COMMUNICATIONS WITH CITY COMMISSION
POLICY NO: 249-P

- Applies To: All municipal employees using email, text messaging, instant messaging, written, digital, or oral communications in connection with municipal duties
- Effective Date: 11/01/2026
- Associated References: Opens Meetings Act (OMA); City Charter

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear communication protocols for City of Traverse City staff regarding all forms of communication with the City Commission, and Commissioners. This includes, but is not limited to, electronic mail (email), SMS/text messaging, instant messaging, written correspondence, and telephonic or in-person interactions. Standardized communication expectations maintain the administrative chain of command, preserve organizational hierarchy, and avoid blurring the distinct lines between administrative management and policy-making responsibilities. Central oversight ensures that all members of the City Commission receive uniform, accurate, and fully-vetted administrative information simultaneously while maintaining compliance with public record standards.

Additional Authority:

City Charter of the City of Traverse City

Scope:

This policy applies to all municipal employees and all City and personal accounts, devices, software, or platforms (including but not limited to, email, cellular text messaging/SMS, instant messaging, social media, and verbal communications) whenever City or personal accounts are used in connection with official municipal duties.

Responsibility:

- **Employees:** Responsible for adhering strictly to established administrative reporting channels and avoiding initiating direct communication (via email, text message, messaging applications, or direct written/verbal outreach) with the City Commission, unless explicitly authorized. If a member of the City Commission makes a verbal inquiry of any employee, the employee is expected to respond, while reinforcing respect for the chain of command. In such an instance where a member of the City Commission makes a verbal inquiry, employees will promptly share the request with their department head. The Department Head will then notify the City Manager or Deputy City Manager (whichever executive the department head reports to; and in their absence, with the Executive Coordinator) about communications that could reasonably be of interest to.
- **Department Heads:** Responsible for monitoring departmental communications, ensuring staff adhere to the administrative chain of command, and routing all official inquiries or

updates to the City Manager's Office.
- **City Manager:** Responsible for overall enforcement of administrative personnel policies in accordance with the Charter and managing official communications between the administration and the City Commission.

Definitions/Acronyms:

- **Chief Administrative Officer (CAO):** The City Manager, designated by the City Charter (Chapter V, Section 35) to direct, supervise, and manage the administrative affairs and daily operations of all City departments and municipal staff.
- **City Commission:** The elected legislative and policy-making body of the City of Traverse City.
- **Chain of Command:** The formal line of authority extending from the City Manager through Department Heads to municipal staff.
- **OMA:** Open Meetings Act (MCL 15.261 et seq.), governing public meeting procedures and prohibiting deliberation by a quorum outside a public meeting.

Policy Statement:

The City of Traverse City operates under a Commission-Manager form of government. The City Manager serves as the Chief Administrative Officer responsible for the executive administration of the City and its employees, while the City Commission sets broad policies and enacts local laws for the community. To maintain effective, transparent, and legally compliant administration, employees drafting business communications intended for, or responsive to, members of the City Commission must be centralized through the City Manager's Office. This policy establishes guidelines for managing staff communications involving elected officials to uphold administrative structure and comply with statutory requirements.

ELIGIBILITY & COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Exclusion of Commission on Email Responses

- Staff members shall not include (via To, Cc, or Bcc) members of the City Commission, individually or collectively, on email responses, department memos, routine operational updates, or staff inquiries.
- All administrative updates, reports, and communications intended for, or responding to, City Commissioners must be channeled through the Department Head to the City Manager’s Office.

Authorized Exceptions

- Staff may include City Commissioners on written communications when explicitly directed or requested to do so in writing by the City Manager, or authorized designee.
- Statutory processes administered under separate legal frameworks (such as formal FOIA compliance communications or official election filings) are exempt from this restriction.

Handling Direct Inquiries from Commissioners

- If an employee directly receives an email inquiry or request from a City Commissioner, the employee shall immediately forward the communication to their Department Head. The Department Head must then consult with the City Manager's Office.
- The City Manager's Office will determine whether the response will be issued directly by the City Manager, assigned to the Department Head, or delegated back to staff with specific copying permissions.

OPEN MEETINGS ACT (OMA) & PUBLIC RECORDS COMPLIANCE

Unintended "Reply All" email threads involving multiple Commissioners can constitute an illegal electronic quorum or deliberation outside of a public meeting, in violation of the Michigan Open Meetings Act (OMA). This policy is designed to centralize communications through the City Manager's Office and protects the municipality against inadvertent violations of the OMA. Uniformity and Transparency: Central oversight ensures that all members of the City Commission receive uniform, accurate, and fully vetted administrative information simultaneously while maintaining compliance with public record standards.

COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT

Adherence to this communication protocol is essential to maintaining institutional structure and legal compliance. Failure to comply with this policy disrupts the administrative chain of command and may result in disciplinary action in accordance with standard personnel regulations.

Approved By: Benjamin Marentette on 10/28/2026 Signature:	History: Created 10/05/2026