

Lapeer Conservation District

Summary of Freedom of Information Act Procedures and Guidelines

(Adopted by action of the Lapeer Conservation District Board on 08/20/2020)

It is the policy of Lapeer Conservation District that all persons (except those persons incarcerated in local, state or federal correctional facilities) 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 public employees.

The people shall be informed so that they may fully participate in the democratic process.

Lapeer Conservation District (the District) acknowledges that it has a legal obligation to disclose all nonexempt public records in its possession pursuant to a FOIA request. The District acknowledges that sometimes it is necessary to invoke the exemptions identified under FOIA in order to ensure the effective operation of government and to protect the privacy of individuals.

Lapeer Conservation District will protect the public's interest in disclosure, while balancing the requirement to withhold or redact portions of certain records. The District's policy is to disclose public records consistent with and in compliance with State law.

The Lapeer Conservation District Board has established the following written procedures and guidelines to implement the FOIA policy.

Section 1: General Policies

The Lapeer Conservation District Board, acting pursuant to the authority at MCL 15.236, designates the District Manager as the FOIA Coordinator. He or she is authorized to designate other District staff to act on his or her behalf to accept and process written requests for the District's public records and approve denials.

- a) If a request for a public record is received by fax or email, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day.
- b) If a request is sent by email and delivered to a District spam or junk-mail folder, the request is not deemed received until one day after the FOIA Coordinator first becomes aware of the request.
- c) 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.
- d) The FOIA Coordinator shall review District spam and junk-mail folders on a regular basis, which shall be no less than once a month.
- e) The FOIA Coordinator may, in his or her discretion, implement administrative rules, consistent with State law and these Procedures and Guidelines to administer the acceptance and processing of FOIA requests.

- f) The District is not obligated to create a new public record or make a compilation or summary of information which does not already exist. Neither the FOIA Coordinator nor other District staff are obligated to provide answers to questions contained in requests for public records or regarding the content of the records themselves.
- g) The FOIA Coordinator shall keep a copy of all written requests for public records received by the District on file for a period of at least one year.
- h) The District will make this Procedures and Guidelines document publicly available without charge. If it does not, the District cannot require deposits or charge fees otherwise permitted under the FOIA until it complies.
- i) A copy of this Procedures and Guidelines document will be publicly available by providing free copies both in the District's response to a written request and upon request by visitors at the District's office. This Procedures and Guidelines document will also be maintained on the District's website: www.lapeercd.org.

Section 2: Submitting a FOIA Request

- a) Requests to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by the District may be submitted on the District's FOIA Request Form, or in any other form of writing (letter, fax, email, etc.), or by verbal request. Verbal requests may be recorded by the District on the FOIA Request Form.
- b) A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable the District to find it.
- c) No specific form to submit a written request is required. However, a FOIA Request Form is available at www.lapeercd.org, and at the District's office: 700 S. Main St. Suite 120-C Lapeer, MI 48446.
- d) A request from a person, other than an individual who qualifies as indigent under MCL 15.234(2)(a), must include the requesting person's name, address, and contact information, and, if the request is made by a person other than an individual, the complete name, address, and contact information of the person's agent who is an individual. An address must be written in compliance with United States Postal Service addressing standards. Contact information must include a valid telephone number or electronic mail address.
- e) Written requests may be delivered to the District's office in person or by mail: Attn: District Manager or FOIA Coordinator, 700 S. Main St. Suite 120-C Lapeer, MI 48446.
- f) Requests may be faxed to: (855) 781-2331. To ensure a prompt response, faxed requests should contain the term "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" on the first/cover page.
- g) Requests may be emailed to: admin@lapeercd.org. To ensure a prompt response, email requests should contain the term "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the subject line.
- h) A person may request that public records be provided on non-paper physical media, emailed or otherwise provided to him or her in digital form in lieu of paper copies. The District will comply with the request only if it possesses the necessary technological capability to provide records in the requested non-paper physical media format.

