

RANCHO MURIETA COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

Category:	Administration	Policy # 2010-10
Title:	District Response to Public Comments	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction to Rancho Murieta Community Services District Board of Directors and staff in responding to inaccurate, misleading or negative information being discussed by the public.

POLICY

When responding to inaccurate, misleading or negative information the public is discussing, these things need to be considered prior to any response from the District:

Level of error, the level of interest in the community, where the error lives and the degree of sensitivity.

Source – how the information is being distributed – blog, gossip, letter, public meeting, etc.

Topic – specific, general interest, current or past.

Severity – not everything needs a response.

Timelines – how quick can a response be made public.

Method – how to distribute the response – letter to residents, on website and/or out to media; interview with media; phone call to media.

Author – who the response will come from – General Manager, Board of Directors, or Board President.

Who needs to approve response – review before release.

How to end the discussion/response – do not keep the issue going.

At the outset, staff works with department heads and Board as appropriate on these issues individually to determine the best strategy. It depends on the level of error, the level of interest by the community, where the error lives and the degree of sensitivity. In general, on issues of high interest and misinformation, we should keep the website updated with the latest factual information to mitigate any rumors and false information, and if the situation warrants it, put out a news release with the whole story and also write a complete story to send to small, local papers and/or email to appropriate stakeholders.

The response should “not repeat the negative” but should put out the “whole and complete story” so as to negate the error or false information.

PUBLIC COMMENTS AT BOARD MEETINGS

In accordance with State law, the Board is prohibited from discussing items not calendared on the agenda. The public may address the Board on any item not listed on the agenda and is within the Board's jurisdiction, under agenda item **Comments from the Public**. Matters brought up which are not on the agenda may be referred to staff for action or calendared on a future agenda.

If a staff person or Board member has some factual data that clarifies and or addresses the comment being made, the staff person or Board member shall respond/answer at that time instead of waiting for the matter to be put on a future agenda. Public discussion, as in extended question and answer, debate and/or pontification is discouraged.

For public comments regarding items on the agenda, if the comment is erroneous and a staff person can correct the misstatement, staff is encouraged to do so.

CORRESPONDENCE FROM DIRECTORS

Directors may wish to have letters/correspondence written to the residents, businesses or other entities of Rancho Murieta. Typically, the General Manager and/or Board President (decision made by the entire Board of Directors) shall be charged with transmitting the District's position on matters to the residents, businesses or other entities in Rancho Murieta.

On occasion, Directors may disagree with a position the District has taken on an issue. In these instances, if a Director responds to public comments it is to be made as a private citizen (no use of title), not on District letterhead and no use of District staff in preparing such responses.

RESPONDING TO PUBLIC COMPLAINTS

When Directors receive a complaint or inquiry from the public regarding the District's services and/or staff, the Director should acknowledge the complaint/inquiry without making any comment/promise as to what will happen on behalf of the District and forward the message to the General Manager.

SPEAKING FOR THE DISTRICT

When Directors are asked the District's position on an issue, the response should reflect the position of the District as a whole. A Director may clarify his/her vote on an issue by stating, "While I voted against XX, the District voted in support of it." When representing the District at meetings or other venues that the Board of Directors has approved prior to attending, the Director can state the District's position not their individual position in any issue.

Approved by Rancho Murieta Community Services District's Board of Directors	November 17, 2010
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