

# City of Summerside Transparency and Accountability Policy

## **1. POLICY STATEMENTS**

The City of Summerside ('the City') is committed to transparency and accountability. The City of Summerside is committed to creating a culture where Council, staff and citizens of Summerside uphold these values.

This policy prescribes general methods, guidelines and principles. It is not the purpose of the policy to specify step-by-step, detailed procedures. Specific procedures to implement the policy must constantly evolve through ongoing development and refinement in response to changing circumstances or public priorities.

### **Vision**

City government which is transparent and accountable to its citizens, with opportunities for meaningful, accessible public participation, made possible through innovation, technology and collaboration.

### **Mission**

Supporting open government principles of transparency and accountability, the City's mission is:

- To be open by default, subject to financial, legal, legislative and privacy constraints
- To ensure Council decision-making is open and transparent
- To be accountable for the provision and performance of its programs and services

## **2. DEFINITIONS**

**Transparency** – The principle that the municipality will conduct its business in an accessible, clear and visible manner and that its activities are open to examination.

**Accountability** – The principle that the municipality take responsibility for its actions, decisions and policies and that it is answerable to the public at large.

## **3. APPLICATION**

All City staff and members of the Summerside City Council are required to reference and use this policy in their daily work on behalf of the City.

## **4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and/or the Director of Communications will oversee this Policy. These senior staff are the first point of contact regarding the Policy. Staff and Council have responsibility to act in the spirit and intent of the Policy.

## **5. POLICY COMPONENT**

This Policy addresses basic principles and practices of local government transparency and accountability as a set of two components. Adherence to both components is taken to be a matter of good governance. The following two subsections help guide the provision of City facilities, services and programs in support of these principles.

**Transparency:**

City information should be made available within legal limitations as defined by the City of Summerside Act. The City will supply information citizens can use to constructively comment on the City's services and activities. Information should be delivered with the intent to enable citizens to participate and provide input into the planning, development or execution of City activities and decisions. The City will openly manage its services and activities on the basis of trust arising from transparency. City information and data must not only be accessible, but understandable, and if requested be provided in alternative formats. These obligations may be restricted by laws or regulations which mandate protection of privacy or confidentiality. Whenever information is withheld, an explanation will be given as to why.

All information should be provided in plain language. When there is a requirement to provide information in specified ways to satisfy legal, technical or regulatory obligations, a plain language translation will also be provided.

Information deemed to be in the public interest is to be updated on a continuous basis, consistently and, proactively. Processes will ensure information is updated and remains relevant following the initial provision of the information.

The City is committed to being 'open by default,' where information is provided to the public proactively.

**Accountability:**

On a legislative level, the roles and responsibilities of the City are defined by the City of Summerside Act. City officials will help citizens understand which level of government is responsible for what program and service. On a day-to-day level, Council and staff will make all City services easy to understand. The roles and responsibilities of citizens, customers and businesses that use the programs and services of the City will be consulted periodically to ensure the service is provided in a fair, equitable and timely way to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved.

In the delivery of services the City will explain what the City expects from citizens and what citizens can expect from the City. Expectations will be based on common sense or conventional practices. Customer and citizen expectations may change from time to time, and all expectations must be balanced with the City's authority, available skills and the resources required to achieve the expected outcome. Reports will be clear, accurate, complete and timely.

Accountable reporting will be balanced and unbiased, highlighting both met and unmet goals, multiple perspectives and outcomes. Achieved outcomes should be recognized, and where expectations have not been met, reports should disclose plans for adjustments and/or corrections made.

**6. POLICY COMMITMENTS**

The City will meet its commitments with a practical view to the constraints imposed by law as well as the City's finite resources – human, financial and technical. City Council Meetings and their minutes will be available for viewing and reading on the City of Summerside website. Many communications channels such as traditional mainstream media, social media platforms and direct mail outs will be used extensively to ensure that information reaches as many citizens as possible. Procedures will be developed that turn this policy from theory to practice, helping the City to make this policy operational. A dispute mechanism will be put in place so citizens have a channel of recourse should they think this policy is not being followed.

**Council Meetings**

The time and dates of regular meetings and agendas and standard reports will be available to the public 24 hours in advance of public deliberations, with the exception of emergency meetings as permitted by the City of Summerside Act (Section 16(3)). All staff reports to Council or Committees of Council will be written in clear non-technical language providing the reader the information required to understand the topic. Wherever possible digital archives will be used to maintain and store up-to-date records of Council by-laws, reports and minutes and is open to the general public. Agendas and minutes will be uploaded within two weeks of being approved to the City's website. All meetings of Council and Committees of Council are open to the public, with exceptions as permitted by the City of Summerside Act. Meeting agendas will be labeled and list the in camera topic headings of closed meeting agendas. With Council's consent, members of the public at meetings can be invited to present as individuals, groups or organizations to Council, or to ask questions relevant to the meeting's agenda.