Section 3: Processing a Request

- a) Unless otherwise agreed to in writing by the person making the request, after receiving a FOIA request the District will issue a response within 5 business days. If a request is received by fax or email, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. The District will respond to your request in one of the following ways:
 1. Grant the request,
 2. Issue a written notice denying the request,
 3. Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request,
 4. Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request the District needs an additional 10 business days to respond, or
 5. Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on the District's website
- b) If the request is granted, or granted in part, the District will ask that payment be made in full for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available.
- c) The FOIA Coordinator shall provide a detailed itemization of the allowable estimated costs to process the request and also provide a best effort estimate of a time frame it will take the District to provide the records to the requestor. The best efforts estimate shall be nonbinding on the District, but will be made in good faith and will strive to be reasonably accurate, given the nature of the request in the particular instance, so as to provide the requested records in a manner based on the public policy expressed by Section 1 of the FOIA.
- d) If the cost of processing the request is expected to exceed \$50, or if the requestor has not paid for a previously granted request, the District will require a deposit before processing the request. See Section 4.
- e) If the request is denied or denied in part, the FOIA Coordinator will issue a Notice of Denial which shall provide:
 1. An explanation as to why a requested public record is exempt from disclosure; or
 2. A certificate that the requested record does not exist under the name or description provided by the requestor, or another name reasonably known by the District; or
 3. An explanation or description of the public record or information within a public record that is separated or deleted from the public record; and
 4. An explanation of the person's right to submit an appeal of the denial to either the Lapeer Conservation District Board or seek judicial review in the Lapeer County Circuit Court;
 5. An explanation of the right to receive attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements as well as actual or compensatory damages, and punitive damages of \$1,000, should they prevail in Circuit Court.
 6. A Notice of Denial signed by the FOIA Coordinator.
- f) 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.

- g) The District 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 District records from loss, alteration, mutilation or destruction and to prevent excessive interference with normal District operations.
- h) 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: Deposit Requirements

- a) If the District has made a good faith calculation that the total fee for processing the request will exceed \$50.00, the District will require that you provide a deposit in the amount of 50% of the total estimated fee. When the District requests the deposit, it will provide you a non-binding best efforts estimate of how long it will take to process the request after you have paid your deposit.
- b) If the District receives a request from a person who has not paid the District for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the District will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before it begins to search for the public record for any subsequent written request when all of the following conditions exist:
 - 1. The final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
 - 2. The public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the District's possession;
 - 3. The public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the best effort time frame estimated by the District to provide the records;
 - 4. Ninety (90) days have passed since the District notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
 - 5. The individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the District; and
 - 6. The District has calculated an estimated detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased fee deposit.
- c) If a deposit that is required under MCL 15.234(8) or MCL 15.234(11) is not received by Lapeer Conservation District within 45 days from receipt by the requesting person of the notice that a deposit is required, and if the requesting person has not filed an appeal of the deposit amount pursuant, the request shall be considered abandoned by the requesting person and Lapeer Conservation District is no longer required to fulfill the request. Notice of a deposit requirement under MCL 15.234(8) or MCL 15.234(11) is considered received three days after it is sent, regardless of the means of transmission. Notice of a deposit requirement under MCL 15.234(8) or MCL 15.234(11) must include the date by which the deposit must be received, which is 48 days after the date the notice is sent.

- d) The District will not require the 100% estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:
1. The person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the District;
 2. The District is subsequently paid in full for all applicable prior written requests; or
 3. Three hundred sixty-five (365) days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the District.

Section 5: Calculation of Processing Fees

- a) The Michigan FOIA statute permits the District to charge for the following costs associated with processing a request:

1. Labor costs associated with copying or duplication, which includes making paper copies, making digital copies, or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet.
2. Labor costs associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the District.
3. Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the District.
4. The cost of copying or duplication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the District's website if you ask for the District to make copies.
5. The cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media when the requester asks for records in non-paper physical media. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the District's website if you ask for the District to make copies.
6. The cost to mail or send a public record to a requestor.

