

Policy: Use of Corporate Resources During an Election Period Policy

Main Contact: Town Clerk

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Table of Contents

Policy Statement	1
Definitions.....	2
Application.....	5
Policy Requirements.....	11
Delegation of Authority	12
Authority	12
Monitoring	12
Contacts	13
Change History	13

Policy Statement

The Corporation of the Town of Renfrew and its local boards and committees are committed to ensuring accountable and transparent election practices in relation to the use of corporate resources. This policy establishes provisions for the use of the Town's facilities, resources and infrastructure during an election period, to preserve public trust and integrity in the election process and to comply with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*.

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended, requires municipalities to establish rules and procedures with respect to the use of municipal resources during an election period. Municipalities are prohibited from making campaign contributions to municipal candidates or registered third parties.



As a campaign contribution may take the form of money, goods or services, this policy provides a fair and consistent guideline for what municipal corporate resources can and cannot be used during municipal, provincial and federal elections.

All provisions contained within this policy shall serve to protect freedom of expression while ensuring that:

- Corporate resources shall not be used during an election period to promote or provide an unfair advantage to any Candidate, political party, constituency association, Registered Third Party, or any person or group supporting or opposing a question on a ballot;
- Members of Council shall not be precluded from performing their duties as elected officials, nor inhibited from representing the interests of their constituents; and
- Information and communication related to an election shall continue to be open and accessible to the public, with content to be produced and approved by the Deputy Returning Officer or their delegate.

Definitions

Campaign(ing) - Any activity by, or on behalf of a Candidate, political party, constituency association, Registered Third Party, or question on a ballot intended to elicit support during the Election Period. This does not include the appearance of elected officials, other candidates or their supporters, or registrants at an event in their personal capacity without the display of any signage or graphics identifying the individual as a candidate or registrant, and without the solicitation of votes.

Campaign Materials - Any materials, including political advertising, used to solicit votes for a candidate(s) or questions in an election, or any materials that promote or oppose the candidacy of a person for elected office. This includes, but is not limited to literature, banners, posters, pictures, buttons, clothing, or other paraphernalia. Campaign Materials also include, but are not limited to, materials in all media formats such as print, displays, radio, television, and online platforms including websites or social media. Campaign materials do not include election signs, which are governed by the Town's Sign By-Law.



Canada Elections Act (CEA) – The *Canada Elections Act*, S.C. 2000, c. 9, as amended or replaced from time to time. Stated to represent the federal legislation that regulates the conduct of elections for members of the House of Commons, including rules for political financing, advertising, third-party activities, and the responsibilities of Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

Candidate - Any person who has filed, and not withdrawn, a nomination in a municipal, school board, provincial or federal election or by-election, or a person seeking nomination for a political party in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c.32*, Part 6 of the *Canada Elections Act, S.C. 2000, c.9*. and the *Election Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.E.6*. Where referred to in this policy, the term “Candidate” may also be substituted to read political party, constituency association, Registered Third Party, or a person or group supporting or opposing a question on a ballot.

Corporate Resource - All items, staff, services, or resources which are the property of the Town of Renfrew including, but not limited to: materials, equipment, vehicles, facilities, land, technology (computers, smartphones, tablets, etc.), intellectual property, images, logos, and supplies. Working hours, meaning the time during which the Municipality compensates employees to perform certain duties or tasks, are also considered to be a Corporate Resource.

Election - Represents municipal, federal or provincial election including by-elections for any thereof.

Elections Blackout Period – Refers to a specific timeframe during which political advertising is prohibited. This includes advertising that promotes or opposes a registered candidate, registered third party or registered political party. The blackout period typically begins the day before voting day and ends at the close of polls on voting day, unless otherwise specified and defined within legislation. The blackout period applies to broadcast, print, electronic, or other media.

Election Finances Act (EFA) – The *Election Finances Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.7, as amended or replaced from time to time. Stated to represent the Ontario legislation governing the registration, financing, and financial reporting of political parties, candidates, constituency associations, and third parties in provincial elections. It establishes rules for contributions, spending limits, and transparency in political financing in Ontario.



