

Cuyahoga County  
Public Records Ordinance



Cuyahoga County Council  
Rules, Ethics, Charter Review & Council Operations Committee

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Rationale .....	2
Chapter 2: Definitions .....	2
Chapter 3: Scope of Ordinance .....	3
<i>Section 3.1: Applicability</i> .....	3
Chapter 4: County Records Commission.....	3
<i>Section 4.1: Creation of County Records Commission</i> .....	3
<i>Section 4.2: Appointment of Designees</i> .....	3
<i>Section 4.3: Powers and Duties of County Records Commission</i> .....	3
<i>Section 4.4: Rules and Procedures of the County Records Commission</i> .....	4
<i>Section 4.5: Meetings of the County Records Commission</i> .....	4
<i>Section 4.6: County Records Commission Action on Records Proposals</i> .....	4
Chapter 5: Public Records .....	4
<i>Section 5.1: Maintenance of Public Records</i> .....	4
<i>Section 5.2 Maintenance of Electronic Mail</i> .....	4
<i>Section 5.3: Designation of Countywide Public Records Manager</i> .....	5
<i>Section 5.4: Designation of Deputy Countywide Public Records Manager</i> .....	5
<i>Section 5.5: Designation of Public Records Managers</i> .....	6
<i>Section 5.6: Public Records Manager for County Council</i> .....	7
<i>Section 5.7: Records Retention Schedules</i> .....	7
<i>Section 5.8: Interim Transient Records Retention Schedule</i> .....	7
<i>Section 5.9: Publication of Public Records Policy</i> .....	8
<i>Section 5.10: County Website</i> .....	8
Chapter 6: Public Records Requests .....	8
<i>Section 6.1: Form of Records Request</i> .....	8
<i>Section 6.2: Identity of Requestor Not Required</i> .....	9
<i>Section 6.3: Availability of Records</i> .....	9
<i>Section 6.4: Denial of Request and Redaction of Records</i> .....	9
<i>Section 6.5: Public Records Request Log</i> .....	9
Chapter 7: Costs of Public Records .....	10
<i>Section 7.1: County Council to Determine Copy Costs for Public Records</i> .....	10
<i>Section 7.2: Interim Copy Costs for Public Records</i> .....	10
Chapter 8: Public Records Training.....	11

# Public Records Policy of Cuyahoga County, Ohio

## Chapter 1: Rationale

Believing that open government leads to a better-informed citizenry, greater public participation in government, better government, better public policy, and more effective use of public resources, the County Council establishes this Public Records Policy to insure the preservation and public accessibility of records relating to all functions of Cuyahoga County government. Cuyahoga County's policy in all of its functions is to strictly adhere to all of its obligations under Ohio's Public Records Law and to exceed those obligations whenever it is practical and makes sense to do so.

## Chapter 2: Definitions

Section 2.1: "Committee" shall include subcommittees.

Section 2.2: "Public office" includes the following:

- (A) the office of the County Executive
- (B) the Cuyahoga County Council, including all of its committees
- (C) all departments, divisions, offices, or other organized bodies operating under the administration of the County Executive,
- (D) the Cuyahoga County Prosecuting Attorney,
- (E) all Boards, Commissions, and Advisory Councils to which the County Executive and/or the County Council appoint at least a majority of its members,
- (F) all Boards, Commissions, Advisory Councils and any similar body created by the Cuyahoga County Charter, the County Council, and/or the County Executive.

Section 2.3: As used in Section 2.2, a "similar body" must be formally organized, be on-going, and be involved in making or advising on public policy decisions.

Section 2.4: "Public record" includes any document, device, or item, regardless of physical form or characteristic, including electronic records, created or received by or coming under the jurisdiction of any public office, which serves to document the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operation, or other activities of the office. All

records which meet this definition are public records, unless exempted under section 149.43 of the Ohio Revised Code.

Section 2.5: "Electronic record" includes prepared documents such as word processing documents, spreadsheets, and graphic presentations as well as written electronic communications, including but not limited to electronic mail and text messages.

