

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

This policy enhances communications between the town council and town manager, town attorney, town clerk and chief communications officer. Channeling communications in accordance with this policy ensures a timely and accurate flow of information in support of council priorities.

Communications at Dais

When sitting at the dais, councilmembers raise their hands to be recognized by the mayor for discussion or comment on matters before council. This process keeps the meetings orderly and assists the clerk's office in producing accurate records of the proceedings.

Communications with Town Manager, Town Attorney, Town Clerk and other Town Staff

Council communicates directly with the town manager on all matters relating to the town, including operational and personnel matters; with the town attorney on legal and legislative issues; and with the town clerk on administrative and housekeeping matters.

Requests for staff services are addressed to the town manager. When communications require input or information from staff, responses include council as a whole. If council is copied on correspondence received by the mayor, the mayor's response is provided to council. The mayor provides copies to council of letters sent on behalf of the town and council.

Agendas

When a member of council is interested in placing an item on an upcoming agenda, please direct the request to the mayor, or bring up the issue at a work session during Roundtable.

Town Clerk's Office

The town clerk maintains effective working relationships with the town council, town manager and town attorney. Requests for administrative services are made electronically directly to the town clerk, who delegates tasks within her office. If the request requires resources which are prohibitive to meeting the daily requirements of the office, the town clerk will refer the request to the town manager for approval. Councilmembers should respond to RSVP requests from the town clerk within three

working days or by the date specified for receptions, gatherings or events (the clerk's office RSVPs collectively for council); and as requested for comment on resolutions or draft correspondence. The town clerk makes all travel arrangements and hotel accommodations for events attended by Council.

Virginia Freedom of Information Act

The town clerk serves as the custodian of record for council. Communications constituting public records are defined under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Use of Town Email Accounts and Communications among Councilmembers

Councilmembers shall use their town email account for **all** communications regarding town business in order to achieve full compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Virginia records retention laws and for general transparency. Emails relating to town business received on an outside account should be forwarded to the town email account to be answered in order to create a record of the communication. As the custodian of record, the town clerk should be copied on all communications relating to town business.

There are occasions when councilmembers communicate among themselves electronically. These communications constitute public records under FOIA and are subject to release under FOIA. Communications marked "confidential" are not shared with the general public or any individual not privy to the confidential information. Merely marking a document "confidential," however, does not guarantee exclusion from FOIA and the document may be considered a public record subject to release under FOIA.

Communications on Council Positions

Councilmembers may send individual comments to boards and commissions on issues before those bodies, though council should exercise considerable discretion particularly on matters that ultimately come before council.

Communications stating guidance or positions on behalf of the town or council as a whole are reviewed by council or discussed at work sessions.

Town Council Research/Information Requests to Town Staff

Any research or information requested by councilmembers is provided to the council as a whole unless otherwise requested. This process ensures all councilmembers have the same information.

**Communication and requests for research,
information or opinions from the Town Attorney**

Members of council communicate directly with the town attorney as necessary. The town attorney will determine whether mayor or town council direction is necessary prior to following up on requests for legal review, research or action. Communications received from the town attorney or any attorney representing the town marked "Attorney Client Privileged" are not to be shared with anyone.



Lisa C. Merkel, Mayor
December 30, 2016