

**Subject:** Use of Corporate Resources for Election Purposes

**Prepared by:** Legal and Clerks Services

**Approved by:** Director Legal and Clerks Services

**Issue Date:** April 13, 2026

**Review Date:** March 1, 2029

**Revision Date:** February 12, 2026

## Policy

The *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, (the *Act*), 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 party advertisers, and this Policy ensures that municipal resources are not used in a way that could be considered to be a contribution.

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide information to registered candidates, including members of City Council, third party advertisers, and City employees about how City resources can and cannot be used for election purposes.

## Scope

This policy applies to candidates, third party advertisers and City employees during the period of a municipal, school board, provincial, or federal election or by-election.

This policy does not preclude an elected official from performing their duties nor inhibit them from representing the interests of the constituents who elected them. The City recognizes that elected officials are responsible to serve their constituents and fulfill their responsibilities until the end of their term. In fulfilling their responsibilities, elected officials are still accountable for their adherence to this policy.

## Procedures

### Rationale and Legislative Authority

It is necessary to establish the appropriate use of Corporate resources during an election period to protect the interests of candidates and third party advertisers and the Corporation. The *Act* prohibits a municipality from making a contribution to a candidate. The *Act* also prohibits a candidate, or someone acting on the candidate's behalf, from accepting a contribution from a person who is not entitled to make a contribution.

As a contribution may take the form of money, goods or services, the use of the Corporation's resources for election purposes would be viewed as a contribution by the municipality to the candidate or registered third party, which is a violation of the *Act*.

### Definitions

**"The Act"** means the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended from time to time, and includes any regulation made thereunder.

**"By-election"** means an election other than a regular election.

**"Candidate"** means a person or political party who is running or acclaimed in a municipal, provincial or federal election, and shall be deemed to include third party advertisers, third parties, and any person seeking to influence other persons to vote for or against any candidate or any question or by-law submitted to the electors under section 8 of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.

**"Campaign"** means any work, effort, activity or thing intending to influence persons to vote for or against any Candidate or any question or by-law submitted to the electors in an election.

**"Campaign Material"** means material in any media (i.e. print, radio, websites and social media) used to promote or oppose a candidate, ballot question, or by-law submitted to the electors in an election. Campaign material also includes but is not limited to banners and literature (e.g. pamphlets, brochures, cards, posters, placards / signs, buttons, pins, clothing and car wraps).

**"Campaign Period"** begins the date a candidate or third party advertiser files their nomination through to December 31 in the case of a regular municipal election and 45 days after voting day in the case of a municipal by-election. For federal and provincial elections the campaign period begins with the issuance of the writ through to voting day and ends as determined by Elections Canada and Elections Ontario.

**"City Facility"** means any property under the care and the control of the City of St. Catharines, including property owned, leased, occupied or used by the City, which can

include but is not limited to City Hall, libraries, community centres, meeting rooms, lobbies, sports fields, parks, pools, arenas, museum and carousel.

**“City of St. Catharines”** means The Corporation of the City of St. Catharines (“The Corporation”).

**“Corporate resources”** includes but is not limited to The Corporation’s employees, facilities, events, funds, information and assets.

**“Elected Official”** means a member of St. Catharines City Council, member of Niagara Regional Council, school board trustees, Member of Parliament, or Member of Provincial Parliament.

**“Employees” or “Staff”** includes full-time, part-time, and contract employees, paid by the Corporation of the City of St. Catharines, as well as, volunteers with the City.

**“Nomination Day”** means the last day a candidate may file their nomination as outlined in the *Act* for a municipal election.

**“Official City Events”** means an event hosted by the City, or an event where an Elected Official is attending as a representative of the City.

**“Voting Day”** means the day on which the final vote is to be taken in an election.

## **General Provisions**

1. Corporate resources, assets and funding may not be used for campaign-related purposes.
2. Candidates may not use any City facility for any campaign-related purposes.
3. Campaign material shall not be displayed in, or distributed at, any City facility, unless otherwise outlined in this procedure. Any staff at these facilities are authorized to remove materials.
4. The following is to be discontinued for members of Council seeking re-election from the day of registering to be a candidate to Election Day:
  - a) All forms of advertising using municipal resources or publications (i.e. The Current);
  - b) All printing, photocopying and distribution, including printing and general distribution of any newsletters using municipal resources, unless so directed and approved by Council, materials for Council and Committee meetings are exempt from this policy;

- c) Ordering office furniture and furnishings using municipal resources, except those of an emergency nature; and
  - d) Ordering stationery and business cards using municipal resources.
- 5. Candidates, including Elected Officials, may not print or distribute campaign material using municipal funds.
- 6. Members of Council are responsible to ensure that the content of any communications material, including printed material such as newsletters, advertising, etc. funded by the municipality, is not directly campaign-related.
- 7. Candidates, including Elected Officials and members of Local Boards and Committees, shall ensure their backgrounds, materials, and attire during any City events and meetings are neutral without reference to any Candidate or Campaign.
- 8. Candidate requests for meetings with any City employee, City information, facility tours, and other similar requests, may not always be accommodated due to resources and time constraints. If a meeting, information request, or tour is accommodated for one candidate, the City must commit to organizing a similar meeting, information, or tour for all similar parties. New report requests made by Members of Council shall be discontinued from May 1<sup>st</sup> to Voting Day. Information not routinely disclosed may be subject to the Freedom of Information process.
- 9. The Council Community and Priority Fund cannot be used for campaigning or the production of campaign materials. In an election year, projects must be awarded before the start of Nominating Period.
- 10. The City will not host or organize all-candidates meetings or debates. However, the City may advertise such events with prior approval from the Chief Administrative Officer and City Clerk.