## **Chapter 3: Scope of Ordinance**

### *Section 3.1: Applicability*

This ordinance is hereby adopted as the public records policy, required under Section 149.43 of the Ohio Revised Code, for every public office in Cuyahoga County government, as public office is defined in Section 2.2 of this ordinance, over which the Cuyahoga County Council has legislative authority.

## **Chapter 4: County Records Commission**

### *Section 4.1: Creation of County Records Commission*

There is hereby created, the County Records Commission, which shall succeed and replace the current County Records Commission. The County Records Commission shall consist of the County Executive, who shall serve as chairperson, the President of County Council, the Prosecuting Attorney, the Fiscal Officer, and the Clerk of Courts of Common Pleas.

### *Section 4.2: Appointment of Designees*

Each member of the County Records Commission shall appoint one designee, an employee of his/her office who is knowledgeable about the maintenance of public records, who shall attend meetings of the County Records Commission whenever the member is unable to do so.

### *Section 4.3: Powers and Duties of County Records Commission*

The County Records Commission shall have all the powers and perform all the duties of County Records Commissions provided for in Section 149.38 of the Ohio Revised Code, including, but not limited to, the power to recommend applications for one-time disposal of records or proposed records retention schedules to the Ohio Historical Society.

*Section 4.4: Rules and Procedures of the County Records Commission*

The County Records Commission shall adopt its own rules and procedures, which shall be consistent with Section 149.38 of the Ohio Revised Code. Until such time as the County Records Commission adopts such rules, it shall operate under the rules of the prior County Records Commission that existed prior to the enactment of this ordinance.

*Section 4.5: Meetings of the County Records Commission*

The County Records Commission shall meet at the call of the chair as often as needed to respond to proposed records retention schedules and proposed one-time disposals of records, but shall meet a minimum of once every six (6) months.

*Section 4.6: County Records Commission Action on Records Proposals*

Within sixty (60) days after receiving a request for one-time disposal of records or a proposed records retention schedule from any office, the County Records Commission shall either approve the request and send it to the Ohio Historical Society for its consideration or return the request disapproved to the office that submitted it with a letter stating the reasons for disapproval.

## **Chapter 5: Public Records**

*Section 5.1: Maintenance of Public Records*

All public offices within the scope of this ordinance shall organize and maintain all their public records so that they are readily available for inspection and copying in accordance with the Ohio Public Records Law and the Public Records Policy of Cuyahoga County.

*Section 5.2 Maintenance of Electronic Mail*

A.) All electronic mail sent or received through the Cuyahoga County Information Services Center shall be the property of Cuyahoga County. The necessity to maintain electronic mail as public records shall depend on the content of the records, not on the medium in which it is kept. It shall be the responsibility of the public records managers and each individual user to

insure that electronic mail is maintained in accordance with the records retention schedule for each office, and that records which must be kept for an extended length of time will not be placed in files where they will be automatically deleted.

- B.) Each person covered by this ordinance shall also insure that all public record electronic mail sent or received outside of the County Information Service Center system are maintained so that they are readily available for inspection and copying in accordance with the records retention schedule for each office.

*Section 5.3: Designation of Countywide Public Records Manager*

The County Archivist is hereby designated as the Countywide Public Records Manager and shall do the following:

- A.) Manage the public records of Cuyahoga County to insure that they are organized so as to be readily available to the public for inspection and copying and are maintained and disposed of in accordance with the records retention schedules of the various offices within Cuyahoga County government.
- B.) Assist the public records managers of the various public offices in Cuyahoga County in implementing a sound and consistent countywide public records process in accordance with this ordinance.
- C.) Assist the public offices within the scope of this ordinance in preparing and updating public records retention schedules.

