



City of New London

Media Relations Policy

October 2003

Focus:

- The City of New London's Public Communications Plan identified numerous strategies for communicating information to the public, centered on the citizen's perspective. The Media Relations Policy focuses on one of those strategies and presents guidelines to assist city staff in communicating the mission and vision of the City of New London in a comprehensive and coordinated way.
- The media is one of the most effective tools to disseminate accurate/timely coverage of city issues, programs, and events to city residents. For most citizens, print television and radio coverage is the only link they have to city events and decision-making.
- The city encourages accurate media coverage of programs, events, and decisions of local and regional interest and those that impact a significant segment of the community. In this regard, the city and the media have a mutual responsibility to provide accurate, objective information of city events to city residents.
- This policy serves to provide a common identity in the structure of information presented to the public, including current and potential residents, visitors and businesses, and to create new ways to generate interest in the city.

GUIDELINES:

1. **Major/Special Events.** The City Administrator shall be informed of major events as soon as possible. The Administrator will in turn inform the City Council prior to public release of information, if practical. In the case of special events, the City Administrator shall be informed prior to the release of information and may determine how, when and by whom this special event information is released.
2. **Routine Events.** Department heads and division heads are encouraged to provide the media and general public with information regarding routine upcoming events and activities within their departments and divisions.
3. **Legal Notices.** All legal notices are distributed according to State Statutes. For assistance, contact the City Clerk or City Attorney.
4. **Meeting Notices.** The City of New London follows the State of Wisconsin Open Meetings Law. Agendas for all meetings shall contain the appropriate statutory exceptions for closed sessions where applicable (see §19.85). All City of New London committees and sub-committees shall follow the Open Meetings Law.
 - The New London Press Star is the official newspaper of the City of New London and all notices will be sent, faxed or emailed to the paper as soon as prepared or at least 24 hours before any meeting. In case of an emergency, two hours notice of a meeting shall be given to the newspaper.

- Other media outlets, citizens and organizations may be informed of meetings upon written request.

5. **Press Releases and Public Service Announcements.** For routine items, the following media shall be informed:

New London Press Star
WDUX Radio

Appleton Post Crescent
WJMQ Radio

- Non-routine press releases shall be prepared and/or approved by the City Administrator.
 - Routine press releases promoting special recreation and cultural activities, and fast-breaking news updates regarding major police and fire activity may be prepared by the appropriate department. Fast breaking news shall be forwarded to the City Administrator immediately.
6. **Official Letters to the Editor and Feature Articles.** The City Administrator shall author and/or approve these communications. Presenting a coordinated message throughout city government is of utmost importance.
7. **Press Conferences.** The City Administrator or City Council may convene a press conference to announce a major city decision or to respond to an issue of general interest to the media. Staff members who believe they have an item that warrants a media conference should contact the City Administrator for approval.
8. **Police Department.** It is recognized that the Police Department receives ongoing media requests regarding daily activities. The New London Police Department follows the Wisconsin Open Records Law.
9. **Website.** Media releases, policies, newsworthy articles and other information shall be posted to the City's website at www.newlondonwi.org as soon as practical. It is understood that posting to the website provides an additional source of information to citizens and the media, and is not to be construed as the official or only source of information.
10. **Public Records.** Disclosure of public records to the media is covered by Wisconsin State Statutes and City Ordinances. The media are no more or no less privileged than the general public in being provided access to city records during normal working hours. Accurate information provided to the media is beneficial both to citizens and the city in carrying out its public information efforts. Non-routine requests may be directed to the City Attorney for interpretation.

