

**From:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [City Council](#)  
**Subject:** Concerning Press Restrictions  
**Date:** Sunday, March 2, 2025 8:25:11 AM

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**Subject:** Concerns Regarding Press Access and First Amendment Issues

Dear Sebastopol City Council,

I am writing to express serious concerns regarding the media practices outlined in the recent email from to The Sebastopol Times from Mayor Zollman. These policies raise **significant First Amendment and public accountability issues** by placing undue restrictions on press access to city officials and staff.

While it is reasonable for the city to designate spokespersons for efficiency, **it cannot control who on staff or council members may speak with the media**. Council members are elected officials, and public employees retain the right to speak on matters of public concern. Any attempt to **centralize or limit communications** risks creating a chilling effect, discouraging transparency and public accountability.

Of particular concern is the statement that the city will be **“more responsive” to questions related to city priorities and goals** while potentially delaying responses to other inquiries. This raises **serious constitutional issues**, as the government **cannot condition access to information based on whether it aligns with its agenda**. The press has the right to ask questions on any topic of public concern, and the city has an obligation to provide timely and fair responses, regardless of the subject matter.

Additionally, requiring journalists to **cc the Mayor, City Manager, and Assistant City Manager on all inquiries** creates an **environment of surveillance and intimidation**, potentially discouraging city staff and council members from speaking candidly. Government employees,

especially those in public-facing roles, must be allowed to communicate openly without fear of retaliation.

Policies that **discourage timely responses, limit interview availability, and dictate preferred communication methods** also create unnecessary roadblocks for journalists covering breaking news. The press serves as a critical check on government power, and any attempt to control or restrict media access **undermines transparency and public trust.**

I urge you to clarify that:

1. **All council members and staff may speak with the press if they choose**, without restrictions or required oversight.
2. **Media inquiries will not be prioritized or delayed based on whether they align with city goals.**
3. **Journalists are not required to cc specific officials on all communications.**
4. **The city will strive for timely responses to all inquiries, regardless of when they are received.**

I appreciate your prompt attention to these concerns and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,  
Bryan Peterson