*Section 5.4: Designation of Deputy Countywide Public Records Manager*

The County Executive shall designate one employee of the executive office staff as Deputy County Public Records Manager, who shall do the following:

- A.) Assist the Countywide Public Records Manager in the performance of his/her duties;
- B.) Maintain the public records request log provided for in Section 6.5 of this ordinance.
- C.) Work with each public office to determine what kinds of public records requests are received by that office that relate to personal or business matters, rather than governmental operations, and are not required to be included in the public records request log.

- D.) Provide a copy of Cuyahoga County's Public Records policy to each public records manager and obtain a written acknowledgement from each records manager that the policy was received,
- E.) Serve as the public records manager for the County Executive's office.

*Section 5.5: Designation of Public Records Managers*

- A.) Each public office shall designate a public records manager who shall be responsible for the maintenance of the public records for that office and for handling public records requests directed to that office.
- B.) For the following offices, the person designated as public records manager shall be an employee of the office who works at the principal place at which that office does business:
  - a. the County Executive, including all executive office staff
  - b. the County Council
  - c. the Law Department
  - d. the Sheriff
  - e. the Medical Examiner
  - f. the Clerk of Courts
  - g. the Department of Economic Development, which shall include the Office of Collaboration
  - h. the Information Officer
  - i. the Department of Public Works
  - j. the Department of Purchasing
  - k. the Department of Human Resources
  - l. the Fiscal Office
  - m. the Child Support Enforcement Agency
  - n. the Division of Children and Family Services
  - o. the Division of Employment and Family Services
  - p. the Division of Senior and Adult Services
  - q. the Director of Human Services, which shall include the Director's Office and all other offices in the Department of Human Services not covered by items twelve (12) through fifteen (15) above.
  - r. the Inspector General

- C.) Each office not listed in Subsection B of this section shall designate a public records manager who shall be one of the following:
- a. an employee of that office or an officer of a Board, Commission, or Advisory Council,
  - b. the Deputy County Public Records Manager, or
  - c. an employee of Cuyahoga County, approved by the Deputy County Public Records Manager, who is the public records manager for another office with responsibilities related to those of the designating office.

*Section 5.6: Public Records Manager for County Council*

The Clerk of Council is hereby designated as public records manager for Cuyahoga County Council.

*Section 5.7: Records Retention Schedules*

Each public office shall have a records retention schedule in place, which shall specify, consistent with state law, the methods by which and the length of time that records shall be kept. For any office that has a records retention schedule in place at the time that this ordinance becomes effective, that records retention schedule shall remain in effect until it is amended according to the procedure set forth in Section 149.38 of the Ohio Revised Code. Each public office that does not have a records retention schedule in place at the time that this ordinance becomes effective shall propose a public records retention schedule to the County Records Commission, in accordance with the procedure set forth in Section 149.38 of the Ohio Revised Code, not later than June 30, 2011.

*Section 5.8: Interim Transient Records Retention Schedule*

Except to the extent that a different records retention schedule on transient communications is required for an office by state law, each public office that does not have a records retention schedule on transient communications in place at the time that this ordinance becomes effective shall use the transient records retention policy and schedule adopted by the County Commissioners on January 12, 2009, until such time as the office's records retention schedule on transient communications is updated, according to the procedure set forth in Section 149.38 of the Ohio Revised Code.



*Section 5.9: Publication of Public Records Policy*

- A.) Each public office having public office space shall prepare a poster which shall describe the public records policy of that office, explain how to obtain public records, and name the public records manager for that office. The poster shall be displayed in a conspicuous place at the office and at any branch office where the office conducts business. Each office shall post the same information and its public records retention schedule on its web-page on the county's website.
- B.) The County Executive and the Clerk of Council shall each post on their respective web-pages the full Public Records Policy of Cuyahoga County, a summary of that policy, instructions on how to obtain public records, and a list of all of the public records managers for Cuyahoga County government and their contact information, and the public records retention schedule for each office.
- C.) The manual of general policies and procedures issued to all employees shall include the county's public records policy.

