



CITY OF WHITEHALL, OHIO PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY

It is the policy of the City of Whitehall that openness leads to a better-informed citizenry, which leads to better government and better public policy. It is the policy of the City of Whitehall to strictly adhere to the state's Public Records Act. All exemptions to openness are to be construed in their narrowest sense and any denial of public records in response to a valid request must be accompanied by an explanation, including legal authority, as outlined in the Ohio Revised Code. If the request is in writing, the explanation must also be in writing.

Section 1: Public Records

The City of Whitehall, in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, defines records as including the following: Any item that is kept by a public office that is stored on a fixed medium that is created, received, or sent under the jurisdiction of a public office that documents the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office. All records of the City of Whitehall are public unless they are specifically exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Revised Code.

Section 1.1 - It is the policy of the City of Whitehall that, as required by Ohio law, records will be organized and maintained so that they are readily available for inspection and copying.

Section 1.2 – City records are maintained in accordance with the City's record retention schedules. Record retention schedules are to be updated regularly and posted prominently.

Section 2: Record Requests

Each request for public records should be evaluated for a response using the following guidelines:

Section 2.1 - Although no specific language is required to make a request, the requester must at least identify the records requested with sufficient clarity to allow the public office to identify, retrieve, and review the records. If it is not clear what records are being sought, the records custodian may contact the requester for clarification.

Section 2.2 - The requester does not have to put a records request in writing, and does not have to provide his or her identity or the intended use of the requested public record. It is this office's general policy that this information is not to be required.

Section 2.3 - Public records are to be available for inspection during regular business hours, with the exception of published holidays. Public records must be made available for inspection promptly. The City of Whitehall reserves the right to have a member of the administration oversee the inspection of public records. Copies of public records must be made available within a reasonable period of time. "Prompt" and "reasonable" take into account the volume of records

requested; the proximity of the location where the records are stored; and the necessity for any legal review of the records requested.

Section 2.4 - Each request should be evaluated for an estimated length of time required to gather the records. Routine requests for records should be satisfied immediately if feasible to do so. Routine requests include, but are not limited to, meeting minutes, budgets, salary information, forms and applications, personnel rosters, etc. If fewer than 20 pages of copies are requested or if the records are readily available in an electronic format that can be e-mailed or downloaded easily, these should be made as quickly as the equipment allows.

All requests for public records must either be satisfied or be acknowledged in writing by the City of Whitehall within three business days following the office's receipt of the request. If a request is deemed significantly beyond "routine," such as seeking a voluminous number of copies or requiring extensive research, the acknowledgement must include the following:

Section 2.4a - An estimated number of business days it will take to satisfy the request.

Section 2.4b - An estimated cost if copies are requested.

Section 2.4c - Any items within the request that may be exempt from disclosure.

Section 2.5 - Any denial of public records requested must include an explanation, including legal authority. If portions of a record are public and portions are exempt, the exempt portions are to be redacted and the rest released. If there are redactions, each redaction must be accompanied by a supporting explanation, including legal authority.

Section 3: Costs for Public Records

Those seeking public records will be charged only the actual cost of making copies.

Section 3.1 - The charge for paper copies is five cents (.05) per page. When requested records are voluminous, the City reserves the right to use an outside vendor and charge at cost accordingly.

Section 3.2 - The charge for downloaded computer files to a compact disc is \$1 per disc.

Section 3.3 - There is no charge for documents e-mailed.

Section 3.4 – Other copied formats (video tape, dvd, etc...) will be at actual cost.

Section 3.5 - Requesters may ask that documents be mailed to them. They will be charged the actual cost of the postage and mailing supplies.

Section 4: E-mail

Documents in electronic mail format are records as defined by the Ohio Revised Code when their content relates to the business of the office. E-mail is to be treated in the same fashion as records in other formats and should follow the same retention schedules.

Section 4.1 - Records in private e-mail accounts used to conduct public business are subject to disclosure, and all employees or representatives of the City of Whitehall are instructed to retain their e-mails that relate to public business (see Section 1 Public Records) and to copy them to their business e-mail accounts and/or to the office's records custodian.

Section 4.2 - E-mails from private accounts shall be treated as records of the public office, filing them in the appropriate way, retaining them per established schedules and making them available for inspection and copying in accordance with the Public Records Act.

Section 5: Failure to Respond to a Public Records Request

The City of Whitehall recognizes the legal and non-legal consequences of failure to properly respond to a public records request. In addition to the distrust in government that failure to comply may cause, The City of Whitehall's failure to comply with a request may result in a court ordering the City of Whitehall to comply with the law and to pay the requester attorney's fees and damages.