Corporation of the Town of Hearst

Accountability and Transparency Policy

1. Application and Purpose

This Policy outlines how the Town of Hearst (the Town) ensures that municipal matters and operations are conducted in an accountable and transparent manner, with an emphasis on openness, ethical conduct, service excellence, and fiscal responsibility.

Accountability, transparency, and openness are the principles of good governance that foster public trust. These principles are upheld through the Town's commitment to implementing measures that, to the best of its ability, ensure that activities and services are delivered through processes that are open, accessible, and responsive to the public.

The Town recognizes its responsibility to govern in an open manner through effective communication, consultation, and collaboration. This approach ensures that the public is informed about how decisions are made and implemented, and are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.

This Policy has been developed in accordance with Section 270 of the Municipal Act, 2001 (the "Act"), which requires municipalities to adopt and maintain a policy establishing the manner in which the municipality will try to ensure that it is accountable to the public for its actions, and the manner in which the municipality will try to ensure that its actions are transparent to the public.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to both the political decision-making processes and the administrative operations of the Town, including all employees, members of Council, and members of municipal committees and of local boards.

This Policy does not supersede or replace Council's Code of Conduct or the Staff–Council Relations Policy; rather, it complements these frameworks and reinforces the Town's commitment to ethical governance.

3. Policy Responsibilities

Members of Council, members of municipal committees and of local boards, and Town staff are responsible for complying with this Policy and for ensuring accountability in their actions, as well as transparency in municipal matters and operations.

4. Definitions

The following terms shall have the following meanings in this Policy:

"**Accountability**" means the principle that the Town will be responsible to the public for decisions made and policies implemented, as well as its actions or inaction.

"**Public**" means any individual person, organization or entity that has an interest or stake in the Town's business, actions or inaction.

"**Transparency**" means the principle that the Town encourages and fosters public participation and openness in its decision-making process, and that information about municipal decisions and operations is open, accessible and clear to the public.

5. General Policy Principles

5.1 Legislated Requirements

The Town's operations and governance are accountable and transparent to the public through the fulfillment of its legislative responsibilities applicable to the vast range of services it provides. Said responsibilities range from the various provincial statutes which include, but are not limited to: the Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c. 25, the Planning Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.13, the Building Code Act, 1992, S.O. 1992, c. 23, the Provincial Offences Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. P.33, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.50, and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005.

5.2 Open Government

The Town conducts its everyday governance based on communication, consultation, and collaboration. Its various policies, procedures, and practices are designed to ensure that operations are accessible and straightforward, with clear mechanisms in place to inform the public about how decisions are made and implemented, and to encourage their implication in the decision-making process.

5.3 Public Participation and Sharing of Information

Meetings of Council and applicable local boards and committees are open to the public, except where applicable legislation permits or requires a meeting, or part of a meeting, to be closed to the public. Meeting agendas and pertinent documentation are posted on the Town website, in advance, providing the public the opportunity to take note of the subjects to be discussed.

Members of the public are provided with the possibility to make delegations or submit written comments on specific agenda items, as outlined in the rules governing the order and procedures of meetings of Council, and of its committees and local boards.

In addition, the Town has implemented policies and practices promoting meaningful and effective public participation through the timely disclosure of information, including but not limited to:

a) Television and web streaming of Council meetings;

b) Online publication of:

- Council, committees and local boards meeting agendas and related documentation, along with all meeting minutes;
- Summaries of Council meetings;
- Declaration of interest registry;
- Mayoral Decisions and Directions;
- Municipal by-laws adopted by Council.

c) Adherence to applicable governance policies, by-laws, and guiding documents, including but not limited to the following:

- Council Code of Conduct Policy;
- Council Rules of Order Procedure Policy;
- Council Committees By-law;
- Board and Committee Appointment Policy;
- Delegation of Powers By-law;
- Municipal Council Strategic Vision; and
- Use of Municipal Resources for Elections Purposes Policy.

