

Policy Statement

1. The City of Owen Sound supports the use of electronic signatures in place of handwritten (wet) signatures when legally appropriate. Electronic signatures have the same legal effect as wet signatures unless specific legislation or other City policies require a physical signature.

Purpose

2. The purpose of this policy is to:
 - a. improve efficiency in City operations;
 - b. reduce paper use and support sustainability;
 - c. improve customer service and accessibility;
 - d. streamline how information is collected, shared and stored; and
 - e. ensure legal validity, reliability, and security of electronic signatures.

Scope

3. This policy applies to all City staff, Council members, contractors, and volunteers when using signatures for official City business, both internally and externally.

Definitions

4. For the purposes of this policy,
 - “City” means the City of Owen Sound, and a reference to the City is a reference to the geographical area or The Corporation of the City of Owen Sound as the context requires;
 - “electronic record” is any document created, sent, or stored electronically;
 - “electronic signature” is a digital mark used to sign a document;
 - “Director” means the City Manager, the Director of Community Services, the Director of Corporate Services, the Director of Public Works & Engineering, the Fire Chief, or any one of the above, and any designates thereof;
 - “employee” means City of Owen Sound full-time employees, part-time employees, students, volunteers, members of Council and Committee;

“manager” means an employee who is responsible for a City division and includes employees who supervise and manage other employees;

“person” means an individual, business, government, or other entity participating in a transaction with the City;

“record” means information created, received, and maintained as evidence of a transaction or legal obligation;

“vital records” means a record essential for the City to continue operations in an emergency; and

“wet signature” means a physical, handwritten signature using ink on paper.

Policy

Recognition of Electronic Signatures and Exceptions

5. The City recognizes that electronic signatures are not to be denied legal effects, validity, or enforceability merely because they are in electronic form. At the same time, this policy does not affect the City’s ability to conduct transactions using wet signatures.
6. The City will not allow for the use and acceptance of an electronic signature, where the applicable legislation or the City’s policies prescribe the use of a wet signature.

Exceptions

7. Electronic signatures may not be used when:
 - a. legislation requires a physical signature (e.g. certain land titles or statutory declarations); or
 - b. City policies specifically prohibit electronic signing for a particular document type.
8. Employees must consult with their immediate supervisor or the Manager of Information Technology when unsure whether an electronic signature is appropriate.

Authority to Sign Electronically

9. Employees may use an electronic signature only if:
 - a. they have delegated authority to sign documents on behalf of the City;
 - b. the document being signed falls within the scope of their duties; and
 - c. the electronic signature method meets the requirements outlined in this policy.

10. Employees must consult their immediate supervisor when unsure about their signing authority.

Consent

11. The use of an electronic signature requires the consent of all parties involved, including the City, in accordance with this policy and applicable procedures. The City will not mandate the use of an electronic signature without the individual's consent. If a wet signature is requested, the City will accommodate this preference.

Approved Tools and Technology

12. No specific electronic signature software is mandated under this policy.
13. Any software or tool used must be reviewed and approved by the Manager of Information Technology.
14. Software must meet the functional and security requirements described in section 14.

Minimum Functional Requirements

15. Electronic signature technology or processes must ensure that:
 - a. the signer consents to sign the document;
 - b. the signature is unique to the signer;
 - c. the signing method is under the signer's sole control;
 - d. the method can reliably identify the signer.
 - e. the signature is linked to the document so changes after signing are detectable;
 - f. the integrity of the record is preserved after signing;
 - g. the record is accessible, retainable, and readable for its full retention period; and
 - h. metadata such as date/time, signer identity, and origin/destination is captured.

Acceptable Uses

16. Electronic signatures may be used for:
 - a. internal approvals, forms and authorizations;
 - b. contracts, agreements and external communications;
 - c. resident and business-facing processes (e.g., permits, submissions); and

- d. any other transaction approved by a Director or the City Manager.

Record Management

17. All electronically signed documents must be stored and disposed of in accordance with the City's Records and Information Management Policy (AF002).
18. Records must remain secure, accessible, and change-proof for the full retention period.

Compliance and Enforcement

19. Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or contract.
20. The City reserves the right to audit and review the use of electronic signatures to ensure compliance with applicable legislation and policy.
Employees must report misuse or unauthorized signing immediately to their immediate supervisor or the Manager of Information Technology.

Policy review

21. The Manager of Information Technology will review this policy:
 - a. every five (5) years to ensure effectiveness and compliance with current business processes; or
 - a. sooner, if required, based on legislative changes.
22. The Manager of Information Technology is authorized to make such administrative changes to this policy as appropriate to keep the policy current. Any revision to the policy's intent must be presented to the City Manager for consideration.

Related Information and Resources

Internal

23. [AF002 Records and Information Management Policy](#)
24. [Delegation of Powers and Duties By-law](#)

External

- a. [Electronic Commerce Act, 2000, SO 2000, c. 17](#)
- b. [CAN/CGSB-72.34-2017 Electronic Records as Documentary Evidence \(The National Standard of Canada\)](#)

Appendices

25. N/A

Revision History

Authority	Date	Approval	Description of Amendment
City Manager	Click or tap to enter a date.	CM	New policy
Choose an item.	Click or tap to enter a date.	Choose an item.	
Choose an item.	Click or tap to enter a date.	Choose an item.	