



Office of the
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
272 Main Street
Townsend, Massachusetts 01469

Gordon Clark, *Chairman*

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POLICY #2-2015
BOARD OF SELECTMEN

MEDIA RELATIONS POLICY

GOAL:

The Town of Townsend seeks to inform its residents, businesses and visitors by engaging in a pro-active communications program. This program recognizes that one of the most effective and quickest ways to communicate Town policies and activities to citizens is by working in partnership with the news media.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Only the Board of Selectmen acting by and through the Chair is authorized to provide an official statement on behalf of the Town of Townsend in relation to any significant incident or issue. This does not pertain to those matters that fall within the jurisdiction of elected officials of the Town. Department Heads must receive confirmation from the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen through the Town Administrator before making any public statement on behalf of the Town. Confirmation to discuss one issue or incident does not imply that the Department Head may discuss on behalf of the Towns other current or future issues that may arise, without further confirmation.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION:

Comments to the media regarding a police or fire investigation shall be directed to the Police or Fire Chief or their designee.

If a member of the media is requesting statement of the Towns position from an employee, then that employee must politely direct the media representative to the designated Department Head. Where special circumstances exist, employees should be aware that all comments regarding those circumstances is to be referred to the Department Head or Chairman of the Board of Selectmen. Under no circumstances are employees permitted to comment as an official position of the Town.

If you become aware of any newsworthy events or activities that may be developing in your area of responsibility, you should promptly inform the Office of the Board of Selectmen.

The Town recognizes that individuals have the right to make public comment and publicly debate political and social issues. However, employees must make it clear that other than in the course of Town business or when giving evidence in court, they are neither making an official comment nor representing an official position of the Town.

SENSITIVE OR CONTROVERSIAL SITUATIONS:

All television, radio, newspaper or other media inquiries regarding sensitive or controversial issues should always be referred immediately to the Office of the Board of Selectmen. The Town Administrator will notify the Board of Selectmen before any media response is provided. The Town Administrator will coordinate a response including designating a spokesperson (if needed).

MEMBERS OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES:

The Chairperson of an appointed Town Board or Committee, shall be the primary interface to provide all information to the public on behalf of the Board or Committee (i.e. represent the Board or Committee in stating Board or Committee Positions). Each Board or Committee member shall recognize that it is the responsibility of the Board or Committee Chairperson to speak for and on behalf of the Board or Committee. Any Board or Committee member may speak on behalf of the Board or Committee on a specific subject as long as he/she receives permission from the Board or Committee Chairperson. That being said, each Board or Committee member has the right to speak for/on his/her own behalf as long as s/he clearly identifies that is the case in any communications that are intended to be released to the public.

PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES:

Because the Police and Fire Departments operate 24/7 and their work generates a high volume of media calls, those departments have designated sworn personnel as media spokespersons and follow specific guidelines when releasing information. Any media calls to other Town staff regarding a Police or Fire issue should be referred immediately to the Police Department or Fire Department, as appropriate. All information released to the media by the Police and Fire Departments should be provided immediately to the Office of the Board of Selectmen; and, when appropriate, the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen should be contacted at the time of major incidents

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN ON 10/13, 2015



Gordon Clark, Chairman



Carolyn Smart, Vice-Chair