

# The Town of Plymouth, Massachusetts Public Records Access Guidelines

As of February 22, 2023

**Created by Connor Anderson, Records Access Officer for the Town of Plymouth. A copy of these guidelines can be provided by the Records Access Officer upon request.**

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**Effective January 1, 2017, the Massachusetts Public Records Law, G.L. c.66 and c.4, §7(26) provides that a municipality must, within 10 business days (Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays), respond to a request for records by providing access to or a copy of such records, or explaining any delay or denial. These guidelines are intended to assist members of the public seeking access to public records in the custody of the Town of Plymouth.**

## **General Information:**

**1. Business Hours** - The regular business hours of Town Hall are:

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 7:30 AM—4:00 PM.

Tuesday 7:30 AM—6:30 PM

Friday 7:30 AM—12:00 PM

**2. Records Access Officer (RAO)** – All Public Records Requests should be delivered to the Records Access Officer for the Town of Plymouth, Connor Anderson.

Connor Anderson,

Archivist/Public Records Access Officer

26 Court St., Plymouth, MA 02360

Phone: (508) 322-3388

Email: [canderson@plymouth-ma.gov](mailto:canderson@plymouth-ma.gov)

## **Public Records Law Information:**

General information about the public records law and public records requests is found in the Secretary of the Commonwealth's, "A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law," updated February 2022. [See Appendix A](#)

**Please note: For any requests or questions concerning Vital Records (Births, Deaths, and Marriages), please contact the Town Clerk's Office at (508) 747-1620 x10189. Alternatively, please visit the following webpage: <https://www.plymouth-ma.gov/town-clerk/pages/vital-records>**

## **Public Records Requests:**

- 1. Making Public Records Requests** - Any person may make a public records request:
  - a) via the Town's [\*\*FOIA Direct\*\*](#) site, found on the town's website (preferred)
  - b) via first class mail addressed to the RAO at the RAO's business address set forth above
  - c) via e-mail addressed to the RAO at the e-mail address set forth above.
  - d) In-person at 26 Court St., Plymouth, MA 02360
- 2. Requests Encouraged to be in writing** - Although not required, it is strongly encouraged that public records requests be in writing to ensure the most efficient and accurate response. All written public records requests, including via email, shall be addressed/directed to the RAO, and contain the requester's name and contact information, so that the RAO is able to provide the required response.
- 3. Contact Information** - Individuals making requests in-person are not required to give their names or contact information. For in-person requests that require additional time for a comprehensive response, requesters will be advised to check in periodically with the RAO or department from which records are sought, or requesters may voluntarily provide contact information. Voluntary Public Records Request Forms shall be available in all municipal offices.
- 4. Specificity of Requests** - To facilitate timely responses to public records requests, requests should be as specific as possible, detailing, if known, records custodian(s), and date and subject matter parameters. The more specific the request, the better able the TOWN will be to respond, as broad requests often require more extensive staff efforts to locate, review and copy all possibly responsive records.
- 5. Receipt of Requests** - Written requests received during normal business hours, as defined in paragraph 1, above, will be considered received on that date. Written requests sent via email or facsimile after normal business hours shall not be considered received until the following business day. Business days shall not include Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays.
- 6. Purpose of Request** - The RAO may ask for more information to assist the requester to make an appropriate request and/or to enable the RAO to respond more efficiently.

## **Responses to Public Records Requests:**

- 1. Fees** - If fees will be assessed, a written estimate of the same will be provided to the requester.
- 2. Response if Longer than 10 Days or Denial in Whole or in Part** - If a full response, including provision of records, cannot be made within 10 business days of receipt of the request, the RAO or designee will respond to the requester in writing: explaining the anticipated time frame for complete response; identifying any records that the TOWN does not have in its

custody; identifying records which the TOWN does not expect will be provided, or that will be redacted, specifying the relevant exemption and its application to the requested record or portion thereof; providing a good faith fee estimate; and including a statement of appeal rights.

**3. Clarification of Request** - Depending upon the scope of the request, the requester may be asked to clarify the request, provide more specific detail, and/or agree to a voluntary extension of time for the TOWN to respond fully to the request.

**4. Time for Response** - Typically, a complete response will be provided within 25 business days of receipt of the requests. If, due to the scope of the request, the need for redactions, or other complications, the town is concerned that it will not be able to provide a complete response within that time frame, the town may ask the requester for an extension of time to comply or petition the Supervisor of Public Records for additional time.

