

TITLE 10

SPECIAL ORDINANCES, REGULATIONS, RULES, POLICIES, AND BARGAINING AGREEMENTS

SUBTITLE 3 — POLICIES

POLICY 31

DISCLOSURE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION TO THE MEDIA

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I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

31.010 Purpose

(A) The purposes of this policy are:

(1) to establish policies and procedures involving contact and relationships with the media by County employees;

(2) to comply with the requirements of Oregon's Public Records Law regarding public records (ORS 192).

(3) to actively seek and establish a cooperative relationship with the media that provides information on matters of public interest;

(4) to ensure that information provided to the media and, in turn, to the public, is accurate, understandable and timely; and

(5) to protect from disclosure any information that is potentially legally sensitive or that may be the subject of an exemption under ORS 192 (Public Records and Meeting Law).

(B) In order to accomplish these purposes, it is necessary that media contacts and the information provided in those contacts be coordinated and reviewed in a timely manner to the fullest extent practical.

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

31.100 Definitions

As used in this policy, the term:

(A) "**Board**" means the Linn County Board of Commissioners.

(A) "**Department**" means a unit of division of the Linn County government. The term does not include offices of elected officials other than the Board.

(B) "**Media**" means all forms of news formats, including but not limited to, newspapers, magazines, television, radio and Internet.

(C) "**Public Information**" means information, verbal or written, provided to the media.

(D) "**Public Information Officer**" or "**PIO**" means the Linn County Administrative Officer or designated representative thereof.

31.200 Background

(A) For the citizens of the County, the media is a major source of information regarding the County's policies, issues and activities. In that role, media contacts and relations can have a major effect on the public image of the County and the citizen's understanding of the County's many functions and operations. Citizens, including media representatives, should be provided with accurate, understandable and timely information.

(B) The County has experienced occasions when employees have had contacts with the media, either self initiated or in response to inquires, wherein information has been provided or statements have been made that have been presented as representing the "County's position" concerning an issue, activity, policy, etc. In some of these situations, the information should not have been released and/or the statements represented personal opinions. Further, media contacts and the information provided during those contacts have not been consistently reported within the County organization; i.e. the first knowledge of the "County's position" is gained when reading the newspaper, watching the local news or listening to the talk radio show. These situations could lead to inconsistent activities and policies by the County with the Board and staff not knowledgeable of media contacts and the information being provided in those contacts.

(C) There is an ever-present need to protect information that is potentially legally sensitive or may be the subject of an exemption under ORS 192 (Public Record and Meeting Law) from being unintentionally disclosed and, therefore, this policy is designed to protect such information by providing general guidance to the holder of the information.

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

31.300 Applicability

(A) This policy applies to all departments and County employees that work for and report to the Board.

(B) This policy applies to other County elected officials and their employees at the discretion of those elected officials.

(C) This policy applies to members of boards, commissions, and committees established by the Board and subject to LCC 400 (Boards, Commissions, and Committees).

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

31.400 Policy term

This policy applies until it is amended or rescinded by the Board.

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

II. POLICY AND PROCEDURE

31.500 Policy statement

(A) The Administrative Officer shall be the primary Public Information Officer (PIO) for the Board and for its departments. The PIO will be the focal point for coordinating and reviewing all media contacts; i.e. all contacts regarding any policies, issues and activities involving the Board and its departments.

(B) Every County elected official, including the Commissioners, may make and respond to media contacts at any time; however, such media contacts and responses should be based on and be consistent with LCP 31.010 (Purpose), LCP 31.100 (Background), and LCP 31.600 (D) (potentially legally sensitive materials).

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

31.600 Procedure to comply with the policy; generally

(A) Compliance with the provisions of this policy are based on whether the person is responding to media inquiries or initiating media contacts (including press releases).

(B) If the person is responding to media inquiries the person shall comply with LCP 31.620.

(C) If the person is initiating media contact (including issuing a press release), the person shall comply with LCP 31.650.

(D) No person under any circumstances may

provide information to any member of the media, when such information is potentially legally sensitive or may be the subject of an exemption under ORS 192 (Public Record and Meeting Law) until the person first discusses the matter with County Counsel and gets authorization from County Counsel to disclose such information. The holder of such information may also refer the member of the media to the office of County Counsel for a decision on whether the information should be disclosed.

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

31.620 Procedures for responding to media inquiries

(A) Whenever possible, prior to responding to a media inquiry, County employees shall coordinate any response with the PIO (or, if not available, with the chair of the Board) through their department head. In some situations, the PIO will provide the response to the inquiry.

(B) When prior coordination with the PIO or chair is not possible, employees shall advise the PIO as soon as possible after the contact and response concerning the nature of the inquiry and response provided.

(C) Some general guidelines to follow, subject to LCP 31.600, when dealing with the media:

- (1) Always treat media representatives with respect and courtesy.
- (2) Be frank, open and honest - but also be careful with the tone and language used in any response.
- (3) Refer the media to the PIO when unsure one has authority to answer a question.
- (4) If the answer to a question is not known, say so, and offer to get the answer and provide it later.
- (5) Always remember: "If you don't want to be quoted, don't say it."

[Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01]

31.650 Procedures for initiating media contacts to include press releases

(A) Prior to initiating contact with the media, County employees shall coordinate the information and/or the activity with the PIO. For exam-

ple, if a press release or notice of an event is going to be provided to the media, employees shall provide the information to the PIO for review and coordination in advance.

(B) Since the media is dependent upon newsworthy information and many County activities directly benefit from publicity, county employees should be alert to potential or developing stories which can be passed to the media.

References and Authorities:

Legislative History of Policy 31:

Adopted 01-536 eff 9/4/01

Amendments to 01-536:

#1 none

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