5.4 Fiscal Accountability, Oversight and Reporting

The Town demonstrates financial accountability through transparent financial policies and controls that clearly identify the sources of funding for municipal activities and services and support effective financial oversight.

In addition, the Town promotes fiscal responsibility through the following practices, including but not limited to:

a) The conduct of an open annual budget process and presentation of the results of the annual audit of the Town's financial statements by its appointed municipal auditor during open meetings of Council;

b) Online publication of financial information and documents, including:

- the annual budget and audited financial statements;
- municipal user fees and charges by-laws; and
- the Asset Management Plan;

c) Adherence to established financial policies, procedures and controls, including but not limited to the following:

- Procurement (Purchasing) Policy;
- Council Remuneration Policy;
- Purchase of Land Policy;
- Tax Collection Policy;
- Investment Policy;
- Donation Policy;
- Authorized Signatories and Banking Control Policy; and
- Tangible Capital Assets Policy;

d) Annual reporting, during open meetings of Council, on:

- monetary and in-kind contributions allocated to local schools and organizations;
- charitable tax rebates provided for eligible charities and organizations that are similar to eligible charities;
- midyear budget expenditures and variances;
- the annual remuneration and expenses of members of Council; and

e) Administration of employee compensation in accordance with the Town's Salary Administration Policy.

5.5 Internal Governance

Various administrative practices, policies, and governance mechanisms establish clear lines of accountability for municipal employees and members of Council and of its committees and local boards, including but not limited to the following:

a) Employee Code of Conduct;

b) Council-Staff Relations Policy;

c) Hiring Policy;

d) Public Notice Policy;

e) Workplace Health and Safety Policy;

f) Workplace Violence, Harassment and Discrimination Policy;

g) Online Media Policy;

h) Electronic Monitoring Policy;

i) Accessibility Policy;

j) Record Retention Policy;

k) Various human resources policies and practices;

l) Municipal elections policies and procedures; and

m) The appointment of an integrity commissioner.

6. Accountability Measures

The Town is committed to continuous improvement in the delivery of municipal services and the conduct of its operations. The Town welcomes feedback and complaints concerning its governance, municipal services, programs, operations, employees, members of Council, and members of its committees and local boards.

All feedback and complaints shall be received respectfully and, where appropriate, reviewed and addressed in accordance with applicable legislation, municipal policies, and established procedures.

6.1 Municipal Services

Feedback or complaints regarding municipal services, programs, operations, or employees may be submitted through the Town Hall reception or any other designated municipal channel.

All feedback and complaints received are referred to the CAO, who reviews the matter. Where further review or investigation is warranted, the CAO will refer the matter to the responsible Department Head, who will determine any appropriate follow-up or corrective action and provide a response to the complainant, where appropriate.

6.2 Council and Members of Council

Complaints concerning Council or an individual member of Council may be submitted to the Town Clerk.

Upon receiving a complaint, the Town Clerk shall provide information regarding the applicable complaint process and, where appropriate, direct the complainant to the appropriate authority or process. Depending on the nature of the complaint, this may include the Head of Council, the Integrity Commissioner, or the Ontario Ombudsman.

6.3 Commitment to Resolution

The Town is committed to addressing feedback and complaints through processes that are accessible, respectful, impartial, and consistent with the principles of accountability, transparency, and good governance. Whenever possible, the Town will seek to address complaints at the first point of contact and to resolve matters in a timely and fair manner.

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the Town's response, or where the matter falls within the jurisdiction of another body, the complainant may pursue an appropriate external avenue, including the Ontario Ombudsman, as applicable.

7. Complaints and Compliance of this Policy

The Town Clerk is responsible for receiving complaints and/or concerns related to this Policy.

Upon receipt of a complaint and/or concern, the Clerk shall notify:

a) In the case of a municipal employee, the CAO;

b) In the case of the CAO, Council;

c) In the case of a closed meeting of Council, the Integrity Commissioner; and

d) In the case of a member of Council, the Integrity Commissioner.

8. Policy Review

This Policy shall be reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains consistent with applicable legislation, Town policies and procedures, and current municipal practices.