

Town of Hamburg Media Relations Policy

1. Policy

The objective of the Town of Hamburg media relations policy and procedure is to ensure that the information contained in all communication with the media is consistent, accurate, fair and timely.

Effective communications with the media are critical to the Town of Hamburg's ability to carry out its mission, relay necessary and sometimes critical information to the public, and promote the services of the town.

2. General Procedures for Interacting with the Media

The following shall be the guidelines for departments, with the exception of the police department, to follow regarding speaking or otherwise interacting with the media.

1. Department heads and/or their designees are free to respond to requests from the media regarding the operations of their respective department. In such cases, the Town Supervisor and department liaison should be notified as soon as possible to inform him/her of the contact, preferably before any interview takes place. Such notification can be particularly important to ensure a coordinated, consistent response if follow-up inquiries are made with other town officials. Media inquiries should be referred to the Town Supervisor if they involve issues with town-wide significance and/or are of a controversial or sensitive nature.
2. Positive media solicitation is an integral element of the town's communications program. Any ideas for articles or pieces that would positively portray the town, its work or its community should be directed to the Town Supervisor and department liaison of the involved department for input and direction.
3. The Town Supervisor and the Town Board should be notified as soon as practical about negative occurrences that are likely to rise to the level of a news story.
4. Guidelines for communicating with the media when the issue is non-controversial and limited to a department's operations or functions:
 - a. Obtain the name of the person calling, the media organization and, if available, the anticipated time of release of information in print or broadcast. This information should be included when the notification is made to the Town Supervisor and department liaison.
 - b. The best approach with the media is to be prompt, helpful and honest. All contacts from the media should be returned as soon as possible, in deference to reporters' deadlines.

- c. Make sure you understand each question from the media before answering. If you cannot answer the question, or are uncomfortable providing a response, take the reporter's number and advise him/her that someone who can provide the information will contact him/her as soon as possible. Follow-up to ensure information is provided in a timely manner.
- d. Do not offer speculations or gossip. Do not answer a reporter's question with "no comment." Do not be condescending or underestimate the reporter's intelligence, but make sure the reporter understands your responses. Provide your phone number and/or e-mail address for follow-up questions.
- e. In responding to the media, you are representing and speaking for the town. Personal opinions should be clearly and carefully identified as such.
- f. Issues that should not be discussed with reporters are 1) legal issues, 2) personnel issues, 3) questions that involve town's integrity, such as ethics or issues that may result in harm to others, or 4) a town crisis or emergency.
- g. Any media inquiries that involve information about specific employees must be directed to the Town Supervisor. Such inquiries will be handled in strict compliance with the state and federal law.

3. Town wide Emergency or Crisis

Crisis communications have a lasting impact on the town's reputation and public support. How well we convey our message to the public greatly depends on what is reported to the news media. This is especially true in a crisis, during which the news media is the primary means of communication to our constituencies. Because of the emotions that usually accompany crises, images formed from crisis reporting are especially important in shaping long-lasting public impressions of the town.

In the event of a major crisis in the town, it is essential that an effective communications plan be put into effect to disseminate timely, accurate information and to ensure that inquiries are routed to the appropriate sources.

The Town Supervisor, working in conjunction with the Chief of Police, the Emergency Management Director, and the Highway Superintendent (when applicable) are responsible for the development and dissemination of all town communications. This includes internal communications with employees. The priority will be on maintaining timely and open communications with the media, providing complete and accurate information that has been confirmed about the emergency situation and the town's response to the crisis at hand. Communications with the media should be frequent throughout the duration of the emergency situation. The town web site and social media sites should be utilized as a key medium for updating the public on the details of the emergency situation and actions we are taking to address all related issues.

4. Localized Emergencies or Police Matters

For emergencies that are more localized (such as automobile accidents) or non-emergency police matters, all media inquiries and public communications will be handled by the police department in accordance with the department's operating procedures/media policy.

Notwithstanding the internal police department media policy, the police department must develop a policy that ensures the Town Supervisor and the Town Board become aware of all matters for which media inquiries and/or public communications have been made.

5. Elected Officials

It is acknowledged that elected officials cannot be bound to this policy. However, in order to ensure an accurate and consistent message, it is encouraged that all elected officials adhere to the standards set forth in this policy.