

Town of Westford, Vermont
Public Record Inspection, Copying and Transmission Policy

PURPOSE. The Vermont Public Records Act, 1 V.S.A. §§ 315-320, provides access to a town's public records for inspection and copying unless the records are exempt by law from public access. The Town is authorized under section 316(j) of the Public Records Act to adopt and enforce reasonable rules to prevent disruption of operations in responding to records requests, to preserve the security of public records, and to protect public records from damage. This policy is intended to provide for timely action on requests for public records without unreasonable interruption of operations and to protect the integrity of the Town's public records.

APPLICABILITY. A public record is defined as any written or recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristic, which is produced or acquired in the course of Town business. Public records, regardless of format, are available for inspection and copying unless there is a specific statute exempting the record from public disclosure. Those records exempt from public inspection and copying are set out at 1 V.S.A. § 317(c).

This policy applies to all public records requests of all custodians in the Town of Westford.

DEFINITIONS. For purposes of this policy, the following words and/or phrases shall apply:

1. "Agency" means an agency, board, committee, department, branch, instrumentality, commission, or authority of any town.
2. "Custodian" means the person that has charge or custody of a public record.
3. "Promptly" means immediately, with little or no delay, and not more than three business days.

PUBLIC RECORD REQUEST FORMS. Not every public record request will necessitate the use of a written request form. However, when a request is made for a public record that is not readily accessible, may be exempt from public access, or may not exist, the requestor will be asked to complete, but is not required to do so except as stated below, a Public Records Request Form designated by the Custodian. If the requestor declines to complete the Public Records Request Form, the Custodian may complete such form. Where a request is likely to result in charges for copying or staff time, the requestor is required to submit a completed Request Form. The Custodian shall retain the original copy of all requests and written responses (if applicable).

INSPECTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS. In responding to a request to inspect or copy a record, the Custodian will consult with the requestor if necessary in order to clarify the request or to obtain additional information that will assist the Custodian in responding to the request and in facilitating production of the requested record for inspection or copying. When a requestor seeks a voluminous amount of separate and distinct records, the Custodian may ask the requestor to narrow the scope of the public records request.

Upon receipt of a request to inspect a public record, the Custodian will promptly produce the record for inspection except that:

1. The Custodian will inform the requestor in writing if the record does not exist under the name given by the requestor or by any other name known to the Custodian.
2. If the Custodian withholds the record as exempt from public access, the Custodian will promptly certify this fact in writing to the requestor. The Custodian will identify the record or portion of record withheld, the statutory basis for withholding the record, a brief statement of the reasons and supporting facts for denial, and provide the names and titles or positions of each person responsible for denial of the request. The Custodian will also inform the requestor of the right to appeal this determination to the Selectboard. It is the policy of the Town that all exempt records will be withheld from disclosure.
3. If the record is in active use or in storage and therefore not readily available at the time of the request, the Custodian will promptly certify this fact in writing to the requestor and set a date and hour within one calendar week of the request when the record will be available for inspection.

For the purpose of this policy, a “business day” means a day that the Custodian’s office is open to provide services.

The time limits described above may be extended in writing up to ten business days from receipt of the records request based on:

- a. The need to search for and collect requested records from field facilities or other establishments that are separate from the Town Office; or
- b. The need to search for, collect, and appropriately examine a voluminous amount of separate and distinct records which are demanded in a single request; or
- c. The need for consultation with the Town attorney or other Town officers or departments having a substantial interest in the determination of the request.

If the time limits described above are extended, the Custodian will inform the requestor of such fact in writing, setting forth the reasons for the extension and specifying the date upon which the Custodian will respond to the request.

The Custodian will not withhold any record in its entirety on the basis that it contains some exempt content if the record is otherwise subject to disclosure; instead, the Custodian will redact the information he or she considers to be exempt and produce the record accompanied by an explanation of the basis for denial of the redacted information.

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTED FOR INSPECTION. In order that all public records in the custody of the Custodian may be protected from damage or loss, such records may only be inspected in

locations in the Town Office designated by the Custodian. No public record may be removed from a designated location, marked, altered, defaced, torn, damaged, destroyed, disassembled, or removed from its proper location or order. The Custodian or other staff person may be present during the inspection of a public record. No person shall be allowed to copy a public record using copying equipment other than that owned by the Town unless approved by the Custodian.

When inspection of an electronic record is requested and the inspection of the original electronic record would create a disruption in operations of the Town or would jeopardize the security or condition of the original record, the Custodian will provide an electronic copy of the original record in the format in which the record is maintained, less any exempt information redacted from the record, at no cost to the requestor.

COPIES OF PUBLIC RECORDS. Upon receipt of a request to make a copy of a public record, the Custodian will make and produce a copy subject to the following:

1. **Charges.** Except where otherwise provided by law, the Custodian will charge and collect the following costs for making a copy of a public record:
 - a. The actual cost charge for a copy of a public record as determined by the Selectboard under 1 V.S.A. § 316(e) or the uniform schedule of charges established by the Secretary of State if the Selectboard fails to establish a uniform schedule of charges; and
 - b. The cost of staff time associated with complying with a request for a copy of a public record when the time exceeds 30 minutes as that cost is determined by the Selectboard under 1 V.S.A. § 316(e) or the uniform schedule of charges established by the Secretary of State if the Selectboard fails to establish a uniform schedule of charges.

All charges for copies and staff time must be paid in full prior to delivery of the requested copies. Upon request, the Custodian will provide an estimate of the cost of making a copy of a public record prior to complying with the request.

