

CHAPTER 2

PUBLIC RELATIONS/ ORGANIZATIONS

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2:1 INTRODUCTION

Public relations help the Drain Commissioner to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among various groups; it serves to bring the private and public policies into harmony. Public relations serves a wide variety of groups, such as: the Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners (MACDC), the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan Wildlife Association. It also serves intergovernmental units, such as: County Board of Commissioners, Township Boards, City Councils and Village Boards.

To achieve their goals, Drain Commissioners must develop effective relationships among each other and interest groups. The Drain Commissioner must understand the attitudes and values of all of these groups. Public relations encompass many areas, such as: press and media, community relations, relationships to County Boards and relationships to other Drain Commissioners, particularly in surrounding counties.

2:2 PRESS/MEDIA

The press is something the Drain Commissioner either loves or hates. The press can be a wonderful asset if handled correctly. There are some basic principals to follow when working with press reporters:

1. Be a good listener.
2. Get to know the local reporters. Watch them on the news or read their articles so you will understand their styles before you meet with them and give them information.
3. Always tell the truth.
4. Be in control.
5. Know your topic thoroughly.
6. Always be consistent.
7. Don't waiver or lose sight of your goals. It is good to explain to the public what your goal is.
8. Don't make news when there isn't any. Don't feed your ego.
9. Know how to write a press release. Press releases must answer the primary journalist questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How, and How Much?

- a) Who (or what) is (are) the main subject(s) of the release.
- b) What is the event reported in the release?
- c) When did the event happen, or will happen?
- d) Where did or will the event happen?
- e) Why did the event happen, or will happen?
- f) How did the event happen, or will happen?
- g) How much (use numbers whenever possible) is involved?

2:3 COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Drain Commissioners should always have an “open-door” policy, so the public may come into your office at any time to ask questions and have someone explain a project or provide information as to what is going on in their Drainage District.

It is good public relations to have brochures and newsletters available for the public to pick up at the counter. One Drain Commissioner has a brochure on his counter entitled “Rain, Rain Go Away”, which explains the basic stormwater polices for that particular County.

2:4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The degree of interaction between the Drain Commissioner’s office and the County Board of Commissioners varies widely from County to County. Some County Boards are content to let the Drain Commissioner do his job and consider it best if they don’t get involved in drainage issues at all. Others like to be informed of all decisions and often want to be part of the decision making process. Regardless of your County Board’s persuasion, it is in everyone’s best interest to have a good working relationship beginning the day you take office.

By statute, the Drain Commissioner and his staff are required to be supplied an annual salary and expenses by the County Board. In addition, the Drain Code requires that the Drain Commissioner submit an Annual Report to the County Board of Commissioners. The Board is also required to provide a drain revolving fund, and may at their discretion provide the County’s Full Faith and Credit for a bond issue. Except in special instances, such as a Chapter 20 petition, this is where the statutory relationship ends. In real life, however, there are many more reasons to develop a rapport with your Board. The time may come when you need additional budget, equipment, revolving fund, or staff. When this happens, it is important that you are on good terms with your Commissioners, as they ultimately control the purse strings of the County.

With the office of Drain Commissioner comes a great deal of power. It is important to guard against letting this power go to your head. Misuses of this power can not only cause problems for you, but can ultimately cause problems or resentment from Commissioners who have to hear the complaints from their constituents. Hard feelings between you, the Drain Commissioner, and the County Board can result in difficulties in day to day operations in your office.

In addition to your relationship with the County Board of Commissioners, you need to develop a relationship with officials at the Township, City, and Village levels throughout your County. Frequently, your constituents contact these individuals with questions regarding drainage problems, development issues, or special assessments. It is important that they feel comfortable working with you so that these questions can be answered, or problems remedied.

Increased development statewide is having a major impact on drains which were generally designed and constructed as agricultural drains. It is important that the Drain Commissioner establish a protocol with Township, City and Village agencies so that developments are properly planned and drains capacities not exceeded. Developing a working relationship is the first step in developing a good site plan review protocol and preventing the overloading of your drains, and subsequent major reconstruction projects.

