

Council, Boards, Committees

Use of Corporate Resources During an Election

Approved by Council on:

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Reviewed: February 2026

Amended:

Next Review: October 2029

Section 88.18 of the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended* (MEA) requires municipalities and local boards to establish rules and procedures with respect to the use of municipal or board resources during an election campaign, before May 1 of an election year.

The MEA, prohibits municipalities from making campaign contributions to municipal candidates or registered third parties. A contribution includes:

- money, goods and services given to and accepted by or on behalf and under the direction of a person for his or her election campaign (s. 88.15(1))
- money, goods and services given to and accepted by or on behalf of an individual, corporation or trade union in relation to third party advertisements (s.88.15 (2))

Since a contribution can take the form of money, goods, or services, any use of the City's resources for an election by any staff, member of Council who is a candidate, or by any other candidate or any registered third party, would be considered a contribution by the City for the purposes of the MEA. Provincial and Federal legislation impose similar restrictions for provincial and federal campaigns where a contribution can only be made by an individual.

Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to:

- i. ensure compliance with municipal, provincial and federal legislation with respect to contributions to candidates;

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- ii. ensure Registered Candidates and Registered Third Parties are treated fairly and consistently within the municipality;
- iii. ensure the integrity of the election process is maintained at all times;
- iv. establish the appropriate use of resources during an election period, in order to:
 - a. protect the interests of Members of Council, Registered Candidates, Registered Third Parties, Staff and the Corporation; and
 - b. ensure accountable and transparent election practices.

Nothing contained in this Policy shall limit or constrain a Member of Council from exercising their statutory functions, or from limiting the Mayor from exercising their duties as the Head of Council and the Chief Executive Officer of the City.

The provisions in this policy may also be subject to additional City by-laws and policies.

Scope and Application:

This policy applies to all Members of Council, all City staff, registered election candidates, registered third parties, and members of the public.

This policy is applied throughout the election period, which begins on the day in which a candidate's nomination papers or third-party registration papers are filed and ends on the day that official results are certified by the City Clerk.

For members of Council who are not seeking re-election this policy is in effect at the close of nominations and ends on the day that official results are certified by the City Clerk.

For Federal and Provincial elections, this policy will be applied the date the writ is issued for the election or by-election and ends on voting day.

Objectives:

The objective of this Policy is to ensure compliance with the Municipal, Provincial and Federal legislation as amended, as it relates to contributions to political campaigns, the Council Code of Good Governance, Code of Conduct for Local Boards, and the Employee Code of Conduct.

Principles:

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1. Corporate resources, assets, and funding shall not be used for any election-related purposes.
2. Election information will be available through the local media and on the City's website at myvoteburlington.ca. The names of candidates will be posted as soon as possible following receipt in the Clerk's office of the required fees and forms.
3. Staff will continue to invite all members of Council in their capacity as elected officials to the City's special events throughout an election year. Information about special events will be available to all candidates on the City's Events calendar.

Definitions:

For the purpose of this policy, unless otherwise stated, the following definitions shall apply:

Term	Definition
Affiliates	Means any affiliates of the City of Burlington including but not limited to Burlington Economic Development Corporation, Burlington Hydro, Burlington Performing Arts Centre, Burlington Art Gallery, Burlington Museums and Royal Botanical Gardens.
Blackout Period	From midnight the day of the last council meeting of the term, until midnight of election day.
Campaigning	Means any activity by, on behalf of, in support of or in opposition to a Candidate, political party or ballot question during a campaign period that is meant to elicit support or opposition.
Campaign contribution	Means anything of value given to influence an election, may take the form of money, goods, or services.

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Term	Definition
Campaign period	Means, in accordance with Section 88.24 of the <i>Municipal Elections Act, 1996</i> , as amended, and 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.
Campaign materials	Means any materials, including political advertising, used to solicit votes for a candidate(s) or question in an election or any materials that promote or oppose the candidacy of a person for elected office. Including but 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, for example print, displays, electronic radio or television, online including websites or social media. Campaign materials do not include election signs, which are governed by the City's Sign By-law.
City	Means the City of Burlington
City Clerk	Means the City Clerk and Returning Officer of the City of Burlington or their delegate.
City Staff	Means employees (full-time, part-time, contract and seasonal) including any contractor providing services to the City.