(Amended 3/22/2011 by Ordinance No. O2011-0012)

*Section 5.10: County Website*

The County shall maintain a readily accessible website, which shall include separate pages for the County Executive, the County Council, and each department in County government. The County Executive and the Clerk of County Council shall insure that the website is regularly updated to provide current information, including the notice, agenda, minutes, and reports of all public meetings conducted by offices within the scope of this ordinance and instructions on how to obtain public records.

## **Chapter 6: Public Records Requests**

*Section 6.1: Form of Records Request*

Any person requesting public records shall identify the records requested with sufficient clarity to allow the public office to identify, retrieve, and review the records requested. No specific language or form is required to make the request. If the records request is not sufficiently clear,

the public records manager must contact the requestor for clarification, and should assist the requestor by providing information about the manner in which the office keeps its records.

*Section 6.2: Identity of Requestor Not Required*

The requestor is not required to put a public records request in writing and does not need to provide his/her identity or the intended use of the records requested. The public office may request this information, particularly to aid in complying with the request, but must clearly state that providing this information is voluntary.

*Section 6.3: Availability of Records*

Records shall be made available promptly for inspection or copying. Public records requests shall be given priority attention in any office receiving them, but reasonable time shall be allowed to comply with requests that are large, involve records stored other than at the site where the request was made, or involving records that must be inspected for possible redaction of information exempt from the public records law. Whenever a request is received that cannot be complied with immediately, the public office shall provide the requestor a receipt acknowledging and describing the public records request and may provide an estimate as to when a response can be provided.

*Section 6.4: Denial of Request and Redaction of Records*

Any denial of records requested must include a written explanation, including legal authority. If part of a record requested is exempt from public records law, that part shall be redacted, and the remainder provided. Each redaction shall be accompanied by a written explanation, including legal authority.

*Section 6.5: Public Records Request Log*

Each office shall maintain a log of all public records requests received that relate to governmental operations and shall forward a copy of the log at the end of each week to the Deputy Countywide Records Manager, who shall maintain a countywide public records log. Each office shall, with the approval of the Deputy Countywide Public Records Manager, determine what kinds of public records requests received by that office relate to personal or business matters, rather than governmental operations; and

these requests shall not be required to be included in the log. For each public records request required to be included in the public records request log, the following information shall be provided:

- (A) the office that received the request
- (B) the date that the request was received,
- (C) the name of the requestor, if known
- (D) a brief description of what records were requested,
- (E) the date that response to the request was completed,
- (F) a brief description of any denials or redactions required.

## **Chapter 7: Costs of Public Records**

### *Section 7.1: County Council to Determine Copy Costs for Public Records*

Persons requesting copies of public records shall be required to pay for the cost of making copies, at a rate not to exceed the actual cost of making copies. Payment in advance may be required.

Starting in calendar year 2011, the County Council shall biannually determine and establish the copying costs for public records.

### *Section 7.2: Interim Copy Costs for Public Records*

Except as otherwise provided by court order, the following copying costs shall apply until the County Council first determines and establishes copying costs for public records:

- A.) The charge for paper copies shall be three cents (\$.03) per page. The charge shall be waived when less than one dollar (\$1.00).
- B.) The charge for computer files downloaded to a compact disc shall be the actual cost, not to exceed \$1.26 per disc. The charge shall be waived when only one (1) disc is required to fulfill the request.
- C.) The charge for computer files downloaded to a compact disc shall be the actual cost, not to exceed \$1.26 per disc. The charge shall be waived when only one (1) disc is required to fulfill the request.

- D.) There shall be no charge for copies provided by email.
- E.) Each public office shall have the discretion to waive copying costs of ten dollars (\$10.00) or less when it determines that it is practical and cost-effective to do so, provided that the public office follows a consistent policy on waiver of copying fees for all requestors.

(Amended 3/22/2011 by Ordinance No. O2011-0012)

## **Chapter 8: Public Records Training**

All elected public officials and public records managers shall attend training on public records policy approved by the Ohio Attorney General, as provided for in Section 109.43 of the Ohio Revised Code. Each public office shall encourage other appropriate persons to receive public records training.