Section 196 of the Drain Code authorizes maintenance expenditures of up to \$2,500 per mile of a drain. During your tenure as Drain Commissioner, you will certainly encounter drain repairs that cannot be done for this amount. When this happens, your relationship with the municipality will be of utmost importance. Section 196(5) allows the Drain Commissioner to exceed the spending limit with a resolution of the governing body of each Township, City, and Village affected by more than 20% of the cost. The ability to work with municipalities to obtain this resolution can be an invaluable tool in conducting drain maintenance. Developing a relationship with Township Supervisors, City Managers or Mayors is essential in obtaining a Resolution to Exceed Spending Limits. The lack of a relationship can result in an inability to obtain the resolution, and thus the inability to remedy the problem. The inability to quickly remedy a problem can ultimately cost you the support of your constituents.

2:5 HOW THE MACDC BENEFITS YOU

MACDC is an influential association in many areas affecting your profession. Becoming aware of the various committee activities within MACDC will enable you to increase your level

of exposure and understanding, to the great benefit of everyone involved. Participating in committee actions can bring extensive networking opportunities, as well as chances to address your own concerns by working towards common goals.

(1) Watch Your Money: *Auditing Committee*

Understand how the association's funds are managed. Awareness of past spending habits can fuel suggestions for future budgets and help you realize ways to use funding more efficiently.

(2) Speak Your Language: *Consultants Committee*

A voice for contractor and supplier associate members to offer professional input towards better County drain construction and maintenance. The sharing of technological expertise brings a practical perspective for improving the association at the working level.

(3) Tools For Everyone: *Education Committee*

Transitions: Introduce new Drain Commissioner colleagues to their work through mentoring.

Inside: Expand and update the knowledge base of the MACDC with continuing education programs for veteran members.

Outside: Communicate with MDEQ and MDA to stay on the advancing crest of issues that may soon be affecting you. Knowledge is power.

(4) Clarity of Action: *Procedures and Practices Manual Special Subcommittee*

Making Drain Commissioner's jobs simpler by standardizing and streamlining. Share the methods that work for you with others.

(5) Drain Code Development: *Legislative Committee*

Be a part of the process which is redefining your profession. These are vital times in the history of the Drain Commission – seize your chance now to contribute to the changes being made for the future. As a proactive Drain Commissioner in grassroots efforts, you can help to determine and support MACDC's political positions in Lansing.

(6) Balancing Authority: *Nomination Committee*

MACDC's officers work for you, bringing their personal experience and talents to the aspects of the association they are most suited for.

(7) Inform and Delight: *Program and Entertainment Committee*

Making conferences a rousing success through the most relevant, interesting speakers possible; devising fun, friendly activities for when the program's done. Meet and network

with peers, develop support and increase business contacts at these great MACDC highlights twice each year.

(8) Self-Improvement: *Resolutions and Bylaws*

Always moving forward, MACDC learns from its past and grows stronger. Bringing proposed changes up for member approval allows for discussion and input from everyone affected.

(9) Cooperative Partners Make a Difference: *MDNR/MDEQ Liaison and Environmental Policy Committee*

Take an active role in this unique and formative partnership. The three entities; MACDC, MDNR and MDEQ have committed to promote a cooperative working relationship on water resource issues of mutual interest and benefit. Your communication and commitment with this endeavor has nothing but positive results for your staff and constituents.

(10) Crossing The T's and Dotting The I's: *PIPELINE Publication Editing Committee*

It's the best way to provide your input and knowledge about your profession. As you interact with colleagues, contractors and consultants this is a perfect opportunity to recognize the experts and promote the publication that represents MACDC. The PIPELINE affords the opportunity for colleagues to share problems and solutions to unique projects within the profession.

(11) Beneficial Partnerships—Liaison Committees: *County Treasurers; United County Officers; Michigan Townships Association; Michigan Land Improvement Contractors; Michigan County Road Association; Michigan Association of Conservation Districts; Michigan Farm Bureau.*

The true value of each Drain Commissioner developing a liaison within their County with each of the above committees is highly recommended. Take the opportunity to stimulate partnerships and become an advocate within each organization. You don't want to compete for resources if you don't have to. There are benefits of politics at the local level. Be proactive!

2:6 START YOUR OWN SPEAKERS BUREAU

There are many opportunities in each County to speak before various groups, such as: schools, Lion's Clubs, various civic groups, League of Women Voters, environmental groups and political parties. Drain Commissioners should always be willing to speak before any of these groups when asked.

2:7 SUBMITTING ARTICLES

This is the same philosophy as above. If you are asked to write an article for a particular newsletter or paper, Drain Commissioners should always be willing to do this because it is simply good publicity for the office. It is also an opportunity to educate the general public on drainage issues.

