

## **The city policies on communicating with the “press” are responsible**

1. The city is in a financial crisis. The staff reportedly is overworked and finding it difficult to do their jobs. Based on these facts alone creating a policy to reply to “press inquiries” efficiently from the city’s perspective makes complete sense. No one has said they would not respond to inquiries, so the freedom of the press is preserved.
2. Media should want replies to their questions that are accurate and reflect the actions of the city or its council. Providing senior staff and the mayor to review questions and responses helps the writer to provide correct information to their readers.
3. The argument that the press has deadlines is interesting. Of course, not much happens in Sebastopol that could not wait a couple of days to be reported without creating a crisis. In the event of a real crisis, I hope the city has a communication strategy for getting information out to residents as quickly as possible. Day to day however, the city’s financial crisis is more important than an arbitrary deadline to publish a blog.
4. There is probably a line between “press” and “bloggers.” The last I investigated; the courts had not affirmed that bloggers are the equivalent of media in this new world. The situation in Sebastopol is relatively simple, there is a blog called the Sebastopol Times which provides excellent local information on government and local events. Then there is the Press Democrat. The city can probably keep up requests from these two entities. However, a policy that encourages any blogger to call any city staffer at any time to ask questions creates a potential for further crisis. The policy in place now helps the city control that risk should it arise. This is a small city with literally no person on staff with the title of “public relations”. Thank God for that!