

VILLAGE OF SPARTA
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT POLICY, PROCEDURES
& GUIDELINES

Adopted by Village Council - June 8, 2015

Preamble: Statement of Principles

It is the policy of the Village of Sparta that all eligible persons, , consistent with the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and employees. The people shall be informed so that they fully participate in the democratic process.

The Village of Sparta shall comply with the FOIA in all respects and respond to requests in a consistent, fair, and even-handed manner.

The Village of Sparta acknowledges that it has a legal obligation to disclose all nonexempt public records in its possession pursuant to a properly submitted FOIA request. The Village of Sparta acknowledges that sometimes it is compelled to invoke the exemptions identified under FOIA in order to ensure the effective operation of government and to protect the privacy of individuals.

The Village of Sparta shall endeavor to protect the public's interest in disclosure while balancing the requirement to withhold or redact portions of certain records that are exempt from disclosure.

Section 1: General Policies

The Village Council, acting pursuant to the authority at MCL 15.236, designates the Village Manager as the FOIA Coordinator. The FOIA Coordinator is authorized to designate other Village staff to assist in processing written requests received under FOIA.

If a FOIA request is received by the Village by facsimile or e-mail, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. If a request is sent by e-mail and delivered to a Village spam or junk-mail folder, the request is not deemed received until one day after the FOIA Coordinator first becomes aware of the request. The FOIA Coordinator shall note in the FOIA log both the date the request was delivered to the spam or junk-mail folder and the date the FOIA Coordinator became aware of the request.

The Village is not obligated to create a new public record in response to a FOIA request or make a compilation or summary of information which does not already exist. Neither the FOIA Coordinator nor other Village staff are obligated to provide answers to questions contained in requests for public records or regarding the content of the records themselves.

The FOIA Coordinator shall keep a copy of all written requests for public records received by the Village on file for a period of at least one year.

Section 2: Requesting a Public Record

A person requesting to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed

or retained by the Village of Sparta must do so in writing. Such written request must be made to the FOIA Coordinator and sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable Village personnel to identify and find the requested public record.

No specific form to submit a FOIA request is required. However the FOIA Coordinator may make available a FOIA Request Form for use by the public.

Written requests for public records may be submitted in person or by mail to any Village office. Requests may also be submitted electronically by facsimile and e-mail. Upon their receipt, requests for public records shall be promptly forwarded to the FOIA Coordinator for processing.

A person may request that public records be provided on non-paper physical media, electronically mailed or other otherwise provided to him or her in lieu of paper copies. The Village will comply with the request only if it possesses the necessary technological capability to provide records in the requested non-paper physical media format. Applicable fees shall apply as specified within this policy.

A person may subscribe to future issues of public records that are created, issued or disseminated by the Village of Sparta on a regular basis. A subscription is valid for up to 6 months and may be renewed by the subscriber.

The FOIA Coordinator is not required to respond to verbal, non-written FOIA requests. However, if a person makes a verbal, non-written request for information that is available on the Village's website, the employee receiving the request may inform the requestor of the pertinent website address.

Section 3: Processing a Request

Within 5 business days of receipt of a FOIA request, the Village will issue a response. If a request is received by facsimile, e-mail or other electronic transmission, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. The Village will respond to the request in one of the following ways:

- Grant the request.
- Issue a written notice denying the request.
- Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request.
- Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request the Village needs an additional 10 business days to respond. Only one such extension is permitted.

If the request is granted, or granted in part, the FOIA Coordinator may require that allowable fees associated with responding to the request be paid in accordance with this policy. The FOIA Coordinator shall provide a detailed itemization of the allowable costs incurred to process the request to the person making the request.

A written summary of these Procedures and Guidelines shall be provided to the requestor with the response to a written FOIA request for public records, provided however, that if such written summary is maintained on the Village's website, then a website link to the summary and this policy may be provided in lieu of providing paper copies.

If the cost of processing a FOIA request is \$50 or less, the requester will be notified of the amount due and where the documents can be obtained.

If based on a good faith calculation by the Village, the cost of processing a FOIA request is expected to exceed \$50, or if the requester has not fully paid for a previously granted request as specified below, the Village will require a good-faith deposit before further processing the request. In making the request for a good-faith deposit the FOIA Coordinator shall provide the requester with a detailed itemization of the allowable costs estimated to be incurred by the Village to process the request and also provide a best efforts estimate of a time frame it will take the Village to provide the records to the requester. The best efforts estimate shall be nonbinding on the Village, but will be made in good faith and will strive to be reasonably accurate, given the nature of the request in the particular instance.