Response to Media Inquiries

Every attempt shall be made by department heads or their designees to respond promptly and accurately to all media inquiries. However, there are exceptions, including:

- **Staff members shall not respond to media inquiries regarding an issue involving city litigation or offer legal opinions on city policies or activities. Once a case has been filed, it is public information. Media inquiries regarding filed cases are to be referred to the City Attorney.**
 - **Employees and personnel actions are not to be discussed with the media. Questions may be directed to the City Administrator.**
 - **The City Administrator may designate a media spokesperson to respond to an issue of major significance to the community to ensure that information is disseminated swiftly and accurately. When such a designation is made, the City Administrator will notify the department heads to forward all inquiries regarding a particular issue to the appropriate spokesperson.**
1. Only respond when you know the answer and do not speculate. Do not respond to hypothetical questions. Do not go “off the record.”
 2. Office staff shall be instructed to respond to calls from the media on a timely basis.
 3. No staff member shall intentionally mislead or provide the media with inaccurate or incomplete information regarding any city policy or event.
 4. Prior to being interviewed in person or over the phone, it is important to try to determine the focus of the story as well as the specific information desired by the reporter. Permission to tape a phone interview for radio broadcast must be requested and given in advance of airing.
 5. Departments which have an ongoing contact with the media are required to notify the City Administrator only of those media contacts which involve issues of significant concern to the city, such as: non-routine police or fire activity, including injury to an officer, shooting incident, arrest or conviction of a city employee which may impact that individual’s ability to successfully carry out his/her professional responsibility; politically sensitive matters that may impact city business; injury or death of a city employee or city official on or off official city duty; major malfunctions of city equipment or in a city facility which could impact the general welfare of the public or environment or the ability of the city to provide service; an unexpected work stoppage or inability to provide a critical city service; programs which receive awards or grants and city employees or officials who receive recognition for outstanding achievement; new employees and terminated staff members.

6. Department heads and identified management level staff are authorized to serve as a liaison to media representatives regarding routine policy issues in their areas.

Staff shall not make any comments to the media regarding individual council members. Staff shall not make judgmental comments regarding council actions or official city policy. Staff shall also refrain from anticipating an action or position that has not formally been taken by the council or a commission or board with policy-making authority.

City Council and the Media:

1. Any inquiry regarding “why” an individual council member voted in a particular manner on a specific issue shall be forwarded to the council member in question.
2. Traditionally, council members have made a practice of being fully accessible to the media. Every attempt shall be made to encourage the press to directly contact the council members on council policies and issues. Unless otherwise notified, council members’ home phone numbers can be given to the media and are listed in the information directory.
3. City Council and committee members shall realize that the media are contacting them as a community representative. They shall declare if their response is on behalf of the entire council or committee, or if they are speaking as an individual. Council members are encourage to notify other members if they plan to write an editorial or issue an individual media release and then provide other members advance copies of media responses.

CORRECTION OF MISINFORMATION:

The City of New London has the responsibility to clarify or correct any information released by the media that contains inaccuracies regarding a city-related issue. In meeting this responsibility the city recognizes that the role of the media is to provide information to the public, a goal that may result in the release of media stories which may not always reflect favorably on city policies or operations.

1. **Factual Discrepancies.** It is the responsibility of the department heads to advise the City Administrator who should contact the media when a story has been published or aired containing a factual error which significantly impacts the public’s perception of the issue being discussed. Depending on the nature of the error, the request for correction could be made by written letter or an informal phone call.
2. **Editorial Discrepancies.** Department heads shall contact the City Administrator when a specific editorial comment or news story has been published or aired which does not adequately represent a balanced perspective or the issue being discussed.

The City Administrator and/or council will determine if an official city rebuttal or response is appropriate.

3. **Letters to the Editor.** When appropriately presented, letters to the editor can be effective tools in clarifying a misconception of city policy or programs or correcting inaccurate information that has been widely reported by the press.

Those department heads who believe, as a public official, that a city rebuttal is warranted, will discuss their concerns with the City Administrator, who will determine if a response is appropriate, as well as who should prepare and sign the letter. The City Administrator shall authorize and review all letters that are officially sent to the editor.

I, _____ an employee of the City of New
London have received, read and understand the City of New London **Media Relations**
Policy.

Print Name

Date

Signature

*******Return form to Renae*******