**5. Publicly Available Records** - The town maintains a searchable website at <https://www.plymouth-ma.gov> where certain public records are available for inspection, downloading or printing. If a requester seeks documents publicly available on the Town's website, the requester will be directed to the website in satisfaction of the request, unless the requester does not have the ability to receive or access the records in a usable electronic form. For more information about publicly available records, please contact the RAO or view the Municipal Records Retention Schedule on the Secretary of the Commonwealth's website for a non-exhaustive list of records that may be kept by a municipality. A copy of this can be provided by the RAO upon request.

**6. Electronic Records Delivery Preference** - To the extent feasible, the RAO or designee will provide public records in response to a request by electronic means unless the record is not available electronically or the requester does not have the ability to receive or access the records electronically. To the extent available and feasible, the RAO will provide an electronic record in the requester's preferred format.

**7. Request for Records to be Mailed** - Should a requester seek to have responsive records provided by mail, the requester will be charged the actual cost of postage, using the least expensive form of mailing possible, unless the requester requests, and agrees to pay for, an expedited form of mailing and such fees are paid in advance.

**8. Creation of Records** - The town is only required to provide records that are in existence at the time of a request and is not required to create a new record to accommodate a specific request.

**9. Answering Questions** - The town is not required to answer questions in response to a public records request.

**10. Supplementing Responses** - The town is not required to supplement its response to a previous public records request in the event that responsive records are created in the future.

**11. Unique Right of Access** - Pursuant to the provisions of 950 CMR 32.06(1)(g), if a requester or requester's representative (such as an attorney), has "a unique right of access by statutory, regulatory, judicial or other applicable means", a request for records will not be considered a G.L. c.66, §10 public records request.

## **Exemptions:**

**Exemptions/Redaction/Withholding** - Some public records, or portions of records, may not be provided in response to a public records request because the TOWN has determined such records to be exempt from disclosure pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c.4, §7(26), the attorney-client privilege, or other applicable exemptions or common law privileges. For more information about exemptions to the Public Records Law, see the Secretary of the Commonwealth's, "A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law," updated December 2022.

## **Fees:**

1. **Reasonable Fees** - In some circumstances, the TOWN may assess a reasonable fee for the production of public records.
2. **Categories of Permissible Charges** - Permissible charges include, but are not limited to:
  - a) five cents (\$0.05) per page\* of black and white printouts or copies;
  - b) actual cost for storage devices or materials such as CDs or thumb/flash drives;
  - c) actual cost for duplication of records not susceptible to ordinary means of reproduction, such as color copies and large format plans;
  - d) postage fees (where applicable, as set forth above); and
  - e) fees for employee time required to satisfy a public records request (as set forth below).

*\*No copying fee will be charged for records provided in electronic form.*

3. **Employee Time for Locating and Segregating Records** - A fee may be charged for employee time necessary to identify, locate, and compile the records requested. A fee may also be charged for employee time necessary to review, and, as applicable, segregate and/or redact information exempt from public disclosure. The hourly rate for such fees shall be the hourly rate of the lowest paid employee capable of performing the task, provided, however, that this hourly rate shall not exceed twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) per hour, unless the town has obtained the approval of the State Supervisor of Public Records to charge a higher hourly rate. Depending upon the nature of the request, different rates may be charged for different types. Due to the population size of Plymouth, the first two hours of work on a records request are free of charge.

5. **Requests for Commercial Purposes** - Said fee limitations may not apply when a request for records is for a commercial purpose as determined by the Commonwealth's Supervisor of Records.

6. **Petition for Higher Fee** - In certain circumstances, the Town may petition the Supervisor of Public Records for permission to assess fees for employee time at a rate in excess of \$25.00.

## **Appeals:**

1. If a requester wishes to assert a claim that they have been denied access to public records, they may appeal the RAO's determination to the Supervisor of Records pursuant to 950 CMR

32.08(1). The Supervisor shall make a final determination on the appeal within ten (10) business days of receipt.

2. If the requester is dissatisfied with the determination of the Supervisor of Records, the requester may appeal to Superior Court. Alternatively, a requester may bypass the Supervisor and go directly to Superior Court.

3. For further information on appeals, see the Secretary of the Commonwealth's, "A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law," updated December 2022.

## **Appendix A**