If the request is denied or denied in part, the FOIA Coordinator will issue a Notice of Denial which shall provide in the applicable circumstance:

- An explanation as to why a requested public record is exempt from disclosure; or
- A certificate that the requested record does not exist under the name or description provided by the requester, or another name reasonably known by the Village; or
- An explanation or description of the public record or information within a public record that is separated or deleted from the public record; and
- An explanation of the person's right to submit an appeal of the denial;
- The Notice of Denial shall be signed by the FOIA Coordinator.

If a request does not sufficiently describe a public record, the FOIA Coordinator may, in lieu of issuing a Notice of Denial indicating that the request is deficient, seek clarification or amendment of the request by the person making the request. Any clarification or amendment will be considered a new request subject to the timelines described in this Section.

The Village shall provide reasonable facilities and opportunities for persons to examine and inspect public records during normal business hours. The FOIA Coordinator is authorized to promulgate rules regulating the manner in which records may be viewed so as to protect Village records from loss, alteration, mutilation or destruction and to prevent excessive interference with normal Village operations.

The FOIA Coordinator shall, upon written request, furnish a certified copy of a public record at no additional cost to the person requesting the public record.

Section 4: Fee Deposits

All fees and deposits calculated under these Procedures and Guidelines shall be listed within a Detailed Itemization of Costs Form that shall be provided to the FOIA requester. A copy of such form is attached hereto and incorporated by reference.

If the fee estimate is expected to exceed \$50.00 based on a good-faith calculation by the Village, the requester shall provide a deposit not exceeding on-half of the total estimated fee.

If a request for public records is from a person who has not fully paid the Village for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the FOIA Coordinator will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated fee before beginning to search for a public record for any subsequent written request by that person when all of the following conditions exist:

- the final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
- the public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the Village's possession;
- the public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the time frame estimated by the Village to provide the records;
- 90 days have passed since the FOIA Coordinator notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
- the individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the Village; and
- the FOIA Coordinator has calculated a detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased estimated fee deposit.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the FOIA Coordinator will not require an increased estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:

- the person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the Village;
- the Village is subsequently paid in full for the applicable prior written request; or
- 365 days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the Village.

Section 5: Calculation of Fees

All fees and deposits calculated under these Procedures and Guidelines shall be listed within a Detailed Itemization of Costs Form that shall be provided to the FOIA requestor. A copy of such form is attached hereto and incorporated by reference.

A fee will not be charged for the cost of search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the Village because of the nature of the request in the particular instance, and the Village specifically identifies the nature of the unreasonably high costs.

The following factors shall be used to determine an unreasonably high cost to the Village:

- The particular request incurs costs greater than incurred from the typical or usual request received by the Village. Volume of the public record requested.
- Amount of time spent to search for, examine, review and separate exempt from non-exempt information in the record requested.
- Whether public records from more than one Village department or various Village

offices is necessary to respond to the request.

- The available staffing to respond to the request.
- Any other similar factors identified by the FOIA Coordinator in responding to the particular request.

The Village may charge for the following costs associated with processing a FOIA request:

- Labor costs directly associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record.
- Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure of information which is disclosed.
- The actual cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media.
- The cost of duplication of publication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records.
- The cost of labor associated with duplication or publication, including making paper copies, making digital copies or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet or other electronic means.

The actual cost of mailing or sending a public record. Labor costs will be calculated based on the following requirements:

- All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15 minute increments with all partial time increments rounded down[†].
- Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid Village employee, capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.[‡]
- Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits. The Village may add up to 50% to the applicable labor charge amount to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits, but in no case may it exceed the actual cost of fringe benefits.
- Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs until agreed to by the requestor; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.

The cost to provide records on non-paper physical media when so requested will be based on the following requirements:

- Computer disks, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
- This cost will only be assessed if the Village has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.
- In order to ensure the integrity and security of the Village's technological infrastructure, the Village will procure any requested non-paper media and will not accept non-paper media from the requestor.

† The cost of labor directly associated with duplication, publication or transferring records to nonpaper physical media can be charged in time increments of the public body's choosing with all partial increments rounded down.