2:8 SERVICE

As we all know, SERVICE is critical, whether on the telephone or in person. As a consumer you have been serviced well and served poorly. The secret in the service to your constituents is people, and that means you and your staff. It may be helpful to establish guidelines for your staff for answering the telephone and providing help to constituents who may drop by the office. You always want your constituents to have a positive impression of you and your staff.

Service: It's your job! Here are some facets that may help you to further develop your public relations program.

Service is:

- **Intangible** - Service involves feelings and perceptions, it cannot be manufactured.
- **Immediacy** - You and your staff should be ready, willing, and able when constituents call, walk through your door, or contact you, regardless of whatever is happening at the moment.
- **Invisible** - When everything is going right, service is invisible. But when a problem occurs, service becomes highly visible, especially to the constituent, and this creates the perfect opportunity for you to shine!
- **Interpersonal** - Service is an interpersonal transaction, requiring communication and listening skills. The staff should be polite, diplomatic, and sometimes gently firm, but always courteous and professional.

If you don't want to alienate your constituents -- stay away from the word NO! The fewer *no's* you use, the more your constituents will say *yes* to you and your staff!

Stay away from:

I can't help you . . .

You didn't follow the proper procedure . . .

We can't do that . . .

It's against policy . . .

We can't make any exceptions . . .

We're not allowed to . . .

That's not my job . . .

When you must say no, offer alternative solutions. Explain briefly and non-defensively, policy and procedures of the Drain Commissioner's office. Express disappointment when you are unable to answer their request and express the desire to help the individual even if there is little or perhaps nothing you can do right now. Also, don't forget to thank your constituent for understanding.

Words That Reflect a SERVICE Attitude:

Please . . .

Thank you . . .

How may I help you . . . ?

I'm happy to help . . .

Yes, that is unfortunate . . .

I regret that you were inconvenienced . . .

I can appreciate that . . .

I am unable to do that, but here's what I can do . . .

Thank you for taking the time to let me know . . .

I do apologize . . .

Let's see what we can do . . .

I don't know the answer right now, but I'd be happy to find out for you . . .

2:8.1 Telephone Etiquette 101

Telephone skills are essential to good service/public relations, but many people take them for granted.

Consider:

- Always state the name of your office and your name when you answer the phone. "Good morning, Drain Commissioner (name and/or county) office, this is (name)".
- Use appropriate language and always be courteous to your caller.
- For some constituents, the telephone is their only contact with your office. Always answer the phone as soon as possible, preferably by the second ring. Enunciate and

Speak directly into the mouthpiece. Keep a pad of paper and pen handy so you can take messages or make notes.

- Listen carefully and concentrate on the call. Avoid rushing or interrupting the caller unless you need to ask for a name, date, or other necessary information.
- If you take a message, repeat it back to the caller to make sure it's correct. If you make any promises or need to take any kind of action, do it! Your reputation and office is on the line.
- When leaving messages, clearly and briefly explain the nature of your call so people can respond even if you will be out when they call back. Consider requesting a fax/email number and sending a message so the person you're trying to reach can conveniently reply.
- When putting callers on hold, clarify if it will be a long wait. Give people an option to hang up if that will be more convenient for them, once you agree who will call back, and when. If you put a caller on extended hold, be sure to check back every 30 seconds or so.

2:9 A CITIZENS GUIDE TO THE OFFICE OF THE DRAIN COMMISSIONER

Some Drain Commissioners have a brochure that they give out to the public with this title on it. It includes information on the duties and functions of the Drain Commissioners, the responsibilities to the Board of Commissioners and the responsibility the County Board of Commissioners to the department. It can give an historical perspective, general information on drainage law, the development of the basic Drain Code, or it can give the history and evolution of the Act itself. If a brochure is provided it should be reviewed by an attorney.

2:10 PARTNERSHIP FOR WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN MICHIGAN

In recognition of the movement towards watershed management, and communications to resolve land and water management issues between state agencies and the County Drain Commissioners, the *Partnering Agreement Between Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Environmental Stewardship Division, and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Land and Water Management Division and Surface Water Quality Divisions* was chartered and signed on February 11, 1999.

APPENDIX

Document List

1. Partnership Agreement between: Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners (MACDC) and Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Mission Statement
2. Memorandum of Understanding between the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts and the Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners
3. Press Release

**PARTNERING AGREEMENT BETWEEN:
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONERS (MACDC)
AND
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (MDA)
AND
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (MDEQ)
MISSION STATEMENT:**

We, the Partners, having developed this partnership based on trust, communication, and teamwork, agree to commit ourselves to continue to foster a cooperative working relationship on water resource issues of mutual interest and benefit.