Elections Campaign Period: Specif to municipal elections and, in accordance with Section 88.24 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended, begins on the day in which nomination papers are filed and ends on December 31 in the case of a regular election and 45 days after voting day in the case of a by-election.

Election Period - The specific duration during which an election campaign takes place, including the timeframe leading up to the actual voting date when political candidates or political parties actively engage in campaigning to garner support from voters. For a provincial and federal election, the period begins on the date the writ is issued and ends on voting day.

Employee (Town Employee) - Any individual working for, or receiving compensation from the Town of Renfrew, including those in part-time, seasonal or contract positions.

Local Board - Has the same meaning as in Section 1 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

Municipal Clerk (Town Clerk) - The Director of Legislative Services and Council Relations for The Corporation of the Town of Renfrew, or their designate, or a returning officer appointed under Section 7(1) of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c.32*.

Municipal Elections Act (MEA) - the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 32*, as amended or replaced from time to time. Stated to represent the Ontario legislation that establishes rules and regulations governing the financing of municipal election campaigns in Ontario.

Member(s) of Council - Any elected officials of the Town of Renfrew, including Mayor and assigned Deputy Mayor.

Municipality – Means the Corporation of the Town of Renfrew.

Municipal Facility/Building - Any building or facility owned or operated by the Town of Renfrew or its local board.

Municipal Office - The Town of Renfrew administration building located at 127 Raglan Street South, Renfrew, Ontario, also known as the Town Hall Office.

Nomination Day: As defined in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended.

Political Advertising: Advertising that takes a position on an issue that can reasonably be regarded as closely associated with a registered third party or candidate.

Registered Third Party - Shall have the same meaning as “Registered Third Party” as found in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996* or the term “Third Party” as defined in the *Election Finances Act (Ontario)* and *Canada Elections Act*, as the context requires.

Town - The Corporation of the Town of Renfrew and includes its agencies, local boards and commissions.

Voting Day - As defined in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, as amended.

Application

1. Responsibilities

- 1.1. Candidates, members of Town Council, Town Employees, members of local agencies, boards and committees and Registered Third Parties are to adhere to the guidelines and parameters established by this policy.
- 1.2. The Town Clerk is responsible for administering this policy and providing any related policies and procedures deemed necessary or desirable for conducting an election.
- 1.3. Employees, Members of Council, and Members of Local Agencies, Boards and Committees are to ensure that Corporate Resources, as identified by this policy, are not used for campaigning.

2. General Provisions

In accordance with the spirit and intent of the election-related legislation:

- 2.1. Corporate Resources and funding shall not be used by a Candidate or Registered Third Party for Campaigning or election-related purposes.



- 2.2. This policy also applies to an elected or acclaimed Member, or a Member not seeking re-election.
- 2.3. The Town Clerk is authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect to this policy.
- 2.4. Election campaign materials may not be displayed at the Town of Renfrew (Town) facilities unless otherwise outlined in this procedure.
- 2.5. Subject to the Election Blackout Period, this policy is not intended to restrict a Member of Council from performing their duties as a Councillor, nor inhibit a Member of Council from representing the interests of their constituents.
- 2.6. Individuals who have questions about this policy are encouraged to contact the Town Clerk to obtain further clarification.

3. **Use of Corporate Identifiers and Resources**

Further to Section 2.1 above, the following is provided for greater clarity when considering the use of corporate communication resources:

- 3.1. Members of Council may not use Council portraits funded by the Town, either as a corporate or Member expense, in Campaign Materials.
- 3.2. Photographs produced for and owned by the Town may not be used for any election purposes.
- 3.3. Candidates or registered third parties may not print, distribute, or make reference to any of the Town's email addresses, telephone numbers, or facility addresses on any Campaign Materials. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Candidates or registered third parties may provide the election telephone number, election email address, or a link to the Town's official election website or webpages in Campaign Materials for electors to access additional information about the election and the voting process.
- 3.4. The Town Clerk may develop and distribute information through various means for the purpose of advising and educating electors.



Candidates or Registered Third Parties are permitted to promote and distribute election information provided by the Town Clerk, provided that such information is not modified in any way.

