



City of Stonecrest Communications Policy

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines that provide the foundation for efficient, effective, timely, and transparent communications with the Stonecrest internal and external stakeholders, media, residents, and the general public.

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the City of Stonecrest to:

1. Inform citizens about the city's services, projects, policies, ordinances and initiatives through timely, accurate, effective communication. Information shall be disseminated in the most effective manner within a reasonable time frame of its availability. The way information is disseminated will be at the discretion of the mayor, communications director, and the city managers only. The only exception will be the handling of open records request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act. The city clerk will be responsible for communicating with the public and media to provide documents requested.
2. Reasonably anticipate the needs of the community, mayor, council, staff and residents for the timely release of internal and external information.
3. Engage in a proactive, up-to-date communications programs that employ a variety of formats designed to accommodate the diverse needs of the community.
4. Develop and employ communications practices that enhance and support the city's economic development efforts.
5. Establish and reasonably foster a good working relationship with local and national media by providing accurate, timely information through the proper city channels.
6. In a crisis or emergency situation, have a communications plan that works in conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the DeKalb Emergency Management Agency.

External Communications

Media Relations

- a. Good working relationships with media can yield an increase in public awareness and support of city initiatives. Stonecrest's media policy is to provide accurate, timely information for which the media and the public have a just and reasonable claim. The communications director or in his absence, a designee will be responsible for reviewing all information submitted to the local or national media in any form to include but not limited to video files, press releases, newsletters, and emails.



- b. Should a member of the media contact a city staff member, to include city subcontractors, regarding city matters, the staff member shall refer the media representative to the communications director, the mayor or the city managers. Staff members are prohibited from speaking with the media on city matters unless it is approved by the communications director, mayor or city managers. City council members may speak with the media regarding their voting position on city ordinances, taxes, resolutions or city council meeting agenda items. Council members are not allowed to write opinion articles, or editorials on any city business, personnel or contractors. This includes, but is not limited to, opinions on ordinances, salaries, taxes, resolutions or land use. The mayor and council members will consult with city staff, to include the communications director, prior to engaging in a press conference.

All city elected officials will be allowed to defend themselves should personal accusations arise in the media. This may include news stories on campaign disclosures, ethics, campaign finance, etc.

All information given to the media must be true and without slander or ill-intent. City personnel, mayor, and council shall refrain from public personal attacks on any elected official, local or national, other city staff member or member of the public.

For more information see Appendix A – Guidelines for Communicating with the Media.

Social Media

- a. Personal social media pages are permitted for city employees, contractors, and elected officials. Unless linked to the city's social media page or website, the Stonecrest logo may not be used for personal communications.
- b. Staff members, contractor, mayor and council must always be conscious of the fact that they represent the City of Stonecrest. Using negative images, including but not limited to racial, vulgar language, sexually degrading, homophobic or gender insensitive, is prohibited. If a staff member's social media page lists the City of Stonecrest as his/her employer, all communication on the social media page becomes a reflection of the individual as an employee; therefore, all communication on such pages should remain professional.
- c. The mayor, city managers, and communications director or their designee are the only individuals allowed to speak on behalf of the city on any social media page.
- d. The mayor, city managers, and communications director, will determine how the city's social media pages are promoted. Some pages have paid promotions. Council members and staff are prohibited from submitting paid promotions for events on the city's social media pages.
- e. Submissions, such as town hall meeting announcements, council newsletters and events not sponsored by the city, are to be made at the discretion of the mayor, city managers, and communications director



City's Website

- a. The city's website is managed by the communications director and maintained by an outside contractor. On the date of this policy, SJ6 Media is maintaining the website at www.stonecrestga.gov. Modifications, additions or deletions to this site may only be made by the city managers and the communications directory. The exception will be the city clerk in the case of submitting council meeting agendas and minutes only.
- b. The communications director will work with department heads, mayor, and council to determine the information for the city website. This group will also determine the ways in which the website is promoted.

City Email

- a. All city business communications should be made using the city email. The use of personal emails for city business is prohibited.
- b. Communications on city email should remain professional. Email users should refrain from initiating or forwarding humor, cartoons, videos, etc. that are not job-related. Remember, all city emails are subject to an open records request and therefore, may be viewed by the public and exposed in the media.
Failure to adhere to the city's email policies may result in disciplinary action.