I. Goals

- Promote mutual understanding
- Enhance coordination in areas of joint jurisdiction
- Provide for timely problem solving and conflict resolution
- Maintain a partnering spirit
- Better serve the citizens of the state

II. Objectives

- Exchange information and data to promote a more thorough understanding of each office or agency's mission, responsibilities, and authorities
- Jointly organize training for MDA, Environmental Stewardship Division (ESD); MDEQ, Land and Water Management Division (LWMD) and Surface Water Quality Division (SWQD); the Drain Commissioners; and other consultants
- Mutually explore financing options for programs and natural resource mitigation and enhancement

III. Enhance Coordination in Areas of Joint Jurisdiction and Issues of Mutual Concern

- The Partners shall identify and communicate opportunities for joint participation in projects and programs of mutual interest.
- The Partners shall work cooperatively in watershed planning efforts.
- The LWMD staff shall coordinate permit review with appropriate federal agencies.
- The Partners shall agree to meet on-site to proactively discuss projects and to resolve site specific problems, when necessary.
- The Partners will establish an informal problem resolution process, short of the contested case process. This will identify contact persons to be called when problems arise with projects, to encourage rapid resolution.

- Staff of the LWMD will work to insure timely processing of permits and hydrologic/hydraulic analysis.
- Staff of the SWQD will provide input as to the biological, chemical, and physical status of the surface waters.

IV. Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution

- The Drain Commissioners and Drainage Boards will notify the LWMD and the SWQD of all petition projects.
- The Partners will agree to establish working committees to address and attempt to resolve any differences related to significant issues facing the Partners. Examples include:
 - Clarifying the meaning of exemptions
 - Clarifying issues regarding joint jurisdiction
 - Providing input in the development of Best Management Practices to incorporate into a procedure manual to aid in the design of projects
 - Developing uniform statewide guidelines for working in areas of joint jurisdiction
 - Identifying opportunities for joint training sessions

V. Facilitate Education and Information Exchange

- The Partners will conduct partnering meetings in conjunction with the MACDC district meetings and hold one annual meeting.
- The LWMD and the SWQD will invite the Partners to attend and participate at MDEQ in-service training.
- The Partners will conduct an annual review of the partnering agreement and develop an annual action plan.
- The LWMD, the SWQD, and the ESD will actively participate in MACDC's efforts to develop a procedure manual. The LWMD and the SWQD staff participation will focus on areas related to their division's program responsibilities and technical expertise.
- The Partners will provide technical assistance to help ensure appropriate environmental and engineering evaluations are conducted.
- The MACDC and the MDA will consider options to minimize project environmental impacts and identify feasible methods to enhance environmental resources while still achieving drainage objectives.
- The LWMD and the SWQD staff will be available for pre-petition consultation to help develop environmentally acceptable projects and to advise regarding financing options.
- The LWMD and the SWQD will work to accommodate reasonable design criteria to facilitate necessary drainage and storm water management, minimize environmental impacts and identify, where practical, methods to enhance the natural resources.

- The LWMD and the SWQD staff will review preliminary drain designs when requested by the Drain Commissioner or Drainage Board.
- The Partners will develop effective strategies for the implementation of storm water regulations within drainage districts.

VI. Maintain A Partnering Spirit

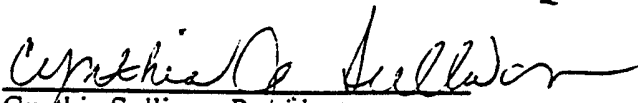
- Provide mutual support in resolving problems
- Maintain open and direct communication
- Build trust and common purpose

VII. Better Serve the Public

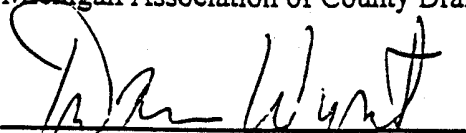
- Inform and educate the citizens of the State of Michigan on the jurisdiction and responsibilities of the partners
- Enhance delivery of services
- Reduce response time
- Protect the natural resources and provide effective, sustainable drainage and storm water management infrastructure and foster a diverse and vigorous economy

VIII. Financing

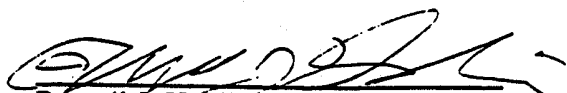
- Explore potential funding options for natural resource preservation and enhancement



Cynthia Sullivan, President
Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners



Dan Wyant, Director
Michigan Department of Agriculture



Russell J. Harding, Director
Michigan Department of Environmental Quality

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN THE
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS
AND THE
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONERS

This memorandum of understanding is between the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, hereafter called the MACD, and the Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners, hereafter called the MACDC. This memorandum establishes a basis for the continued cooperation of the two parties and is effective on the date signed.