- b) Labor Costs

1. All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15-minute increments, with all partial time increments rounded down. If the time involved is less than 15 minutes, there will be no charge.
2. Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid District employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.
3. Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits. The District 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.
4. Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs unless agreed to by the requestor; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.
5. Contracted labor costs will be charged at 6 times the state minimum hourly wage.
6. A labor cost will not be charged for the 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 District. Costs are unreasonably high when they are excessive and beyond the normal or usual amount for those services compared to the District's usual FOIA requests, because of the nature of the request in this particular instance. The following factors shall be used to determine an unreasonably high cost to the District:

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

c) Copying and Duplication

1. The cost for records provided on non-paper physical media, such as computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
2. This cost will be charged only if the District has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.
3. The District will procure any non-paper media and will not accept media from the requestor in order to ensure integrity of the District's technology infrastructure.
4. 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.
 - The District must use the most economical method for making copies of public records, including using double-sided printing.
 - Copies for non-standard sized sheets of paper will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.

d) Mailing Costs

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

1. The actual cost to mail public records will use a reasonably economic justified means.
2. The District may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
3. No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless requested.

e) If the FOIA Coordinator does not respond to a written request in a timely manner, the District must:

1. Reduce the labor costs by 5% for each day the District exceeds the time permitted under FOIA up to a 50% maximum reduction, if any of the following applies:
 - The District's late response was willful and intentional,

- The written request conveyed a request for information within the first 250 words of the body of a letter facsimile, email or email attachment, or
- The written request included the words, characters, or abbreviations for “freedom of information,” “information,” “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 email, letter or facsimile cover page.

2. Fully note the charge reduction.

Section 6: Waiver of Fees

The cost of the search for and copying of a public record may be waived or reduced if in the sole judgment of the FOIA Coordinator a waiver or reduced fee is in the public interest because it can be considered as primarily benefitting the general public. The Lapeer Conservation District Board of Directors may identify specific records or types of records it deems should be made available for no charge or at a reduced cost.

Section 7: Discounted Fees

a) Indigence

The District will discount the first \$20.00 of fees for a request if you submit an affidavit (a sworn statement) stating that you are:

1. Indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
2. If not receiving public assistance, stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigence.

You are **not** eligible to receive the \$20.00 discount if you:

1. Have previously received discounted copies of public records from the District twice during the calendar year; or
2. Are requesting information on behalf of other persons who are offering or providing payment to you to make the request.

b) Nonprofit Organization

A nonprofit organization advocating for developmentally disabled or mentally ill individuals that is formally designated by the state to carry out activities under subtitle C of the federal developmental disabilities assistance and bill of rights act of 2000, Public Law 106-402, and the protection and advocacy for individuals with mental illness act, Public Law 99-319, may receive a \$20.00 discount if the request meets all of the following requirements in the Act:

1. Is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients.
2. Is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the mental health code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931.
3. Is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the state, if requested by the public body.

Section 8: Appeal of the denial of a public record

If you believe that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, you may appeal to the District Board of Directors by filing a written appeal of the denial at the District office.

The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word “appeal,” and identify the reason or reasons you are seeking a reversal of the denial.

The District Board of Directors is not considered to have received a written appeal until the first regularly scheduled Board meeting following submission of the written appeal. Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the District Board of Directors 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, issue a notice extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the District Board shall respond to the written appeal. The District Board shall not issue more than 1 notice of extension for a particular written appeal.

If the District Board fails to respond to a written appeal, or if the District Board upholds all or a portion of the disclosure denial that is the subject of the written appeal, the requesting person may seek judicial review of the nondisclosure by commencing a civil action in Circuit Court.

Whether or not a requestor submitted an appeal of a denial to the District Board, he or she may file a civil action in Lapeer County Circuit Court within 180 days after the District's final determination to deny the request.

If a court determines a public record is not exempt from disclosure, it shall order the District to cease withholding or to produce all or a portion of a public record wrongfully withheld, regardless of the location of the public record. Failure to comply with an order of the court may be punished as contempt of court.