‡ If using contract or outside labor to separate and delete exempt material from non-exempt material, the public body must clearly note the name of person or firm who does the work and the total labor cost may not exceed an amount 6 times the state minimum hourly wage, which is currently \$8.15.

The cost to provide paper copies of records will be based on the following requirements:

- Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will not exceed \$.10 per sheet of paper. Copies for non-standard sized sheets of paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.
- The Village may provide records using double-sided printing, if cost-saving and available.

The cost to mail records to a requestor will be based on the following requirements:

- The actual cost to mail public records using a reasonably economical and justified means.
- The Village may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
- No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless requested.

If the FOIA Coordinator does not respond to a written request in a timely manner, the following shall be required:

- Reduce the labor costs by 5% for each day the Village exceeds the time permitted under FOIA up to a 50% maximum reduction, if any of the following applies:
 - The late response was willful and intentional.
 - The written request, within the first 250 words of the body of a letter facsimile, e-mail or e-mail attachment conveyed a request for information.
 - The written request included the words, characters, or abbreviations for "freedom of information", "information", "and FOIA", "copy" or a recognizable misspelling of such, or legal code reference to MCL 15.231 et seq or 1976 Public Act 442 on the front of an envelope or in the subject line of an e-mail, letter or facsimile cover page.
- Fully note the charge reduction in the Detailed Itemization of Costs Form

Section 6: Waiver of Fees

The FOIA Coordinator will waive the first \$20.00 of the processing fee for a request if the person requesting a public record submits an affidavit stating that they are:

- indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
- if not receiving public assistance stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigency.

An individual is not eligible to receive the waiver if:

- the requestor has previously received discounted copies of public records from the Village twice[§] during the calendar year; or
- the requestor requests information in connection with other persons who are offering or providing payment to make the request.

An affidavit is sworn statement. The FOIA Coordinator may make a Fee Waiver Affidavit Form available for use by the public.

A nonprofit organization designated to by the State to carry out activities under subtitle C of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 200 and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act, or their successors, if the request meets all of the following requirements:

- is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients;
- is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under Section 931 of the Mental Health Code, MCL 330.1931;
- is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the State.

Section 7: Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record

When a requestor believes that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, he or she may file an appeal of the denial to the Village Council. An appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify the reason or reasons the requestor is seeking a reversal of the denial.

Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the Village Council will respond in writing by:

- reversing the disclosure denial;
- upholding the disclosure denial; or
- reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.
- Under unusual circumstances, such as the need to examine or review a voluminous amount of separate and distinct public records or the need to collect the requested records from numerous facilities located apart from the office receiving or processing the request, the Village Council may issue not more than 1 notice of extension for not more than 10 business days to respond to the appeal

Whether or not a requestor submitted an appeal of a denial to the Village Council, he or she may file an action in circuit court within 180 days after the Village's final determination to deny the request.

§ The FOIA requires that an indigent requestor is entitled to at least two discounted fees in a calendar year; however a public body may permit more than two if it so chooses to do so.

Section 8: Appeal of an Excessive FOIA Processing Fee

If a requestor believes that the fee charged by the Village to process a FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, he or she must first submit a written appeal for a fee reduction to the Village Council. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted.

Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the Village Council will respond in writing by:

- waive the fee;
- reduce the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee, accompanied by a certification by the Village Council that the statements in the determination are accurate and the reduced fee amount complies with these Procedures and Guidelines and Section 4 of the FOIA;
- uphold the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis under Section 4 of the FOIA that supports the required fee, accompanied by a certification by the Village Council that the statements in the determination are accurate and the fee amount complies with these Procedures and Guidelines and Section 4 of the FOIA; or
- issue a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the Village Council will respond to the written appeal.

Within 45 days after receiving notice of the Village Council's determination of a fee appeal, a requestor may commence an action in circuit court. If the action is filed in further appeal of the fee, the Village is not obligated to process the underlying FOIA request until the Court resolves the fee dispute.

Section 9: Conflict with Prior FOIA Policies and Procedures; Effective Date

To the extent that these Procedures and Guidelines conflict with previous FOIA policies promulgated by Village Commission or the Village Administration these Procedures and Guidelines are controlling.

To the extent that any provision of these Procedures and Guidelines or any administrative rule promulgated by the FOIA Coordinator pertaining to the release of public records is found to be in conflict with any State statute, the applicable statute shall control.

These FOIA Policies and Guidelines become effective July 1, 2015.