The two parties have a common interest in that they both work on a watershed basis and both have responsibilities to work with landowners to address watershed needs. These needs include assisting landowners with water management issues as well as upland watershed treatment to address soil erosion and water quality problems.

WHAT BOTH PARTIES AGREE TO DO:

Conservation District Staff and Directors, and County Drain Commissioners will:

1. Work together to educate landowners and others of the importance of installing upland conservation measures to reduce sediment in surface waters which in turn will reduce the frequency of maintenance activities and thus reduce local costs.
2. Work together with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and other interested parties to share common digital data bases and identify and prioritize watersheds to reduce the amount of soil erosion reaching surface waters.
3. Work together with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and other interested parties to develop watershed plans to address both soil and water management resource problems as well as identify available financing sources.
4. Through the President of MADC, and the President of MACDC, appoint liaisons for their respective groups who will coordinate their joint efforts at a statewide level.
5. Coordinate their technical and financial expertise and resources to maximize efforts in addressing natural resource issues at the local levels as agreed upon and as resources allow.

WHAT THE MADC WILL DO:

1. Encourage Conservation Districts, as resources allow, to provide environmental monitoring of county drains and to recommend remedial soil erosion actions based upon their finding.
2. Encourage Conservation Districts, as resources allow, to provide drainage district inventories of the extent of existing and potential problems and impairments.
3. Encourage Conservation Districts, as resources allow, to perform stewardship certification for landowners in a drainage district, in order that such property owners might receive recognition for past stewardship practices.
4. Encourage Conservation District to include County Drain Commissioners when planning local projects.

WHAT THE MACDC WILL DO:

1. Encourage its members to include Conservation District staff and boards so that they may provide input in planning local projects.
2. Encourage its members to use their expertise and resources to maintain adequate drainage and carry out upland treatment measures to preserve the designed drainage protection.

IT IS FURTHER UNDERSTOOD:

1. Assistance provided by either party will be in accordance with applicable policies and with local, state, and federal laws.
2. This agreement may be amended or canceled by either party at any time by mutual consent, or by either party alone by giving 30 days notice.
3. Neither party is bound by any obligation in this agreement that involves the expenditure of funds in excess of that authorized by law.

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Lang A. Leach
 BY: **President**

12-3-97
 Date

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONERS

Cynthia J. Sullivan
 BY: **Cynthia J. Sullivan, President**

12-03-97
 Date

PRESS RELEASE

On February 11, 1999, the Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the Michigan Department of Agriculture signed a Partnership Agreement.

The Agreement was signed at a ceremony at the Grand Traverse Resort, where the Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners is convened for their annual Winter Conference. Celebrating their 100-year anniversary as an Association. “This is a momentous occasion,” says Cynthia Sullivan, Newaygo County Drain Commissioner and President of the Drain Commissioners Association, “it represents years of discussion amongst the parties.”

The Agreement is designed to assist the State agencies and the County Drain Commissioners in development of a solid working arrangement to protect the State’s water resources and recognizing the important role of the Drain Commissioners in storm water management in Michigan, says Sullivan. The terms of the Agreement were finally defined at a joint conference held in March 1998.

“There is no need for the State agencies and local officials to be at odds when it comes to storm water management” explains Sullivan. “We all need to work together to serve the citizens of Michigan.”

The Agreement executed by Ms. Sullivan, Director Russell J. Harding of MDEQ and Director Dan Wyant of MDA, spells out goals and objectives for the parties.

It addresses issues of joint jurisdiction over the established county and intercounty drains in Michigan. Further, the Agreement calls for joint training efforts and cooperation in undertaking projects that provide for storm water management under the Michigan Drain Code in conjunction with the State’s environmental statutes and regulations.

“In the past, the Drain Commissioners and the MDEQ have found themselves in adversarial positions when it comes to drain projects,” says Sullivan. “This Agreement calls for our organization and the State to become better acquainted with the roles and expectations of our constituents and find new ways to solve problems and introduce new techniques that will better serve all the interests.”