If a person asserting the right to inspect, copy, or receive a copy of all or a portion of a public record prevails in such an action, the court shall award reasonable attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements. If the person or District prevails in part, the court may, in its discretion, award all or an appropriate portion of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements.

If the court determines that the District has arbitrarily and capriciously violated this act by refusal or delay in disclosing or providing copies of a public record, the court shall order the District to pay a civil fine of \$1,000, which shall be deposited into the general fund of the state treasury. The court shall award, in addition to any actual or compensatory damages, punitive damages in the amount of \$1,000 to the person seeking the right to inspect or receive a copy of a public record. The damages shall not be assessed against an individual, but shall be assessed against the next succeeding public body that is not an individual and that kept or maintained the public record as part of its public function.

Section 9: Appeal of an Excess FOIA Processing Fee

“Fee” means the total fee or any component of the total fee calculated under section 4 of the FOIA, including any deposit.

If the requestor believes that the fee charged by the District to process a FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law or under this policy, he/she must first appeal to the District Board of Directors by filing a written appeal for a fee reduction to the office of the District Manager.

The appeal must be in writing and specifically state the word “appeal” and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted.

The District Board of Directors is not considered to have received a written appeal until the first regularly scheduled District Board meeting following submission of the written appeal. Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the District Lapeer CD Board of Directors will respond in writing by:

- Waiving the fee;
- Reducing the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee;
- Upholding the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the required fee; or
- Issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the District Board of Directors will respond to the written appeal. The District Board shall not issue more than 1 notice of extension for a particular written appeal.

Where the District Board reduces or upholds the fee, the determination must include a certification from the District Board that the statements in the determination are accurate and that the reduced fee amount complies with its publicly available procedures and guidelines and Section 4 of the FOIA.

Within 45 days after receiving notice of the District Board’s determination of an appeal, the requesting person may commence a civil action in Clinton County Circuit Court for a fee reduction.

If a civil action is commenced against the District for an excess fee, the District is not obligated to complete the processing of the written request for the public record at issue until the court resolves the fee dispute.

An action shall not be filed in circuit court unless **one** of the following applies:

- The District does not provide for appeals of fees,
- The District Board failed to respond to a written appeal as required, or
- The District Board issued a determination to a written appeal.

If a court determines that the District required a fee that exceeds the amount permitted under its publicly available procedures and guidelines or Section 4 of the FOIA, the court shall reduce the fee to a permissible amount. Failure to comply with an order of the court may be punished as contempt of court.

If the requesting person prevails in court by receiving a reduction of 50% or more of the total fee, the court may, in its discretion, award all or an appropriate portion of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs, and disbursements. The award shall be assessed against the public body liable for damages.

If the court determines that the District has arbitrarily and capriciously violated the FOIA by charging an excessive fee, the court shall order the District to pay a civil fine of \$500.00, which shall be deposited in the general fund of the state treasury. The court may also award, in addition to any actual or compensatory damages, punitive damages in the amount of \$500 to the person seeking the fee reduction. The fine and any damages shall not be assessed against an individual but shall be assessed against the next succeeding public body that is not an individual and that kept or maintained the public record as part of its public function.

Section 10: Conflict with Prior FOIA Policies and Procedures; Effective Date

To the extent that these Procedures and Guidelines conflict with previous FOIA policies promulgated by District Board these Procedures and Guidelines are controlling. To the extent that any administrative rule promulgated by the FOIA Coordinator subsequent to the adoption of this resolution is found to be in conflict with any previous policy promulgated by the District Board or the District Administration, the administrative rule promulgated by the FOIA Coordinator is 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. The FOIA Coordinator is authorized to modify this policy and all previous policies adopted by the District Board, and to adopt such administrative rules as he or she may deem necessary, to facilitate the legal review and processing of requests for public records made pursuant to Michigan's FOIA statute, provided that such modifications and rules are consistent with State law. The FOIA Coordinator shall inform the District Board of any change these Policies and Guidelines.

These FOIA Policies and Guidelines become effective August 20, 2020