized or "off the record" information from being released. Finally, to address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, the City of Winchester will participate in social media formats to reach a broader audience.

This policy is not intended to restrict the media's contact with elected officials. Issues concerning any elected official's contact with the media are exclusively within the purview of the City Council.

B. Policy Statement

It will be the policy of the City of Winchester to foster and encourage an atmosphere of openness in dealing with the media. Coordinating news releases and information to the media is to be regarded as an important consideration in maintaining good public relations. City media, including newsletters, web pages, social media outlets, and cable television access channels are intended to support priorities, programs, and services of the City.

The City encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the City and the missions of its departments where appropriate. The City has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding who may "speak" and what is "spoken" on behalf of the City on social media sites. This policy includes guidelines for the use of social media. The City Manager or his designee shall approve what social media outlets may be suitable for use by the City and its departments. The City Manager or his designee shall serve to educate departments on how to best use various social media outlets to achieve their goals.

The City Manager or his designee is responsible for administering the city's e-newsletter, web page, social media outlets, and access channels in conformance with these guidelines.

Information regarding non-city programs will not be published unless:

- there is significant investment of City resources;
- the City is a sponsor or co-sponsor of the program or event; or
- the information is intended to inform residents of policies and programs of other governmental agencies having jurisdiction in the City.

Exceptions

City media may be used to inform residents of cultural or academic activities or events, whether held in the city or not, so long as the program or activity is sponsored by a not-for-profit agency or organization and there is no conflict with the Prohibitions set forth below. Arts and entertainment events in Old Town Winchester may also be included in city informational media, spacing permitting.

Prohibitions

City informational media are not to be used for advocating support for a particular issue or individual unless as identified as a priority of the City. City informational media will not be used for any commercial advertising message or any purpose that constitutes libel, slander, invasion of privacy, violation of trademark or copyright, or that might violate any local, state, or federal law including FCC regulations.

C. Definitions

Social Media - various forms of discussion and information sharing including social networks, blogs, video sharing, podcasts, wikis, message boards, and online forums. Technologies include: picture-sharing, wall-postings, e-mail, instant messaging, and music-sharing to name a few. Examples of social media applications include but are not limited to Google and Yahoo Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace and Facebook (social networking), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging), LinkedIn (business networking), and news media comment sharing/blogging.

Social Networking - the practice of expanding the number of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through web-based applications. Social networking may include joining clubs and organizations or staying connected through phone conversations and written correspondence such as letters. This policy focuses on social networking as it relates to the Internet to promote such connections. Web sites dedicated to social networking include Linkedin, My Space, and Facebook.

D. Duties and Responsibilities

The City Manager or his designee shall be the official staff spokesperson for the City and shall act as the Public Information Officer (PIO) unless otherwise designated. In accordance with Police Department policies and procedures, the Chief of Police or his designee, shall handle inquiries concerning criminal investigations. The media shall contact the City Manager or his designee concerning the administration or affairs of the City including but not limited to:

- specific actions taken at official City Council meetings or commission, board or committee meetings;
- clarification and interpretation of City policies and administrative rules and regulations;

- actions pending or under consideration by the City Council or any commission, board, or committee that have not yet been made official policies;
- inquiries concerning City employees; and
- routine inquiries regarding departmental operations.

It is the responsibility of:

1. the Public Information Officer to maintain the City's official web presence via social media/networking and the internet.
2. the Information Technology (IT) Department to administer security and monitoring measures that support this policy.
3. all City Departments and employees who want to engage in social media/networking in an official capacity for their department to coordinate this activity with the PIO and IT Department.

The responsibility for assuring complete compliance with the provisions of this policy rests with the Department Director, supervisors and the individual employee involved. It is the responsibility of social media users and those engaged in social networking to stay informed regarding City policies related to this activity.

E. <u>Speaking to the Print and Broadcast Media</u>

The City Manager or his designee shall be notified immediately of any contacts or requests for information from television, print, or radio media. Questions concerning new programs and policies that are under consideration by the City Council shall be referred to the City Manager or his designee. At his discretion, the City Manager may designate a person to serve as spokesperson on a particular issue.

In the case of formal written news releases, all such releases will be disseminated from the City Manager's Office or with the prior review and approval of the City Manager or his designee. If a particular employee or Department Director wishes to bring some information to the attention of the media, that matter should be coordinated with the City Manager or his designee.