## **Technology Related Provisions**

- 11. Websites or domain names that are funded by the Corporation may not include any Campaign Material.
- 12. Candidates are permitted to link to any City document available to the public or on a public City webpage from their Campaign Material.
- 13. Candidates are not permitted to incorporate a video or other material (i.e. photos, videos, electronic images) for which the City has proprietary rights in their

Campaign Material. However, use of City of St. Catharines videos that are posted to YouTube is permitted, in accordance with YouTube's Terms of Service.

14. Members of Council shall not use the City's IT resources, including the City's website and social media accounts, for any campaign-related activities.
15. Social media accounts, websites, and other similar media for campaigning must not be created or supported by City resources; these must be managed using personal cell phones, tablets and / or computers.
16. Members of Council who choose to create or use social media accounts, websites, and other similar media for campaigning must include, for the duration of the Campaign Period, a clear statement on each campaign website or social media account's home page indicating that the account is being used for Election Campaign purposes and is not related to their duties as an Elected Official.
17. Candidates are permitted to provide contact or other information requested by the City to be included on any communication materials published by the City and are permitted to distribute such materials.
18. Candidates are not permitted to use City of St. Catharines social media handles or "tag" City of St. Catharines in campaign related social media posts. Any comment by a candidate on a city social media post that may be reasonably be perceived as campaigning will be removed.
19. Candidates must not, under any circumstances, use a City logo, corporate branding, coat of arms, slogan or other corporate identifier or any variation of it on any Campaign Material, including election signs, social media or campaign websites.
20. Members of Council may not use the municipality's voicemail system and / or cell phones for campaign-related communications or to record campaign-related messages.

### **Attendance at City Events**

21. The following applies to City Organized Events that occur from Nomination Day to the day the election results have been certified by the City Clerk:
  - a) Candidates may participate in City Events.
  - b) City Events that are expected to occur annually, such as Canada Day, can continue to take place in an election year.

- c) Elected Officials / Candidates may be identified to speak at City Events, but election campaigning at City Events is not permitted.
- d) Campaigning, Campaign Materials, campaign booths, or similar are not permitted at City Events.
- e) Election-related events that are organized by the City, Elections Canada or Elections Ontario may be held at any City Facility provided no one particular candidate, political party or registered third party is promoted or endorsed during the event.

In this section, campaigning does not include the attendance of candidates and/or their supporters at City Events, such as when they are attending as a resident or participant, but not as a candidate. Candidates are responsible for ensuring that their supporters are aware of this distinction.

## **Staff Provisions**

- 22. Staff shall not canvass or actively work in support or opposition of a municipal, provincial or federal candidate or party during working hours unless they are on a leave of absence without pay, lieu time, float day or vacation leave.
- 23. Staff shall not use Corporate Resources in support or opposition of a municipal, provincial or federal candidate or party.
- 24. Staff shall not canvass or actively work in support or opposition of a candidate or political party while wearing a uniform, badge, logo or other item identifying them as an employee of the City or using a vehicle owned or leased by the municipality.
- 25. Staff engaged in political activities must take care to separate those personal activities from their official positions.
- 26. The City Clerk, Deputy Clerk and any other staff member involved in administering the municipal election shall:
  - a) Not be involved in political activity including, but not limited to, endorsing, supporting or opposing any candidate, attending campaign events, donating or soliciting donations for a campaign and shall refrain from posting, liking, sharing or commenting on content related to municipal election campaigns in a way that could compromise their perceived neutrality.

- b) Disclose a personal, financial or familial relationship with a candidate in a municipal or school board election to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) or designate in writing, as soon as possible.
27. Relatives of municipal and school board candidates are not permitted to work as election officers in a municipal election.

## **Provincial and Federal Elections**

28. Should a Member of Council become a candidate in a provincial or federal election / by-election:
- a) Corporate resources shall only be used for Council related purposes and to serve their residents and shall not be used to support an election campaign.
  - b) A Member, who is a candidate, may continue to be an elected representative and may remain active in their capacity as the elected official. The City Clerk and Integrity Commissioner may be consulted with respect to responsibilities and obligations required to comply with policy.

## **Compliance**

The following options are available for complaints related to candidates using City resources for election purposes, including Members of Council or Members of Council seeking re-election:

- a) Submit a written complaint to the City Clerk setting out specific examples and details of the alleged use of a corporate resource outlined in this policy. The City Clerk or designate shall have the authority to receive and investigate any written complaint with respect to the alleged use of corporate resources in contravention of this policy.
- b) File a formal or informal complaint to the Integrity Commissioner under the Code of Conduct for Members of Council, Local Boards and Advisory Committees. However, no investigation shall be commenced within the election period between Nomination Day and Voting Day. An Integrity Commissioner cannot investigate matters regarding *Municipal Elections Act* or election campaign finances. Please refer to the Code of Conduct Complaint Protocol for additional details.
- c) Contact the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman.
- d) Pursue private legal options.

Any concerns or complaints related to campaign finances are addressed through the compliance audit process in Section 88.33 of the Municipal Elections Act.