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Term	Definition
Corporate Resources	<p>Means City facilities, infrastructure, assets, equipment, supplies, services, staff or any resource that belongs to or is funded by the City.</p> <p>City facilities and infrastructure do not include public right-of-ways such as sidewalks, roads, boulevards and laneways.</p>
Elected Official	<p>Means an individual elected to the House of Commons, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Burlington City Council or a school board.</p>
Election campaign activities	<p>Means any activity by or on behalf of a registered candidate, registered third party, or question on a ballot meant to elicit support during the election period.</p>
Nomination Day	<p>Means the third Friday in August in the year of the election, in accordance with Section 31 of the <i>Municipal Elections Act, 1996</i>, as amended.</p>
Political advertising	<p>Means advertising that takes a position on an issue that can reasonably be regarded as closely associated with a registered third party or candidate.</p>
Political Party	<p>Means political parties for provincial and federal elections that are registered under the Ontario <i>Election Finances Act</i> or in the registry of parties referred to in section 374 of the <i>Canada Elections Act</i>.</p>

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Term	Definition
Registered Third Party Advertiser	Means, in relation to a municipal election, an individual, corporation or trade union that is registered with the City Clerk, as per section 88.6 of the <i>Municipal Elections Act, 1996</i> , whose purpose is to promote, support or oppose a candidate for office, or an issue on a question on a ballot, and is not under the direction of a candidate.
Voting Day	Means in a regular municipal election, the fourth Monday in October, in accordance with Section 5 of the <i>Municipal Elections Act, 1996</i> , as amended.

Provisions

1. Access to City Facilities During an Election Period

- a. Municipally provided facilities/properties can only be used for any election related purpose if there is a rental fee established corporately, and the rental is available to all candidates and third parties. No facility/property shall be rented or used for any municipal election related purpose during any day that voting is taking place on the property including set-up, hosting, or take-down activities.
- b. Use of rentals are subject to the following conditions:
 - i. all election campaign materials must only be displayed within the allotted rental period in the allotted rented area designated in the rental agreement; and
 - ii. rentals for campaign related activities are not permitted from the first date of advance voting to the day after voting day; and
 - iii. the City reserves the right to refuse or cancel a rental contract at any time, in accordance with the terms of the contract, should it conflict with the City's corporate values or established policies or procedures, or presents a health and safety concern.
 - iv. no rentals permitted under the Lobby rental category or at Civic Square at City Hall.

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- c. Candidates and Registered Third Parties may accept an invitation to address a group who have booked a City Facility but cannot solicit those outside the meeting/event during this time.
- d. Campaign materials in City facilities (including notice boards) is prohibited and any staff at these facilities are authorized to remove materials.

2. Attendance at City Events

- a. Candidates and registered third parties may attend City organized, hosted, or funded events during a campaign period, but may not display or distribute any campaign materials, or engage in any election related activities.
- b. Members of Council are permitted to attend City-organized events or events held on City facilities and act as ceremonial participants in their capacity as elected officials, including speaking at the event and partaking in ceremonial activities, but may not campaign. Once the writ is issued for Provincial or Federal elections, MPPs and MPs, respectively, are no longer elected officials and therefore should not be invited to attend City events.
- c. Any meetings hosted by Members of Council and paid for by the City must be regarding City business only and may not include any campaigning or distribution of campaign materials.
- d. Members of Council including those not seeking re-election may attend Food for Feedback during an election year as members of the public but may not have a booth at the event. Campaigning, including the display or distribution of campaign materials is prohibited.

3. Use of Corporate Identifiers and Resources

- a. The City's logo, corporate branding, crest, chain of office, coat of arms, slogan or other corporate identifiers or that of its affiliates, shall not be used for any election campaign-related purposes, except in the case of a link to any City website to obtain information about the municipal election.
- b. Photographs, videos, electronic images, or graphics, produced or generated by the City or its affiliates shall not be used by registered candidates and registered third parties for any election purposes. This includes official headshots.