Sullivan goes on to explain “I am excited about the prospects for the future. I think all of us have a greater understanding and sensitivity to the issues represented in the Agreement.”

Under the Agreement, the State and local officials will be included in the exchange of technical information and landowner concerns as it relates to storm water projects. The ultimate goal for all involved is better service to the citizens of Michigan.

MEDIA QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

And, a few tips to get “better ink”!

1. **I receive and read newspaper articles/editorials that may be opposing in nature to the Drain Commissioner’s office. Should I respond to such articles, and if so, what is my most effective method?**
2. Should you choose to respond, you may either write a letter to the Editor, or the most effective but underutilized tool is to write an opposing-editorial (op-ed) piece. The difference is your letter to the Editor only allows you two or three paragraphs to state your position. An op-ed piece frees you to explain in detail your position on an issue. Should you choose to write an op-ed, it is suggested you call the Editorial Page Editor of the newspaper, request a brief meeting with the Editor and take the opportunity to get to know the Editor, and then ask if you may present an op-ed piece.

Instead of being on the defensive, you have the option to *be the first to get your story to the media*. The early bird catches the worm - or, in this case, gets the best spin. Journalists are impressionable. If you have an issue you believe is a good piece, call the newspaper and talk to the reporter. Good reporters want good information. Make your story relevant to individuals. Remember that your goal is to sell the story to the reporter and be sure they understand the layout of your project. The reporter’s job is to get a good story, they do not necessarily have to agree with the issue -- humanize your story!

Step up to the plate with something substantive. Journalists generally do not care for stories of “grin and shake”. Journalists generally love stories about tax-cut proposals, new educational initiatives, welfare reform, etc. Make time to give the reporter plenty of background information. Even if an issue or idea may not go anywhere for a year or two, you may lay the groundwork. The concept might make a good story.

Be aware of the trends newspapers are using. Newspapers are increasingly moving toward shorter stories and more graphics. It is best to illustrate your story the way you want it to be, so as to avoid mistakes. Newspapers are using more factoids: boxes, pie charts, data and graphics to illustrate facts. If applicable, provide factoids to the reporter.

2. **I have never been interviewed by the press. How should I respond to questions? Are there any tips that may help me to convey my message?**

- A. Honesty is always the best policy! Don’t waiver about your position and for whom you’re advocating. Reporters are skeptical by nature, remember you should know going into the interview that newspaper or television reporters are looking for the conflict in the issue -- that’s their job, that’s what makes the story!

If you have a face-to-face interview, sincerity is very important. Reporters can read body language and straight-talk. Look into their eyes and be enthusiastic! When you first meet the reporter, break the ice and engage in idle talk . . . “How about those Detroit Tigers?” Discuss hometowns, sports, family and so on, then you may lead back into the interview by saying, “Now, we were going to talk about . . . drain, shall we begin?”

If you receive an unexpected call from a reporter, you should have done your intelligence work up front. Your staff should already be trained to always ask the name of the caller and the nature of their call. Staff should know to get advance information on what topic the reporter wants to discuss. You may need some time to better craft your answer if you are not prepared to take the call immediately, and you would advise your staff to please take a message and you will return the reporter's call. This gives you time to think through your responses and what your opposition will say to the reporter.

3. When speaking with a reporter and I say, "This is off-the-record", will the reporter actually honor my request or will he report my confidence?

Before you start giving off-the-record information, do your homework first! Know your subject -- get to know the reporter. Are they a reputable man or woman? If not, you do not want to be talking off-the-record. It is helpful if you take the time to get to know and build a relationship with reporters.

Do not assume because you say, "This is off-the-record" the reporter will oblige. Be sure they verbally commit to you that the conversation is off-the-record! You must both consent that the information is off-the-record. Also, be careful not to get confused with sharing "background information" this term is the same as off-the-record. A creditable reporter will check with you before they quote you.

4. How should I prepare for questions at a Board of Determination meeting?

- A. Be careful not to make promises you cannot keep. Do not tell your community cost estimates for projects. For example, if a project has been estimated at \$3 million and the actual cost is \$6 million, people will not be happy and will quote you for what you said in the meeting, "\$3 million". If you are not sure of a cost, don't give one or guess at a cost!

Be honest!

5. Who is the public relations person in my office?

- A. Everyone! Public relations is everyone in your office. Public relations are critical, whether on the telephone or in person. Every office should have a professional approach to office management with the public. It may be helpful to review and update procedures with your staff. Staff should be attentive and professional and know how to convey information and be helpful. First impressions really do matter!