

# AUGUSTA TOWNSHIP

Policy:	<b>Public Complaints Procedure Policy</b>	Date issued: By-Law:	March 12, 2018
Application:	All Employees, contractors, elected officials, volunteers, consultants and residents	Revision No.	
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

This policy is intended to ensure that we handle complaints fairly, efficiently and effectively.

Our complaint management system is intended to:

- enable us to respond to issues raised by people making complaints in a timely and cost-effective way;
- boost public confidence in our administrative process; and
- provide information that can be used by us to deliver quality improvements in our citizen engagement services, staff, and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance to our staff and people who wish to make a complaint on the key principles and concepts of our complaint management system.

### 1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all staff receiving or managing complaints from the public made to or about us, regarding our citizen engagements, infrastructure, systems, practices, procedures, services, staff and complaint handling.

## 2. Terms and Definitions

### Complaint

Expression of dissatisfaction relating to a township facility, program, service or operation, or lack thereof.

A complaint covered by this Policy does not include:

- Inquiry (general requests for service or information)
- Feedback (an opinion or comment regarding service delivery not directed as a complaint)
- Compliment (expression of appreciation or approval)
- Suggestion (an idea for service improvements)
- Code of conduct or conflict of interest complaints
- Reports of problems or wrongdoing merely intended to bring a problem to our notice with no expectation of a response
- Grievances (a clear, formal written statement by an individual staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem)

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## **Complaint Management System**

All policies, procedures, practices, staff, hardware and software used by township staff in the management of complaints.

## **Frivolous**

A complaint not having any serious purpose or value.

## **Procedure**

A statement or instruction that sets out how our policies will be implemented and by whom.

## **Vexatious**

A complaint instituted without sufficient grounds so as to cause annoyance or embarrassment to the defendant.

## **3. Guiding Principles**

We are committed to seeking and receiving communications about our services, systems, practices, procedures, citizen engagements, infrastructure and complaint handling.

It is in the interest of all parties that complaints are dealt with as quickly as possible. Complaints will be handled with integrity, equitability and in an unbiased manner within a reasonable time frame.

### **No detriment to people making complaints**

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

### **Confidentiality**

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where it is practicable and appropriate.

Complaints, to the extent possible, will be dealt with confidentially. Privacy issues will be considered before information obtained about an individual during an investigation is released.

### **Anonymous Complaints**

Anonymous complaints will only be acted upon when there is a risk to health and/or safety or that pose a significant threat to the natural environment.

### **Accessibility**

We will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about us is easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly people who may require assistance.

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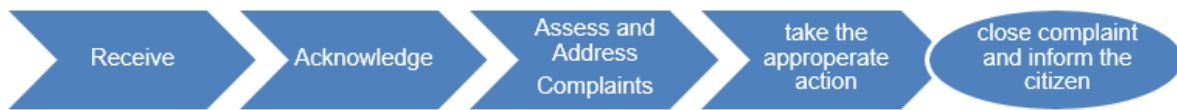
## 4. Procedure and Implementation

### 4.1 Introduction

When responding to complaints, staff should act in accordance with our complaint handling procedures as well as any other internal documents providing guidance on the management of complaints.

Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback.

Our staff are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and efficiently as possible. We will adopt flexible approaches to service delivery and problem solving to enhance accessibility for people making complaints and/or their representatives.



### 4.2 Complaint processing

The five key stages in our complaint management system are set out below:

#### Receipt and acknowledgement of complaints

Complaints can be made by phone, in person or in writing.

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the outset, we will record the complaint and its supporting information in our complaint system. We will also assign a unique identifier to the complaint file.

The record of the complaint will document:

- the contact information of the person making a complaint.
- the category of the complaint.
- issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want.
- any other relevant information; and
- any additional support the person making a complaint requires.

We will assess and prioritize complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised with one being top priority. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety, the natural environment or security the response will be escalated appropriately.

Staff will strive to respond to a complaint in a timely manner, depending on the complexity of the issue.

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## **Initial assessment and addressing complaints**

### **Initial assessment**

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, we will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within our control. We will also consider the outcome/s sought by the person making a complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

Upon receipt of a complaint, staff are encouraged to resolve the initial complaint at the lowest level in an informal manner.

When determining how a complaint will be managed, we will consider:

- How serious, complicated, or urgent the complaint is.
- Whether the complaint raises concerns about people's health and safety.
- How the person making the complaint is being affected.
- The risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed; and
- Whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organizations.
- Determine if a complaint is considered frivolous or vexatious.

### **Addressing complaints**

After assessing the complaint, we will consider how to manage it. To manage a complaint, we may:

- Give the person making a complaint information or an explanation where appropriate;
- Review relevant applicable legislation, Township policies and procedures and By-Laws;
- Gather information from the product, person, or area that the complaint is about; or
- Investigate the claims made in the complaint and identify actions that may be taken to address the complaint or improve Township operations.

### **Action and reasons for decisions**

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised the following will be recorded in the complaints system:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action we took;
- the reason/s for our decision; and
- the remedy or resolution/s that we have proposed or put in place.

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## **Closing the complaint, record keeping, redress and review**

We will keep comprehensive records about:

- How we managed the complaint;
- The outcome/s of the complaint, including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations; and
- Any outstanding actions that need to be followed up.

Staff may inform the complainant with a basic update on the outcome when appropriate or requested.

We will ensure that outcomes are properly implemented, monitored, and reported to senior management.

## **5. Accountability and Learning**

### **5.1 Monitoring of the complaint management system**

We will continually monitor our complaint management system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints, and
- identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the system.

### **5.2 Continuous improvement**

We are committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- support appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- regularly review the complaints management system and complaint data to monitor systemic issues and trends, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

## **6. COMPLAINT APPEAL PROCESS**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the results of the investigation or the process, they may request a delegation to Council or at the provincial level to request an investigation through the Ombudsman.