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- c. Candidates may not post photographs or themselves with City employees in uniform.
- d. Corporate resources shall not be used for:
 - i. printing or distribution of any material that illustrates that a Member of Council or any other individual is registered or intends to run for office; or
 - ii. the printing or distribution of any campaign material that makes reference to, or contains the names or photographs, or identifies registered candidates,
 - iii. recording election related messages or distributing election related correspondence.
- e. No City consumable materials, such as toner and paper, associated with computer systems shall be used for election campaign-related purposes.
- f. Distribution lists and information produced using City resources, except for lists produced for election purposes in accordance with the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, (e.g. Voters' List) shall not be used for any election campaign-related purposes.
- g. Data and information contained in the City's corporate Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, or the Constituent Records System (CRS) shall not be used for any election campaign-related purposes.

4. Restrictions During the Campaign Period

Design Resources

- a. Members of Council are not permitted to request resources from Corporate Communications and Engagement staff to produce or distribute communication materials. Any requests are forwarded to the Director of Communications and Engagement for review/approval.
- b. City business cards and promotional materials prepared by Creative and Digital Services shall not be used for any campaign purposes or at any campaign events and can only be distributed in the normal course of a candidate's performance of their official duties (e.g. distributed during an AMO , ROMA, or FCM conference a Member is attending in their official capacity).

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Media Requests

- c. Media requests to City Staff during the campaign period shall be directed for response by the City through the Manager of Communications.
- d. Sitting Council Members are permitted under the policy to comment on matters related to the performance of their duties and decision-making, respecting their obligations under the Code of Good Governance Sec 11: “We will communicate information to the public in ways that are accurate, timely, and in the interest of the corporation. We will respect that the Mayor, as Head of Council, is the primary spokesperson for Council.
- e. Official City press releases will not feature quotes from any Member of Council during the election blackout period from midnight the day of the last council meeting of the term, until midnight of election day, except in an emergency situation or in exceptional circumstances as determined by Communications, Clerks, and the Chief Administrative Officer.

Social Media

- f. Members of Council are required to remove the City logo, crest, official photo or title from their social media bio, but can state they are running for re-election.
- g. Members of Council are encouraged to create a secondary campaign social media account for the purposes of campaigning. Elected officials who choose to use their existing social media accounts must include, for the duration of the election campaign period, a clear statement indicating that the account is being used for election campaign purposes and is not related to their duties as an elected official.
- h. Links to all social media, blogs, and external websites will be removed from Member of Council webpages on the City’s website.
- i. All City of Burlington social media accounts (including Transit, Fire, and Recreation accounts) will unfollow all Members of Council on social media.
- j. All City of Burlington social media accounts (includes Transit, Fire, and Recreation Accounts) will not like or reshare posts from Members of Council on social media.

City Talk Issues and Newsletters

- k. Information, messages, or photographs from any member of council shall not be posted in City Talk issues. Previous City Talk issues hosted on individual Member of Council websites shall be removed.

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- l. Printing and distribution of newsletters for Members of Council including those not seeking re-election is prohibited from the day nominations open to midnight of Election Day unless utilizing the City of Burlington approved and adopted campaign period newsletter template that does not reference the name or image of a Member of Council.
- m. Printed and electronic newsletters whose printing and distribution is paid for with City resources shall not contain campaign information, other than links to general election information (e.g. voting locations, key election dates, links to registered candidates).

Webpages

- n. Council Member biographies, speeches by Members of Council, ward meetings, links and news from your Ward Councillor' will be removed from the Mayor and Council webpages on the City's website and any of its affiliates, leaving only the name and photo of the elected representative, their contact information including staff support, their ward map, and a list of their current representation on local boards and committees.

Any webpages pertaining to corporate programs, approved by Council, such as the Red Tape Red Carpet, Key to the City, Burlington Best, etc. may remain on the City's website.

Photographs and Videos

- o. During the election campaign period City communication materials, including videos, will not feature/highlight Members of Council.