- 3.5. The Town logo, crest, coat of arms, slogans, or any other images, illustrations, or videos owned or under the jurisdiction of the Town, may not be used in any Campaign Materials. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Candidates or Registered Third Parties may capture their own photos of Municipal property for use in Campaign Materials, provided the photo is taken from a publicly accessible area.
- 3.6. Messages posted to the Town's social media may be shared by a candidate to their personal or campaign social media account using social media official channels. The post shall not be modified, manipulated or intentionally taken out of context.
- 3.7. No Town consumable materials, such as toner and paper, associated with computer systems shall be used for election campaign-related purposes.
- 3.8. Town records, lists, and files produced using Town resources, with the exception of those specifically made for the use of candidates and registered third party advertisers for election purposes in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, may not be used by any candidates or registered third party advertiser, unless the database has already been released for public use.
- 3.9. In accordance with the Town's Communication Policy, the Town will not publish any material used to promote individual political opinions or campaigns.

4. Corporate Resources – Social Media

- 4.1 If a Member of Council uses any social media account for campaigning, such account must not be created or supported by Town resources. Social media accounts used for campaign purposes must utilize personal cell phones, tablets, and/or computers.
- 4.2 Members of Council who choose to create or use social media accounts for campaigning must include, for the duration of the



election period, a clear statement on each campaign website or social media account's home page (or profile) indicating that the account is being used for election campaign purposes and is not related to their duties as a Member of Council.

- 4.3 Online communications for official Town purposes will be supported in accordance with the Town's Communication Policy and related procedures.

5. Corporate Resources – Technology

Further to Section 2.1 above, the following is provided for greater clarity when considering the use of corporate technology resources:

- 5.1. Members of Council are provided access to corporate information technology (I.T.) assets to fulfill their duties and responsibilities as elected officials but may not use those assets for Campaigning or the development of Campaign Materials. This includes, but is not limited to, functionality through municipally issued smartphones such as calendars, email, texts, and similar applications.
- 5.2. Websites or domain names that are funded by the Town may not be used for campaigning. The Town's official election website or webpages will provide Candidate contact information but shall in no way endorse any Candidate.
- 5.3. Once a Member of Council registers to be a Candidate, any links from the Town's website or social media account to their website or social media pages will be removed from the Town's webpages if the Member's website or social media page contains or will contain Campaign Material. Subsequently, all Council biographies will be removed from the Town's website effective the first day of the nomination period. During the election period, Mayor and Council information on the Town's website will be reduced to council-related contact information only.
- 5.4. The Town's voicemail system shall not be used by Candidates to record campaign-related messages nor shall the computer network, including the email system, be used to distribute campaign-related correspondence.



- 5.5. Links to the Town's website are permitted from a campaign election website for the purposes of obtaining information about the election or sharing program/service information.

6. Corporate Resources - Municipal Facilities/Buildings

Further to Section 2.1 above, the following is provided for greater clarity when considering the use of Municipal facilities and buildings, including Town-owned or leased lands, as Corporate Resources:

- 6.1. Election campaign activities are not permitted at Town Hall (located at 127 Raglan Street South, Renfrew).
- 6.2. Candidates or Registered Third Parties are prohibited from using the Town's Municipal Office for any election-related purpose, including the rental of a Municipal facility and building as a campaign office.
- 6.3. Any Candidate may attend any public Standing Committee, Advisory Committee or Council meeting; however, they shall not use this forum to speak on, or address, any matter relating to their Campaign.
- 6.4. Candidates or Registered Third Parties are prohibited from renting space (e.g., a booth) as part of a Town organized event.
- 6.5. Municipally owned facilities, excluding Town Hall, may be rented in accordance with municipal agreements and current rates and fees for election campaign activities, provided that the rental is available to all registered Candidates and Registered Third Parties. Use of the rentals are subject to the following conditions.
 - i. All election campaign materials must only be displayed within the allocated rental period and in the allocated rental area designated in the rental agreement;
 - ii. Rentals for campaign related activities are not permitted from the first day of advance voting to the day after voting day; and
 - iii. The Town reserves the right to review or cancel a rental contract at any time, in accordance with the terms of the contract, should it conflict with the Town's corporate values



or established policies or procedures, or present a health and safety concern.

