

# **Brown Township**

## **Public Records Policy**

### **Mission Statement**

Openness leads to a better-informed citizenry, which leads to better government and better public policy. Consistent with the premise that government at all levels exists first and foremost to serve the interest of the people, it is the mission and intent of Brown Township to, at all times, fully comply with and abide by both the spirit and the letter of Ohio's Public Records Act.

### **Defining Public Records**

All records kept by Brown Township are public unless they are exempt from disclosure under Ohio law. All public records must be organized and maintained in such a way that they can be made available for inspection and copying.

A record is defined to include the following: a document in any format -- paper, electronic (including, but not limited to, business email) -- that is created by, received by, or comes under the jurisdiction of Brown Township that documents the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the office.

### **Response Timeframe**

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 and redaction of the records requested.

It is the goal of Brown Township that all requests for public records should be acknowledged in writing, or if possible, satisfied within 10 business days following the office's receipt of the request.

### **Handling Requests**

No specific language is required to make a request for public records. However, the requester must at least identify the records requested with sufficient clarity to allow the office to identify, retrieve, and review the records. If it is not clear what records are being sought, the office 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 public records.

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. It is this office's general policy that this information is not to be requested. However, the law does permit the office to ask for a written request, the requester's identity, and/or the intended use of the information requested, but only (1) if a written request or disclosure of identity or intended use would benefit the requester by enhancing the office's ability to identify, locate, or deliver the public records that have been requested; and (2) after telling the requester that a written request is not required and that the requester may decline to reveal his or her identity or intended use.

In processing the request, the office does not have an obligation to create new records or perform new analysis of existing information. An electronic record is deemed to exist so long as a computer is already programmed to produce the record through simple sorting, filtering, or querying. Although not required by law, the office may accommodate the requester by generating new records when it makes sense and is practical under the circumstances.

In processing a request for inspection of a public record, an office employee must accompany the requester during inspection to make certain original records are not taken or altered.

A copy of the most recent edition of the Ohio Sunshine Laws manual is available via the Attorney General's website ([www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov)) for the purpose of keeping employees of the office and the public educated as to the office's obligations under the Ohio Public Records Act, Open Meetings Act, records retention laws, and Personal Information Systems Act.

## **Electronic Records**

Records in the form of email, text message, and instant messaging, including those sent and received via a cell phone are to be treated in the same fashion as records in other formats, such as paper or audiotape.

Public Record content transmitted to or from private accounts or personal devices is subject to disclosure. All employees or representatives of this office are required to retain their email records and other electronic records in accordance with applicable records retention schedules.

## **Denial or Redaction of Records**

If the requester makes an ambiguous or overly broad request or has difficulty in making a request for public records, the request may be denied, but the denial must provide the requester an opportunity to revise the request by informing the requester of the manner in which records are maintained and accessed by the office.

Any denial of public records requested must include an explanation, including legal authority. If the initial request was made in writing, the explanation must also be in

writing. If portions of a record are public and portions are exempt, the exempt portions may be redacted and the rest released. When making public records available for public inspection or copying, the office shall notify the requester of any redaction or make the redaction plainly visible. If there are redactions, they must be accompanied by a supporting explanation, including legal authority.

### **Copying and Mailing Costs**

Those seeking public records may be charged only the actual cost of making copies, not labor. The charge for paper copies is 10 cents per page. The charge for electronic files downloaded to a compact disc is \$1 per disc.

A requester may be required to pay in advance for costs involved in providing the copy. The requester may choose whether to have the record duplicated upon paper, upon the same medium in which the public record is kept, or upon any other medium on which the office determines that the record can reasonably be duplicated as an integral part of the office's normal operations.

If a requester asks that documents be mailed, he or she may be charged the actual cost of the postage and mailing supplies. There is no charge for documents emailed.

### **Managing Records**

Brown Township records are subject to records retention schedules. The office's current schedules are available at 2491 Walker Road, Hilliard, OH 43026, a location readily available to the public as required by Section 149.43(B)(2), Ohio Revised Code. Records are reviewed annually by the records commission (Brown Township Fiscal Officer and Trustee Chair).

3/3/25