Open Records

- a. All open records request made in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act will be handled by the city clerk with assistance, if needed, from the communications director. In accordance with federal law, open records requests will be responded to within three business days. Within this time, the requestor shall be either given the documents requested or given a time frame in which the documents can be produced. During this initial response, the requestor will be given the price for producing the documents. The clerk shall email the communications director a copy of all open records request from all media sources. This will allow the communications director to have a working knowledge of the type of information requested and the potential for various news investigations if applicable.

Proclamations and Congratulatory Letters or Commendations

Proclamations are ceremonial documents signed by the mayor to honor, celebrate or recognize noteworthy acts or events that positively affect the citizens or business community of Stonecrest. Proclamations, congratulatory letters, and commendations are public service documents and do not constitute an endorsement by the mayor or city council.

- a. All proclamations, congratulatory letters or commendations must be signed and approved by the mayor. A two-week notice is required along with all the necessary information and a completed Communications Request Form. (See Appendix B) If a communications request is made for a proclamation, letter or commendation to be presented at a council meeting, a four-



week prior notice must be given and all information must be provided for the request to be considered.

Proclamations may be issued for:

- Recognition of a day, week, month, or year.
- Special honors
- Recognition and to raise the public's awareness of charitable fundraising campaigns within the city. The campaigns must be sponsored by a nonprofit organization.
- Honoring other civic, religious or government organizations and their leadership as deemed appropriate by the mayor.



Appendix – A

Guidelines for Communicating with the Media

Advice for communicating with the media can be limitless. It is imperative that you consult with the communications director to divulge the topic to be discussed and develop a discussion strategy. Your director and even legal counsel may advise you to stay away from certain topics. Herein, are a few rules for dealing with the media when issues are non-controversial and limited to the interviewee's area of expertise:

- Return all inquiries as soon as possible or notify the media outlet of your intent to respond and give an anticipated time for your response. Members of the media work on deadlines and will seek another source if your response is not timely. Other sources may provide information that is not factual, incomplete or biased.
- Answer only the questions asked. Limit that amount of elaboration you offer. Remember editing equipment can take long responses and shorten them while simultaneously changing the meaning.
- Do not feel compelled or forced to conduct an interview. If you need time to prepare before answering, feel free to offer your response to questions that are emailed. This often allows you to avoid on-camera interviews. This method is not often preferred by television reporters but it will suffice if your responses are timely and with the media deadline.
- Do not speculate. It is okay not to know the answer to a question and promise to follow up. Avoid "no comment" responses as they have a negative connotation.
- Remember you are representing Stonecrest, therefore, personal opinions should be avoided or labeled as such when necessary to use.
- Remember there is no such thing as, "off the record." Anything you say to or in hearing distance of a reporter may be printed, aired or televised.
- Remember to keep your responses simple. You are the subject matter expert. Your audience is not. Avoid acronyms, jargon or shop talk.
- Obtain the reporter's name and the name of the media organization. Find out when and how often your information will be aired or published.
- Provide the best contact information for follow-up questions.



Appendix B

Communications Request Form

***MUST COMPLETE REQUEST FORM IN ORDER TO PROCESS.**

*DEPARTMENT/ORGANIZATION: _____

*DATE OF EVENT: _____

*LOCATION: _____

*CONTACT: _____

*PHONE: _____ *FAX : _____

*EMERGENCY CONTACT #: _____

*E-MAIL: _____

In order to process the request, we must receive all requested information IN PRINT. A two-week notice is required, along with all the information and the completed request form.

****A request is NOT a guarantee that your proclamation will be approved by the Communications Department****

(Check All That Apply)

____ Letter/Ceremonial Document

____ Proclamation

____ City Council Meeting Request Date*
(Please see notice below)

*SUMMARY OF EVENT (indicate a brief reason of honoring recipient – ex. Sally’s birthday, 92nd church anniversary):

Please attach additional information.



For Proclamation Requests to be read at the City Council Meeting Only

***City Council Meeting Date Requested:** _____

***Note:**

- All City Council requests must be submitted 4 WEEKS prior to the requested meeting date.
- Details and information must be submitted along with your request.

****A request is NOT a guarantee that your proclamation will be read at the requested City Council Meeting****

Please Email or mail a completed form to Adrion Bell, Director of Communications

Email: abell@stonecrestga.gov

Address: Stonecrest City Hall 3120 Stonecrest Blvd., Stonecrest, GA 30038