

DATE OF MEETING JULY 28, 2025

AUTHORED BY KAREN ROBERTSON, DEPUTY CORPORATE OFFICER

SUBJECT MEDIA ACCREDITATION POLICY

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To bring forward a Media Accreditation Policy that sets the criteria and process for accredited media to use electronic devices during a Council or Council established Committee meeting for journalistic purposes.

Recommendation

That Council endorse the Media Accreditation Council Policy COU-248 as attached to the 2025-JUL-28 Staff Report titled "Media Accreditation Policy".

BACKGROUND

On 2025-APR-07, Council adopted several amendments to Council's Procedure Bylaw including a provision to prohibit the use of electronic devices by members of the public unless expressly authorized by the Chair during Council and Council established Committee meetings.

The intent in giving the Chair authority to grant exceptions would be to provide opportunities for members of the media to use electronic devices during a Council or Council established Committee meeting for journalistic purposes or for members of the public during special occasion ceremonies.

Although this provision provides the Chair with this flexibility, Council wanted staff to explore options for a more formal accreditation process for granting authority to the media and passed the following motion:

"That Council direct staff to prepare a report outlining options for an amendment to "Council Procedure Bylaw 2018 No. 7272" to include a certification process to provide accreditation to media representatives and independent journalists to permit the usage of electronic devices at the City of Nanaimo Council and Committee meetings for journalistic purposes."

DISCUSSION

Given that Council's direction was to bring forward options that are specific to members of the media requiring guidelines and a process, staff felt that it would be more appropriate to outline

them in a Council policy, rather than try to include all the necessary information within a bylaw as bylaws typically consist of provisions that are prescriptive and don't get into the processes for implementing those provisions.

In developing the policy before Council, staff used the criteria and process from Global Affairs Canada, and the BC Courts, as the primary guiding documents. Staff also consulted with Alex Rawnsley, News Director for Nanaimo News Now and Dale Burgos, Manager, Corporate Communications and Community Relations to seek input on the initial draft. They provided valuable feedback which has been incorporated in the attached draft.

Should Council be supportive of the policy, any professional or independent journalist wishing to seek approval for an exemption to Council's Procedure Bylaw as it relates to recording and taking photographs for journalistic purposes would be required to fill out an application. The application would then be vetted by an Accreditation Committee consisting of the Manager, Corporate Communications and Community Relations (the Lead), the Chief Administrative Officer, and a representative from Legislative Services (either the Corporate Officer or Deputy Corporate Officer). Staff did ask Mr. Rawnsley whether the Accreditation Committee should have representation from the media to be part of the committee; however, he conveyed that it would put journalists in a difficult position to recommend, deny, or approve other journalist's applications for accreditation. He believed the process should be overseen by the City's communication staff.

Because the definition of "Prohibited Use of An Electronic Device" within Council's Procedure Bylaw is applicable to all members of the public, and Council's motion is specific to members of the media, it is much easier to carve out the guidelines and process in a Council Policy and still retain the Mayor or Chair's discretion to approve as there are other times when it would be beneficial to allow the public to record or take photographs. This prevents having to amend the Council Procedure Bylaw to capture all other instances where exemptions may apply. Despite this, having a Council policy that sets out the parameters for recommending approval for members of the media would be beneficial. That way, the Mayor or Chair is not put a position to approve or deny requests with nothing to base their decision on as the Mayor or Chair may lack the expertise to determine which journalists would qualify as bona fide media.

Should the policy be endorsed, it would be applicable to requests after the policy is approved. Those that have already been granted approval by the Mayor to date (see Attachment B) would not be required to fill out an application.

Highlights of the policy:

- The policy is applicable to both professional and independent journalists
- Proof of publications from independent journalists must align with Radio Television Digital News Association's Code of Journalistic Ethics. Staff were advised that any reputable outlet is aware of these ethics and adhere to this code.
- Applications would be vetted by the Accreditation Committee. Those who meet the criteria would be referred to the Mayor with a recommendation to approve.
- Journalists who are approved would be required to operate in accordance with Council's Procedure Bylaw or risk having their accreditation revoked.
- Once accredited, there is no requirement to renew the accreditation unless the journalist changes their position, resigns, or changes jobs. All changes must be reported to the Manager, Corporate Communications and Community Relations.

OPTIONS

Option 1:

That Council endorse the Media Accreditation Council Policy COU-248 as attached to the 2025-JUL-28 Staff Report titled "Media Accreditation Policy".

- The advantages to this option are:
 - the policy provides clear and consistent guidelines and a process for professional and independent journalists seeking approval to record and take photographs during a Council or Council established Committee for journalistic purposes.
 - the Media Accreditation Committee would have the expertise to vet the applications and those meeting the criteria would be referred to the Mayor for final sign off.
- The disadvantage to this option is that the process for approval will take slightly longer as applications must be reviewed by the Accreditation Committee.

Option 2:

That Council retain the status quo where discretion for approving members of the media to take photographs or recording video during Council or Council Committee rests with the Chair.

- The advantage to this option is that the Chair can very quickly authorize an exemption to a member of the media seeking approval to record and take photographs during a Council or Council established Committee meeting.
- The disadvantage to this option is approval or denial would not be based on a consistent process and the Mayor or Chair may lack the expertise necessary to determine whether an individual meets the requirements for being an accredited professional or independent journalist.

Option 3:

That Council provide alternate direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Staff were asked to prepare a report outlining options to include a certification process to provide accreditation to media representatives and independent journalists to permit the usage of electronic devices at the City of Nanaimo Council and Committee meetings for journalistic purposes.
- A Media Accreditation Council policy has been drafted for Council's consideration that outlines the requirements and process for approving professional and independent journalists is before Council for consideration.
- If the policy is endorsed by Council, journalists who have not previously been approved who wish to use electronic devices during Council or Committee meetings for journalistic purposes will be required to fill out a Media Accreditation Application Form, which will be assessed by an Accreditation Committee.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Media Accreditation Policy

Attachment B – List of Media Already Accredited

Submitted by:

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Concurrence by:

Dale Burgos,
Mgr. Corporate Communications/Community Relations

Sheila Gurrie,
Director, Legislative Services

Dale Lindsay, CAO