

Boards and Committees and City Council Press Process Protocol

The City is streamlining its processes for press releases and inquiries. The process outlined here for Boards and Committees and City Council aligns with City's internal departmental process for press engagement.

This press process protocol will help: 1) Keep key stakeholders apprised of press-related activities; and 2) Help ensure that the City provides the best and most timely possible information to the press (and by extension, the public).

It is critical to have solid systems in place when reporters are seeking information. It is also important to have a clear process in place when Board and Committees or the City Council are interested in seeking media coverage.

COMMITTEES

Per the City's Boards and Committees Policy, no member of a Board or Committee shall speak for the Board or Committee unless specifically authorized at a duly noticed public meeting. A Board or Committee may provide input to the City Council on City policy germane to the Board or Committee's business or express support/opposition to an issue or incident germane to the Board or Committee's business by formulating its statement at a duly noticed public meeting and then submitting the statement in writing to the City Clerk for inclusion on the next City Council agenda under "Petitions and Communications." This process is to be followed prior to a Board or Committee seeking any press on such a Board or Committee statement.

For Board and Committee business that is **not** providing input on City policy or expressing support/opposition to an issue or incident, the Board or Committee may seek and respond to press in collaboration with their Staff Liaison and the Communications Officer. Boards and Committees may engage press around their business such as events they are coordinating, initiatives they are launching, and programs they are offering, provided that they follow the process outline below.

Any public comments or engagement with the press by a member of a Board or Committee that is beyond the realm of the Board or Committee's business (and therefore outside the scope of this press process protocol) should nonetheless be clearly made as an individual's opinion and not as a representative of the Board or Committee or of the City.

Sending a Press Release

- Boards and Committees should conduct media outreach through press releases.
- The Board or Committee Chair or Staff Liaison should designate Board or Committee member(s) to work on outreach for a given event/activity for which press is being sought, and provide this information to the Communications Officer.

- To send a press release, the Board or Committee Chair (or designated Board or Committee member(s)) should contact their City-assigned Departmental Staff Liaison and Communications Officer at least one week in advance of when they would like a press release to send.
- The Board or Committee Chair (or designated Board or Committee member(s)) is responsible for drafting the press release. The Board or Committee designee should email a draft of the press release to the Communications Officer at least three days in advance of when they would like it to send it. (A press release template is available upon request.)
- The Communications Officer will review the draft and make any edits, and send these back to the Board or Committee Chair (or designated Board or Committee member(s)) and Staff Liaison for review.
- Once finalized, the Communications Officer will send the release to the City's media contacts with herself listed as the contact person.
- If a reporter responds to a press release with a straightforward request, the Communications Officer will either respond to the inquiry or forward the reporter directly to the Board or Committee Chair (or designated Board or Committee member(s)), ensuring that the Staff Liaison is looped in.

Responding to a Press Inquiry (related or not related to a press release):

- If a media contact reaches out directly to a Board or Committee member for comment, please direct the media contact to the Communications Officer or copy her on your reply, with a note that she is the person who handles press inquiries for the City. (In addition to keeping the Communications Officer informed, this will also help inform reporters to contact her with requests.)
- Next, we can decide internally how best to respond to the media contact. If it's a straightforward ask, we may decide that it's best for the Board or Committee Chair (or designated Board or Committee member(s)) to respond directly. In other cases, we may determine that it is best to work on talking points together prior to connecting with the media contact.

Seeking Press Without a Press Release:

- In general, Boards and Committees should conduct all initial media outreach through press releases.
- On occasions where a Board or Committee wishes to initiate a media story without a press release, the Board or Committee Chair (or designated Board or Committee member(s)) shall first provide a summary of the

request to the Staff Liaison and Communications Officer, who will review the request.

- As with press releases, please provide at least a week's notice to the Communications Officer when you want to reach out to the media, and send a summary of the story for which you are seeking coverage three days ahead of time. In some cases, we may work together to come up with talking points prior to you connecting with media contacts.

CITY COUNCIL

Seeking or Responding to Press:

- City Councilors have the right to initiate contact with the media or respond to inquiries from the media without approval from the City Council or City staff. (However, Council Rules dictate that no City Councilor shall speak for the City Council unless specifically authorized to do so by act of the Council or appointed in writing by the Mayor.) City Councilors are welcome to consult the Communications Officer prior to engaging in an interview.
- Notwithstanding the rights of City Councilors to initiate/respond to media inquiries, ideally City Councilors should contact the City Manager if they would like to seek press for a City Council event or activity. The City Manager will then delegate such assistance to the Communications Officer and any other staff involved.
- When reporters reach out to the City requesting an interview with a Councilor, the Communications Officer will field the request and aim to coordinate a time and place for the interview, if a Councilor is interested in speaking to the reporter.
- At times, the Communications Officer may instruct reporters to reach out to Councilors directly. Councilors are welcome to accept or decline requests from reporters.
- At times, the Communications Officer may suggest an approach for responding to a press inquiry and/or talking points for Councilors to use during an interview.
- Councilors should inform the Communications Officer of any media interviews or appearances, ideally prior to engaging in an interview, as it is helpful to understand that stories that are in development.

City staff and Board or Committee members may contact the Communications Officer with any questions by office phone (207-347-4143), email (sdee@southportland.org), or by cell phone voice or text (207-805-4750).