- 6.6. Notwithstanding section 6.5, campaigning and the distribution or display of Campaign Materials are not permitted in any municipal or local board facility, on municipal land, or at a municipal or local board event including any municipal or board meeting. This includes the display of any campaign-related signs in the window, on a vehicle, or on the premises, as well as the display of election-related materials in the office.
- 6.7. The rental to candidates or Registered Third Parties of advertising space on arena boards, lobby monitors, digital signs, or any other municipal social media site is prohibited.
- 6.8. Notwithstanding section 6.6, Campaigning on public sidewalks and highways is permitted, provided that it is in compliance with prevailing legislation and municipal by-laws.
- 6.9. All Candidates and Registered Third Parties must adhere to the provisions set out in any other municipal policies pertaining to Municipal facilities and buildings.

7. Corporate Resources – Town Employees

- 7.1. Town Employees are prohibited from using Corporate Resources for the benefit of a Candidate or Campaign.
- 7.2. Town Employees are expected to comply with the Town's Code of Conduct, Conflict of Interest Policy, and any other applicable policies governing employee conduct, use of municipal resources, and participation in election-related activities.

8. Corporate Resources - Integrity Commissioner

- 8.1. The Town's appointed Integrity Commissioner is considered to be a Corporate Resource, under contract with the Town, and may receive, from time to time, compensation from the Town in accordance with services provided.



- 8.2. Members of Council shall not use the services of the Town's Integrity Commissioner during the Election Period for the purposes of seeking advice related to their Campaign.

9. Corporate Resource - Request and Access to Information

- 9.1. All registered Candidates and Registered Third Party requests for information must adhere to the regulations stipulated in the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, and guidelines established through the Town of Renfrew's Routine Disclosure Policy.
- 9.2. Information requested must be for election purposes only or general purposes thereof and may be reviewed and deemed appropriate by the Returning Officer/Town Clerk.
- 9.3. Information provided to one Candidate or Registered Third Party that is of general nature and may provide valuable guidance to all others will be provided to all registered Candidates and Registered Third Parties through the Town's website to ensure equal access to information.

10. Corporate Resources – Limitation

- 10.1. Nothing in this Policy shall prohibit a Member of Council from performing their duties as Mayor or as a Councillor, nor inhibit them from representing the interests of the constituents who elected them. This policy is subject to the exception of Members' actions associated with fulfilling their normal and ongoing representative roles as Members of Council, such as attending annual or regularly scheduled events, up until the official end of the term they are serving.

Policy Requirements

This policy is applicable to all Candidates for both a municipal, provincial or federal election or by-election, all elected officials of the Town including those not seeking re-election, all municipal employees, Registered Third Parties, and members of the public.

It does not apply to expenses budgeted and incurred by the Town Clerk/Returning Officer for the effective running of the municipal election.

Nothing in this policy shall preclude a Member of Council from performing their duties as a Councillor, nor inhibit them from representing the interests of the constituents who elected them.

Delegation of Authority

Under the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the Town Clerk is the primary authority responsible for administering municipal elections and ensuring compliance with all legislative provisions.

The Town Clerk has the authority to provide guidance with respect to election-related matters in relation to this policy, and to issue in writing any interpretation on the application of this policy and any related approvals or prohibitions. Such guidance, interpretation, approvals, and prohibitions shall be based on the overarching legislative requirements for public funds and resources must not to be used for any election-related purposes, including the promotion of or opposition to the candidacy of a person for elected office.

Authority

Municipal Elections Act, 1996 (Ontario)

- Section 88.18: Requires municipalities and local boards to establish rules and procedures regarding the use of municipal resources during the election period.

Election Finances Act (Ontario)

- Section 29: Prohibits contributions from corporations, trade unions, and municipalities to political parties, constituency associations, candidates, and leadership contestants.

Canada Elections Act

- Section 370: Prohibits indirect contributions, including those from municipalities.

Monitoring

The Town Clerk shall be responsible for receiving complaints and/or concerns related to this policy.

Contacts

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Change History

Policy Name	Effective Date	Significant Changes	By-law No.
Use of Corporate Resource for Election Purposes Policy	April 26, 2022	New policy	31-2022
New – Replaces policy “Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes Policy”	November 25	New policy created to align with industry best practices.	107-2025