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Geauga County Auditor

GEAUGA COUNTY AUDITOR PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY September 2007

Introduction:

It is the policy of the Geauga County Auditor, in accordance with the Ohio Attorney General, that openness leads to a better informed citizenry, which leads to better government and better public policy. It is the policy of the Geauga County Auditor in concurrence with the Ohio Attorney General to encourage strict adherence 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 Geauga County Auditor, in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code and the Ohio Attorney General, defines records as including the following: Any document – paper, electronic (including, but not limited to, email), 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, or other activities of the office. All records of Geauga County offices are public unless they are specifically exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Revised Code.

Section 1.1

It is the policy of the Geauga County Auditor that, as required by Ohio law, records of Geauga County government offices will be organized and maintained so that they are readily available for inspection and copying (See Section 4 for the email record policy). Record retention schedules are to be updated regularly and posted prominently.

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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 must contact the requester for clarification, and should assist the requestor in revising the request by informing the requestor of the manner in which the office keeps its records.

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.

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. 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 (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 emailed 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 on when the copies or computer files can be picked up.

All requests for public records must either be satisfied (see Section 2.4) or be acknowledged in writing 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 as determined by the department.

Section 3.1

Requesters may ask that documents be mailed to them. They will be charged the actual cost of the postage and mailing supplies. The Geauga County Auditor may require payment in advance.

Section 4. Email

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

Geauga County Auditor will use the guidelines established for such records in the state approved and Geauga County Records Commission General Geauga County Schedule of Records Retention and Disposition.

Section 4.1

Records in private email accounts used to conduct public business are subject to disclosure, and all employees or representatives of Geauga County Auditor are instructed to retain their emails that relate to public business (see Section 1 Public Records) and to copy them to their business email accounts and/or to the office's records custodian.

Section 4.2

The records custodian is to treat the emails from private accounts 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 Geauga County Auditor 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 Geauga County government office's failure to comply with a request may result in a court ordering the Geauga County government office to comply with the law and to pay the requester attorney's fees and damages.

Adopted September 28, 2007

By:  _____
Tracy A. Jemison, Auditor