Department Directors, or designated departmental representatives, may handle routine requests from the media that are within their area of expertise. Other employees who may be asked questions should refer the reporter to the Department Director or designated representative. If there is any question as to whether or not a request constitutes a “routine request”, clarification should be obtained from the City Manager or his designee prior to responding to the request.

Department Directors may address questions from the media on sensitive issues relating to their area of expertise, including topics that may affect City policy and/or matters that may ultimately result in Council action only after obtaining authorization from the City Manager or his designee.

Unless otherwise required under applicable law, reports prepared by City staff for submission to City Council shall not be shared with the media or the general public until the agenda packets have been delivered to City Council and authorization has been provided by the City Manager or his designee. This shall not be construed to apply to reports submitted to appointed Boards and Commissions as a condition precedent to submission to Common Council. With regard to these reports, it shall be the responsibility of the respective Board or Commission liaison to ensure that all significant or sensitive matters are discussed with the Manager or his designee prior to release of the information to the media, general public, or the applicable Board or Commission.

News releases shall not contain information, which is confidential pursuant to provisions of State or Federal law, or has which been received by the City pursuant to a representation of confidentiality. Documents or information exempt from disclosure shall not be contained in any news release without City Manager approval.

F. <u>News Releases</u>

News Releases shall be prepared and routed to the City Manager or his designee for final review before they are released to the media. All news releases shall be routed for comment to any department that would be affected by the release prior to final approval by the City Manager or his designee. This requirement will ensure that information is current and correct.

<u>Exception.</u>

Fire and Rescue and Police Department responses to emergencies in the City may be reported directly to the media by a designated department spokesperson with the approval of the Fire and Rescue Chief or Police Chief. Police Department releases concerning traffic advisories, investigations and routine community relations activities may also be reported directly to the media. All releases should also be copied to the City Manager or his designee.

City departments shall use standard City of Winchester news release format to distribute information to the media (Appendix __). News releases shall include the name, telephone number and department, who prepared the release.

News releases containing controversial or sensitive materials and/or matters relating to public safety shall be distributed to the Mayor and members of the City Council prior to release to the media.

G. <u>Social Media</u>

1. All official City of Winchester presences on social media sites or services are considered an extension of the City's information network and are governed by the Media Relations Policy.

2. The City Manager or his designee will review department requests to use social media sites and may delegate this review function to the Public Information Officer.

3. The Public Information Officer will advocate using social media to help departments reach their stated goals by assisting departments in developing appropriate uses for social media, assisting the selecting of appropriate social media outlets and helping departments define a strategy for engagement using social media.

4. Departments that use social media are responsible for complying with applicable federal, state, and City laws, regulations, and policies. This includes adherence to established laws and policies regarding copyright, records retention, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), First Amendment, privacy laws and information security policies established by the City.

5. Wherever possible, links to more information should direct users back to the City's official website for information, forms, documents or online services necessary to conduct business with the City.

6. Employees representing the City government via social media outlets must conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the City. Employees that fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner shall be subject to the disciplinary action outlined in the Comprehensive Employee Management System.

7. The Public Information Officer will monitor content on each of the department social media sites to ensure adherence to the Social Media Policy for appropriate use, messaging, and branding consistent with the goals of the City.

8. Violation of this policy may result in the removal of department pages from social media outlets. The Public Information Officer retains the authority to remove information or provide corrections or clarifications.

9. Use of social media sites.

    a) Personal/private employee blogging or personal/private use of such social media sites as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter is prohibited during working hours. It is also prohibited using City computers or devices such as Internet-enabled personal digital assistants (PDAs) such as Blackberries. Employees may not attribute personal statements, opinions or beliefs to the City of Winchester when engaging in private blogging. Employees are prohibited against disclosure of confidential information or information that could breach the security of the City's computer system in any way. It is also prohibited to use the City logo and trademarks. Employees are prohibited against posting any material that would constitute harassment, hate speech or libel. Employees assume any and all risk associated with blogging. The City may require immediate removal of, and

impose discipline for, material that is disruptive to the workplace or impairs the mission of the City.

b) Use of social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter when doing so as the official spokesperson for a department must be authorized by the employee's Department Director and coordinated with the City's PIO and IT Departments. The PIO will serve as the official spokesperson for the City in the area of social media/networking.

c) Use of social media of a business nature such as LinkedIn or a "Members Only"-site maintained by a City-approved professional organization may be permitted if limited to a professional rather than personal nature and kept short in duration in terms of time accessed. Short is defined as less time than would typically be taken as a personal break during the workday that would be deemed acceptable by a direct supervisor, or such time as given prior approval by one's supervisor.