2. **Standard formats.** The Custodian will make a copy of a public record in the following standard format:
 - a. For any public record maintained by the Custodian in paper form, the Custodian will make a paper copy of the record;
 - b. For any public record maintained by Custodian in electronic form, the Custodian will make either a paper printout of the record or an electronic copy of the record in the format in which the record is maintained, as directed by the requestor.

A request for a copy in a format other than those mentioned above is “non-standard.” The Custodian will not provide a copy of a public record in a non-standard format (e.g., conversion of a paper public record to electronic format).

CREATION OF PUBLIC RECORDS. The Custodian will not create a public record that does not exist.

TRANSMISSION OF PUBLIC RECORDS. The Custodian will not transmit a public record

DENIAL OF A PUBLIC RECORD REQUEST. If the Custodian denies a public record request in whole or in part, the denial may be appealed to the Selectboard. In accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 318(c)(1), the Selectboard will make a written determination on the appeal within five business days after receipt of the appeal. A decision of the Selectboard suggest SB may be reviewable by the Vermont Superior Court pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 319.

The foregoing Policy is hereby adopted by the Selectboard of the Town of Westford, Vermont, this 10th day of March, 2022

This Policy is effective as of this date until amended or repealed.

WESTFORD SELECTBOARD



Lee McClenny, Chair



David Baczewski, Board Member

William Cleary, Board Member

Town of Westford, Vermont
Request for Inspection or Copying of Public Record(s)

Date _____

Dear Custodian:

Pursuant to the Vermont Public Record Act, 1 V.S.A. §§ 315-320, I hereby request to inspect the following public record(s):

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

(If applicable)

I hereby request a copy of the above record(s) in the following format: _____
_____. I agree to pay reasonable and customary costs for these copies.

(Complete this section if you have a disability requiring an accommodation):

I request the following accommodation(s) in order to access the public record(s) I seek:

If you have questions about this request, please call me at _____.

Thank you for your help.

Signature

Printed Name

The Custodian for the Office of _____ shall retain the original of this form for record keeping purposes and provide the requestor with its copy.

Town of Westford, Vermont
Certification of Denial of Access to Public Record(s)
1 V.S.A. § 318(b)(2)

On _____, the Custodian for the Office of _____ of the Town of Westford, Vermont, received a request from _____ for access to public record(s). Certain records determined to be subject to the request have been withheld in whole or in part as exempt from disclosure under 1 V.S.A. § 317. Such withheld records are as follows:

Title or Other Description of Public Record Withheld	All or Partial	Reasons for Withholding and Supporting Facts	Statutory Exemption(s)	Name and Title of Person Responsible for Denial

You may appeal any or all of the withholding of these public records to the Town of Westford Selectboard. In accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 318(c)(1), the Selectboard will make a written determination on the appeal within five business days after receipt of the appeal. A decision of the Selectboard may be reviewable by Vermont Superior Court under 1 V.S.A. § 319.

 Custodian for the Office of _____
 Town of Westford, Vermont
 Date signed _____

The Custodian for the Office of _____ shall retain the original of this form for record keeping purposes and provide the requestor with its copy.

Town of Westford, Vermont
Response to Request for Public Record(s)
1 V.S.A. § 318

On _____, the Custodian for the Office of _____ of the Town of Westford, Vermont, received a request from _____ for access to public record(s).

In response to this request (check all that apply):

- The Custodian is not producing some or all of the record(s) requested for inspection because:
 - the record(s) do not exist under the name given by the requestor or by any other name known to the Custodian. 1 V.S.A. § 318(a)(4);
 - the Town is not required to provide copies of public records in their non-standard format. 1 V.S.A. § 316(i);
 - the record(s) does not already exist, and the Town is not required to create a public record(s). 1 V.S.A. § 316(i);
 - the Town is not required to convert paper public record(s) to electronic format. 1 V.S.A. § 316(i).

Record(s) requested: _____

- The record(s) requested below are in active use or in storage and therefore not available for use at the time of this request. The record(s) requested will be available for examination within one calendar week of the request on _____ (date) at _____ (hour). 1 V.S.A. § 318(b)(1).

Record(s) requested: _____

- The following "unusual circumstances," as that term is defined by 1 V.S.A. § 318(b)(5), exist with respect to the record(s) requested below:
 - the need to search for and collect the requested record(s) from field facilities or other establishments that are separate from the office processing the request;
 - the need to search for, collect, and appropriately examine a voluminous amount of separate and distinct record(s) which are demanded in a single request;
 - the need for consultation with the Town's attorney or with other Town officers or departments having a substantial interest in the determination of the request.

Record(s) requested: _____

The non-exempt record(s) requested will be available for examination not more than ten business days from receipt of this request on _____ (date). 1 V.S.A. § 318(b)(5).

- The record(s) requested below are subject to one or more of the following staff time charges:

- charges for the time directly involved in complying with the request that exceeds 30 minutes;
- charges incurred because the Town agreed to create a public record(s) that did not already exist;
- charges incurred because the Town agreed to provide the public record(s) in a nonstandard format and the time directly involved in complying with the request exceeds 30 minutes.

Record(s) requested: _____

Because this request is subject to staff time charges, the Custodian hereby requires that the request be made in writing and that all charges be paid [in whole/in part] prior to delivery of the copies. Upon request, the Town will provide an estimate of the charge.

This denial of access, whether temporary or permanent, may be appealed to the Town of Westford Selectboard. In accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 318(c)(1), the Selectboard will make written determination on the appeal within five business days after receipt of the appeal. A decision of the Selectboard may be reviewable by Vermont Superior Court under 1 V.S.A. § 319.

Custodian for the Office of _____
Town of Westford, Vermont
Date signed _____

The Custodian for the Office of _____ shall retain the original of this form for record keeping purposes and provide the requestor with its copy.