



Township Of Southwold By-Law Complaint Policy

Purpose

This policy will provide formal policy and procedure governing the handling of by-law complaints by the Municipality and to ensure thorough, prompt and courteous receipt, processing, investigation and resolution thereof.

Complainants are protected under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and every complainant will be kept completely confidential and not be intentionally divulged to any member of Council, the public or media.

Definitions

CAO means the Chief Administrative Officer for the Township of Southwold.

Clerk means the Clerk for the Township of Southwold.

Formal Complaint means a complaint received by Staff, wherein the complainant provides their full name, address and phone number that can be verified by the Investigator and nature of complaint in writing using the required form, over the telephone, in person or via email.

Investigator means a person appointed by the Township of Southwold for the purposes of Municipal Bylaw Enforcement including, but not limited to, a Building Inspector and Municipal Law Enforcement Officer.

Spite Complaint means a complaint filed in ill will or with the intention of malice towards another person and may include retaliatory complaints and neighbour disputes.

Township means the Corporation of the Township of Southwold.

Policy

The Township of Southwold is committed to the thorough, prompt and courteous receipt, processing, investigation and resolution of Formal Complaints.

Complaints - The Township will only respond to Formal Complaints received from a complainant who provides their full name, telephone number and address. Anonymous complaints will not be investigated. The municipality will offer assistance and direction with respect to a by-law concern over the telephone, in person, via email or in writing, using the required form (Schedule "A") where practical.

All Formal Complaints will be documented on a Formal Complaints Form (Schedule "A"), where practical, which can be obtained by contacting the Township or by visiting the Township's website.



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Online Complaints-The Township will respond to Formal Complaints received from a complainant who completes an online form and provides their full name, telephone number, address and email address. The online form cannot be submitted unless all relevant information is completed in full. Staff will verify with the complainant that all of the information is true prior to commencing the investigation. Complainants are protected under the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and every complainant will be kept completely confidential.

General- A failure to comply with a provision of this policy shall not vitiate any proceeding or any step, document or order in a proceeding otherwise in accordance with any municipal by-law or provincial or other legislation. Council is encouraged to direct residents with issues regarding by-law enforcement to the Township Office.

Procedure

Receipt and Confirmation of Complaint

1. Upon receipt of a Formal Complaint, staff shall record the Formal Complaint in a Complaints Log maintained by the Department. In all cases, Staff shall encourage the complainant to describe the matter in their own words, detailing the “who”, “what”, “why”, “when” and “where” of the situation.
2. The Investigator assures the complainant that their name and any personal information provided by them will remain in the strictest of confidence, in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection Privacy Act* and will not be revealed to anyone unless so ordered by a Court or other tribunal or body of competent jurisdiction.
3. The Investigator conducts a preliminary review of the complaint to verify information and research any supporting documentation which may be available in Township records.
4. The Investigator calls the complainant, when necessary, for further details or to confirm or clarify information provided within the Formal Complaint or to obtain the complainant’s signature on the written Formal Complaint, when necessary.

Investigation

1. The Investigator shall attend the site to witness and record the activity to determine if a contravention exists.
2. If the Investigator is uncertain whether the circumstances constitute a contravention, he/she may seek input from the Municipal Prosecutor or Municipal Solicitor if required, and/or the individual responsible for administering the by-law.



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3. If the Investigator determines the matter is not a contravention of any by-law or other statute that the Township is responsible for enforcing, Staff will advise the complainant, enter the complaint finalized date on the complaint form and in the Complaints Log, and close the file.

Enforcement – Stage One

1. In case of situations wherein set fines have been established for violations, an Investigator may, upon confirmation of the existence of a violation, immediately issue an offence notice/ticket. In all cases, the Investigator shall identify a suspected violation and the laws having jurisdiction during an initial warning stage and shall notify the suspected violator of a time limit in which voluntary compliance is expected.

2. Upon determining that there is a violation of a Municipal By-law (excluding set fine situations, documented, chronic violations or where otherwise warranted), the Investigator may proceed to the enforcement stage by providing an initial warning to the suspect/violator by at least one (1) of the following three (3) means:

- (a) In person; or
- (b) By telephone; or,
- (c) In writing.

The Investigator will then document which form of communication he/she used.

3. The Investigator shall notify any internal departments and outside agencies that may have jurisdiction or may be required to assist with or rectify the situation (i.e. Fire Department, Public Works Department, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Environment, Southwestern Public Health)

4. Where provided for by By-law or other statute, an Investigator may issue an emergency order to remedy a violation in lieu of an initial warning if the situation poses an immediate threat to health or safety. The Investigator will notify their immediate supervisor and the CAO immediately.

5. After the time limit has expired, the Investigator shall return to the site to determine if compliance has been accomplished.

6. Upon confirming that the warning has been complied with, Staff will enter the complaint finalized date on the complaint form and in the Complaints Log, and close the file.

Enforcement – Second Stage

1. If suspected violator has not complied with the warning, the Investigator shall review the non-compliance with the CAO and/or individuals responsible for administering the bylaw,



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if warranted.

2. The Investigator decides, based on discussions with the CAO and/or the other individuals responsible for administering the by-law, whether to attempt a second written warning or proceed with the actions necessary to address the situation in accordance with municipal by-laws or other statutes. Either:

(a) If a second written warning or formal order is to be issued, the Investigator will proceed and give a final time period in which to comply; or

(b) If legal action is decided, the Investigator will provide the CAO and/or the individual responsible for administering the by-law with a recommendation to proceed with legal action when it appears obvious compliance is not forthcoming. The complainant may be required to provide evidence and may be asked to testify in court.

3. At any stage of the enforcement process, if, in the opinion of the Investigator, CAO, Clerk and/or the individual responsible for administering the by-law, the matter is of significant consequence, the matter may be brought before Council for direction.

Spite Complaints

Spite Complaints will not be accepted unless deemed by the Investigator or CAO to be immediate threat to health and safety.

Level of Involvement

1. That, in situations whereby multiple complaints are received from a single person at one time, or where a single person continuously submits a variety of complaints on an ongoing basis, the Investigator and Township staff are given the discretion to decide on an appropriate level of response to such complaints. The level of response by staff may include a decision to act on some or all of the complaints, to not act on some or all of the complaints, or to assign priority to some or all of the complaints.

2. That, in situations where the Investigator or Township staff are involved in a dispute between 2 or more people, where it has become obvious that staff's involvement will not be able to achieve a reasonable resolution to their dispute, staff are given the discretion to decide on an appropriate level of further involvement. The level of involvement by staff may include a decision to suspend further involvement or take no further action in the dispute.

In making their decision as to the level of further involvement with the dispute, staff will have regard to the following criteria:



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- safety factors;
- history of attempts to mediate by staff;
- offer for formal mediation;
- coordinating involvement with other relevant agencies;
- the number of unfounded complaints;
- apparent attempts to purposely aggravate the situation;
- complaints that are frivolous and vexatious;
- the number of complaints or concerns registered that do not fall within the jurisdiction of the Township of Southwold's by-laws.

Any decision made under this policy including a decision not to respond to complaints or enforce by-laws, and also including a decision made by the CAO may, at any time, be revisited. Additionally, the CAO or Clerk may at his/her discretion require staff to respond to a complaint or enforce a by-law in spite of any previous decision to the contrary.

Reporting

1. The Investigator will ensure that the Formal Complaint Report (Schedule "A") is completed in its entirety, when necessary.
2. The Investigator will ensure that the Formal Complaint Report – For Staff Use Only (Schedule "B") is completed in its entirety.