

# VAN WERT COUNTY

## PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY

It is the policy of Van Wert County that openness leads to a better informed citizenry, which leads to better government and better public policy. It is the policy of Van Wert County to strictly adhere to the state's Public Records Act and the Ohio Revised Code. 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.

Van Wert County, in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code, defines records as including the following:

- Any document - paper, electronic (including but not limited to e-mail), or other format - that is created or received by or comes under the jurisdiction of a public office that documents the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, and/or other activities of Van Wert County.
- All records of Van Wert County are public unless they are specifically exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Revised Code.

It is the policy of Van Wert County that, as required by Ohio law, records will be organized and maintained so that they are readily available for inspection and copying (see below for the e-mail record policy). Record retention schedules are to be updated regularly and posted prominently.

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

- 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 must contact the requester for clarification, and should assist the requester in revising the request by informing the requester of the manner in which the office keeps its records.
- The requester does not have to put a records request in writing and does not have to provide his/her identity or the intended use of the requested public record. It is Van Wert County's general policy that this information not be requested.

- 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. 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.
- 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 (both in draft and final form), 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.
  - ✓ If more copies are requested, an appointment should be made with the requester for when the copies or computer files can be picked up.
  - ✓ All requests for public records must either be satisfied or be acknowledged in writing by the office in which the records were requested within a reasonable period of time 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:
    - An estimated number of business days it will take to satisfy the request.
    - An estimated cost if copies are requested.
    - Any items within the request that may be exempt from disclosure.

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.

Those seeking public records will be charged only the actual cost of making copies. See below for further clarification:

- The charge for paper copies is 5 cents per page.
- The charge for downloaded computer files to a compact disc is \$1 per disc.
- There is no charge for documents e-mailed.



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

Each department within the County shall track public records requests by date of request, person requesting information (if known), records requested, the actual records provided, date of fulfillment of the request, the method records are provided, the cost to fulfill the request, and the person providing the information.

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

Records in private e-mail accounts used to conduct public business are subject to disclosure, and all employees or representatives of Van Wert County are instructed to retain their e-mails that relate to public business and to copy them to their business e-mail accounts and/or to the office's records custodian.

The records custodian is to treat the e-mails from private accounts as records of Van Wert County, 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.

Van Wert County 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, Van Wert County's failure to comply with a request may result in a court ordering Van Wert County to comply with the law and to pay the requester's attorney fees and damages.

June 4, 2015

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