

CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS CHARTER

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Version 1.0

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication and community engagement are cornerstones of a healthy democracy, in which people can learn about decisions that affect them and participate in the decision-making process. This document defines who is involved in Bellingham City Council communications and community engagement and clarifies their related responsibilities.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. City Council

- a. Delegates communications and community engagement projects to the City Council Communications Work Group or requests communications and community engagement deliverables from City Council staff members.
- b. Considers for approval the City Council Communications Charter and the City Council Strategic Communications and Community Engagement Plan, along with proposed amendments.

2. City Council Communications Work Group

- a. Regular members of this group include the current Council President, past Council President, Communications and Community Relations Director, City Council Communications and Community Relations position, City Council Office Manager, and Legislative Policy Analyst.
 1. Work group members may invite one additional Council Member to provide consultation.
- b. Works with City Council staff members on emergent communications priorities.
- c. Helps advance the City Council Strategic Communications and Community Engagement Plan and City Council Communications Work Plan.

- d. Works on projects as directed by the City Council.

3. Council President

- a. Provides day-to-day direction to City Council Office staff members.
- b. Reviews and approves communications prepared by City Council staff members.
- c. As needed, consults with other City Council Members on communications work.
- d. Works with City Council staff members to identify and respond to emerging communications needs.
- e. Serves as the spokesperson for the City Council as a body, unless delegated to another Council Member.

4. Communications and Community Relations Director

- a. Directs communications and community engagement strategy and approaches across all City departments.
- b. Provides strategic communications and community engagement leadership, advice, and consultation to the legislative and judicial branches of City government.
 - 1. Responsible for ensuring that City communications follow established best practices and reflect the City's values and priorities.
- c. Attends the City Council Communications Work Group to coordinate and align messaging and communications and community engagement strategy, and to consult, as needed, on Council communications and community engagement plans. Provides further coordination and alignment between Work Group meetings.

5. City Council Communications and Community Relations Position

- a. Dedicated position to support City Council communications and community relations.
- b. Acts on direction from
 - 1. City Council as a body,
 - 2. the City Council Communications Work Group,
 - 3. and the City Council President.
- c. Develops, recommends, facilitates, and implements strategic approaches to address the City Council's communication and community engagement needs.
- d. Ensures strategic approaches that address City Council communications and community relations needs align with established best practices and reflect the Guiding Principles for City communications. Coordinates approaches with the City Communications and Community Relations Director, other communications staff, and other City staff when necessary to achieve consistent and accurate messages across branches of government.

6. Council Office Manager

- a. Triage the City Council email inbox.
 1. Provides timely replies to information requests and directs assistance requests to the appropriate staff members.
 2. Provides timely replies to emails that may not command Council Member attention.
- b. Maintains the City Council Office calendar that includes opportunities for public engagement and sends weekly emails to Council Members apprising them of upcoming events.
- c. Sends Council agenda to email list.
- d. Sends meeting and quorum notices via email.

7. Legislative Policy Analyst

- a. Works with City Council staff members, City Council President, and City Council Members to research talking points germane to policy matters.
- b. Works with Council staff members to conduct surveys or other outreach to measure the effects and the effectiveness of policies and reports back to the City Council.

CLIENTS

The City Council is a multi-member body with a horizontal decision-making process, instead of an executive hierarchy. Communications will be conducted for three "clients":

Individual Council Members

Communications activities, aligned with overall Council goals and guidelines, will help individual Council Members connect with constituents. *Examples: Helping a Council Member set up a blog or revising a letter to the editor.*

Council as a whole

Communication on behalf of the City Council, when representing a majority of the Council, is a powerful expression. The Council President works to ensure that communications efforts align with Council goals and majority actions.

Subsets of Council Members

At times, the City Council may assign work to a subset of Council Members. This work may require communications and community relations support. Direction and approval for this work would be dependent on the group's composition and would balance quorum concerns.

COMMUNICATIONS WORK DIRECTION

Because City Council’s intent is only discernible after a structured public decision-making process, a set of protocols will help ensure that communications from the Council support Council priorities and positions. This decision process will occur differently depending on the topic, which may fit into one of the following categories:

<p>At staff discretion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled social media posts consistent with approved work plan • Social media posts from other City accounts • Public notices • General City Council website content
<p>At request of Council Members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting with media requests • Setting up social media accounts • Setting up email newsletters
<p>Under Council President guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking points • Press releases • Photos of Council Members at events • Social media posts outside of those in an approved work plan • Council email/print newsletter content • Op-ed <i>after</i> Council decision on issue • Responses to constituent messages sent from CCmail account • City Council press releases • City Council website news posts
<p>Under City Council Communications Work Group guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancing the City Council Strategic Communications and Community Engagement Plan and City Council Communications Work Plan • Communications and community engagement priorities delegated by the City Council • Revising the City Council Strategic Communications and Community Engagement Plan for Council approval

Not to be released	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Topics in negotiation with the Mayor• Quasi-judicial matters• Election campaign content• Public-facing content prominently featuring individual Council Members near elections• Views contrary to Council’s final vote
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CITY COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS CHARTER AS A LIVING DOCUMENT

The City Council may amend this document by formal vote.