### **Budgets and Strategic Documents**

The City will publish the annual budget document as well as other strategic plans or policies throughout the year. Budget variance reports, financial indicators as well as travel and hospitality expense reports will be published quarterly within 3 months of the end of the quarter. Audited financial statements accompanied by plain language explanations will be published annually.

### **Public Services**

The City proactively provides information on the programs and services they provide to the public such as fees, times, and staff contact information. This information will be easy to access and to understand. Information will be published on City's website and social media channels. The City shall invite online, in-person, or written feedback both positive and negative using the range of channels identified in the policy. The City's internal audit function will monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of City operations under Council's direction.

### **Procurement**

The City has a policy which guides open and transparent procurement of goods and services. As specified by the procurement policy, opportunities to supply the City with goods and services are competitive, advertised, and bids are opened publicly. Evaluation and selection criteria are clear and awards are fully disclosed. Standardized documents are to be used to provide simple, secure and efficient processes and provide accurate and timely disclosure of information for potential contractors and the general public. The City of Summerside's Procurement Policy can be found at the following link [www.summerside.ca/procurement](http://www.summerside.ca/procurement)

### **Conflict of Interest**

The City will apply its rules and guidelines for the management of conflicts of interest to ensure decisions are not improperly affected by self-interest. Direction will be provided to prevent special interests from attempting to offer staff or members of Council items or services of value in return for favours. A code of conduct and ethics / conflict declaration of will be signed by Council and Staff.

### **Records Management and Information Access**

Hundreds of thousands of records and documents of all types and sizes flow through the City's administration every year. Producing, gathering, sorting, storing, disseminating and disposal of official records is a monumental undertaking. The City will aim for continuous improvement with records management practices. The goal is accurate and reliable records, which are accessible, usable and authentic. A wide range of information and records are available and can be

requested directly from the service area or division responsible for the information. Records or information can be requested and the City will make every attempt to provide access to records while respecting the need for privacy.

### **Citizen Engagement**

The City is committed to involving the community in public decision-making processes. The City will maintain a community engagement framework including a database of citizens who have volunteered to participate in City initiatives. The City will support professional training provided to city staff to improve and enhance the planning and implementation of community engagement initiatives. Whenever possible, staff reports to Council will report on ways in which members of the community will be/have been involved in the issue at hand. The City has a current policy regarding public notice requirements. Citizens and community members shall be encouraged to get involved through various citizen committees and boards. Citizen committees provide advice and feedback to City Council and standing committees on a variety of issues and topics. The City will remain committed to organizing public consultations directly relevant to the City's annual budget deliberations.

### **7. REVIEW AND REPORTING**

This Policy will be reviewed once during each term of Council for relevance, currency and accuracy, including the review of activities and commitments in place to support accountability and transparency. The Policy is intended to provide general and relevant direction, on which to build supporting actions. Progress toward becoming more accountable and transparent will be reported on periodically in support of the City's Open Government Framework.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The City of Summerside's Transparency and Accountability Committee of Council recommends the development of:

- a Code of Ethical Standards for the City of Summerside that defines the organization's values and principles as well as describes how the organization collectively aspires to conduct business on behalf of the citizens it serves;
- a Code of Conduct to be signed by Elected Officials and Employees of the City which outlines the responsibilities, behaviours and practices expected of individuals representing the City;
- Conflict of Interest Guidelines complete with disclosure forms to be signed and regularly updated by Elected Officials and Employees;
- a City of Summerside Communications Policy;
- an Online Communications Strategy which includes social media procedures;
- procedures that ensure the City is open by default and is proactively disclosing municipal spending on travel, hospitality and conferences;
- a Municipal Identity Program to identify and inform Citizens of the municipal infrastructure they own;
- more public consultation and citizen engagement efforts that listen to a wide cross section of citizens and incorporate their input in to more decision making; confidentially agreements (to protect information that is sensitive and cannot be publically disclosed for privacy and security reasons) to be signed by Elected Officials and Employees; and

correspondence to inform the Government of Prince Edward Island and the Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities of the development of the City of Summerside's Transparency and Accountability Policy and its Recommendations. The City of Summerside's Transparency and Accountability Committee of Council recommends exploring the development of:

- an updated records management procedures and practices and the financial and human resource costs of various records management software systems; and
- Service/Access Summerside - a front line public information service to answer in-person/telephone/online questions on City of Summerside programs/services to redirect questions to other levels of government when need be. Similar to the provincial government's Access PEI and the federal government's Service Canada.