

Town of Matthews Media Policy

I. Purpose

The purpose of this media policy is to provide town personnel with guidelines for interacting with news media, and coordinating media interaction with the Town's Communications Director.

II. Scope

This policy applies to all departments of the Town of Matthews. Only the Police and Fire & EMS Departments have additional policies and/or procedures for the release of news information as pertaining to emergency and crisis situations.

III. Policy Overview

It shall be the policy of the Town of Matthews to maintain and promote open avenues of communication between the town and the news media, and to provide accurate, informed, timely, and relevant information to the press and to the public. Town staff is expected to be responsive to media inquiries.

IV. General Policy

Media Interaction

1. Town staff should notify their department heads before communicating with members of the media. Staff members and department directors should only discuss areas or programs for which they are responsible for or have expertise.
2. Town department heads should notify the Communications Director when a reporter has contacted their department about a specific interview. In an interview situation, it is suggested that a department head contact the Communications Director before speaking with a member of the media. If the situation does not allow the department head the opportunity to first contact the Communications Director, a follow up call or email should be sent as soon as possible to the Communications Director regarding the situation. The station identification i.e. Channel 9, reporter's name, and subject matter should be included. Some emergency and after hour events will need immediate attention from the staff.
3. If a reporter contacts an employee for specific fact verification and the reporter has already interviewed the employee in regards to a story, it is not necessary to contact the Communications Director before speaking with the reporter. If an employee has not previously had contact with the reporter and is contacted for fact verification, the employee should seek assistance from the Communications Director, after first contacting their Director or immediate Supervisor. The Director or Supervisor is the key contact for each department

and is responsible for the information disseminated by their key employees. No employee should speak with the media without prior reporting this contact to their Supervisor or Director.

4. If an employee does not know an answer to a reporter's questions it is appropriate to answer, "I don't know, let me get back to you" and then follow up with the reporter. Always ask what the deadline is for the reporter.
5. To avoid conflicting messages or confusion, department heads should always contact the Communications Director before they or someone from their department has spoken with the media.
6. When communicating with the media, Town staff should be mindful that they are perceived to be acting on behalf of the Town. All employees should behave professionally and courteously and avoid editorializing as much as possible.
7. Town staff is required to be responsive to the media in a timely fashion. When a member of the media contacts a Town employee, it is expected that the employee respond to the reporter as soon as reasonably expected while still conforming to this policy. Town employees who may not feel comfortable discussing an issue may choose not to comment on the issue but are also obligated to explain that their choice not to comment is not a reflection of department policy or Town policy to avoid communicating with the media. Should such a situation arise, the staff member should contact the Communications Director as soon as possible.
8. In any interview situation, a staff member or department director may decide to refer a member of the media to the Communications Director.

Public Records Request

As a local government entity, the Town may receive requests for information. While most business conducted is open to the public, some pieces of information are not public record. In order to avoid confusion and to not violate the N.C. General Statutes employees should take the following steps when they receive a request for information:

1. Should a member of the media make a request to see something of public record, employees should notify:
 - Communications Director
 - Town Clerk
 - Department Head
 - Town Manager/Assistant Manager
 - Town Attorney

2. Should a member of the general public make a request to see something of public record, employees should notify:
 - Town Clerk
 - Communications Director
 - Department Head
 - Town Manager/Assistant Manager
 - Town Attorney
3. Town staff should advise the requesting party to contact the Town Clerk - Communications Director for the information.
4. Town employees will not release any records until they have received verification from one of the following: Town Clerk, Communications Director, Town Attorney, and the Town Manager that it is acceptable.

News Releases

1. News releases should be submitted to the Communications Director for review, approval, and distribution with the exception of Police, Fire & EMS. The exception will be those events and situations that are an emergency or need immediate attention. The employee should advise the Department Head or their Supervisor and the Communications Director of the news release.
2. Once approved, the Communications Director will be responsible for distribution to the news media. If necessity requires a department to distribute its own news releases, then a courtesy copy should be sent to the Communications Director as soon as possible.
3. All news releases issued should follow generally accepted media formatting.

Any other Communication – such as Brochures/Letters, etc.

The staff will provide a copy of any insert, brochure or mass-produced letter to the Communications Director, prior to its release, in order for the townwide communication process to have a concise appropriate consistent message and appearance. All must be given to the Communications Director with a minimum notice of three weeks. Approval will be needed from the Department Head and the Communications Director prior to the distribution of the information. Most basic information will need only the Department Head and Supervisor's approval.