Expenditures

- p. Council advertising of ward meetings will not include the council member's name and photo and will only include the generic ward contact information starting nomination day until midnight on election day.
- q. Photographs of Members of Burlington City Council will not appear in advertising placed by or paid for by the City of Burlington. Communication expenditures will be permitted with the approval of the City Clerk in the case of emergency situations, as part of a pre-approved communications plan or an urgent neighbourhood issue that requires a timely response.
- r. The budgets for Members of Council for the period of January 1 to Voting Day in a municipal election year will be restricted to 11/12ths of the approved annual budget amount with the provision that subsequent to Voting Day:

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- i. Newly elected members of council be allocated a budget equal to 1/12th of the approved budget amount for the month of December; and
 - ii. Re-elected Members of Council have available to them the balance of funds remaining as of Voting Day;
 - iii. Expenditures for gifts and donations from council members will be limited to those boards, projects and committees that the council member was appointed to by Council.
- s. Funds allocated per ward, and to the Mayor, for support of community events, during an election year, will be administered by the Senior Manager of Community Development in the Recreation, Community and Culture. In non-election years, the funds will once again be administered by Members of Council. In both election and non-election years the expenses will be reported annually as part of the council expense reporting.
- t. Ordering of office furniture and furnishings, except those of an emergency nature, will be discontinued for the Councillor's Office and Mayor's Office.
- u. Virtual meeting software licenses purchased or funded by the City shall not be used for election campaign activity.

5. Access to City Information During an Election Period

- a. Information provided to one candidate, registered third party advertiser or political party that is of a general nature and may provide valuable guidance to all others will be provided to all candidates, registered third-party advertisers or political parties.

6. City Staff

In recognizing the rights of employees and volunteers to participate in political activity, the provisions set out below ensure the requirement for public service to be politically impartial.

- a. City staff shall not canvass or actively campaign for any registered candidate or registered third-party during hours in which they are receiving compensation from the City unless they are on a leave of absence without pay, lieu time, float day, or vacation leave. This shall not interfere with the employee's normal duties.

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- b. City staff shall not use corporate resources in support of or in opposition to a candidate, political party, or registered third party.
- c. Members of Council may not request staff working in a Ward Office or Mayor's Office, to perform any duties related to the election campaign during hours in which the employee receives any compensation from the City unless they are on a leave of absence without pay, lieu time, float day, or vacation leave. This shall not interfere with the employee's normal duties.
- d. City staff shall not canvass nor actively campaign in support of or in opposition to a candidate or party while wearing a City uniform, badge, crest, or other item identifying them as a City of Burlington employee, or while using a City branded vehicle.
- e. City staff shall consult with their Manager prior to agreeing to deliver a presentation at ward or constituent meeting, or similar function within any ward or combination of wards.
- f. City staff shall not use their title or position within the City in a way that may lead a member of the public to infer that the City is endorsing a Candidate, Registered Third-Party or political party.
- g. City staff that support the City Clerk in the administration of a municipal election or by-election may not engage in political activity during such election.

7. At Voting Locations

- a. City staff working directly for a Member(s) of Council (i.e., Executive and Administrative Assistants), shall not be assigned to work as Election Officers in a municipal election.
- b. City staff, who are also relatives of any Member of Council or candidates for municipal election, shall not be assigned to work as Election Officers in a municipal election.

Roles:

Accountable:

The City Clerk is authorized and directed to take such action as necessary to

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give effect to this Policy including facilitating complaints regarding alleged contraventions of the Policy.

Procedures may be defined, and amended from time to time, by the City Clerk to address specific implementation of this Policy.

Responsible:

The City Clerk is responsible for:

- Communicating this Policy to municipal Candidates and Registered Third Parties
- Ensuring this Policy is reviewed and updated as required, prior to municipal elections or by-elections, or as required by legislative change
- Ensuring all municipal Candidates and Registered Third Parties are treated equally

The Chief Administrative Officer, Commissioners, Directors, Managers and Supervisors are responsible for:

- Communicating this Policy to their Staff
- Ensuring compliance with this Policy
- Investigating reported contraventions of the Policy and escalating as required

City Staff are responsible for:

- Complying with this Policy
- Seeking clarification from their supervisor if any aspect of this Policy is not understood

Without exception, all Members of Council, election Candidates, and Registered Third Parties shall comply with this Policy

References:

Municipal Elections Act, 1996, as amended
Council Code of Good Governance
Code of Conduct of Local Boards
Employee Code of Conduct