

# **Rights & Responsibilities:**

## **The Rights of Requesters and the Responsibilities of Dinwiddie County Under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act**

The Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), located § 2.2-3700 et seq. of the Code of Virginia, guarantees citizens of the Commonwealth and representatives of the media access to public records held by public bodies, public officials, and public employees.

A public record is any writing or recording -- regardless of whether it is a paper record, an electronic file, an audio or video recording, or any other format -- that is prepared or owned by, or in the possession of a public body or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business. All public records are presumed to be open, and may only be withheld if a specific, statutory exemption applies.

The policy of FOIA states that the purpose of FOIA is to promote an increased awareness by all persons of governmental activities. In furthering this policy, FOIA requires that the law be interpreted liberally, in favor of access, and that any exemption allowing public records to be withheld must be interpreted narrowly.

### **FOIA Rights of Virginia Citizens and Certain Media Members**

- You have the right to request to inspect **or** receive copies of public records, or both.
- You have the right to request that any charges for the requested records be estimated in advance.
- If you believe that your FOIA rights have been violated, you may file a petition in district or circuit court to compel compliance with FOIA. Alternatively, you may contact the FOIA Council for a nonbinding advisory opinion.

### **Making a Request for records from Dinwiddie County**

- You may request records by U.S. Mail, fax, e-mail, in person, or over the phone. FOIA does not require that your request be in writing, nor do you need to specifically state that you are requesting records under FOIA.
  - From a practical perspective, it may be helpful to both you and the person receiving your request to put your request in writing. This allows you to create a record of your request. It also gives us a clear statement of what records you are requesting, so that there is no misunderstanding over a verbal request. However, we cannot refuse to respond to your FOIA request if you elect to not put it in writing.
- Your request must identify the records you are seeking with "reasonable specificity." This is a common-sense standard. It does not refer to or limit the volume or number of

records that you are requesting; instead, it requires that you be specific enough so that we can identify and locate the records that you are seeking.

- Your request must ask for existing records or documents. FOIA gives you a right to inspect or copy **records**; it does not apply to a situation where you are asking general questions about the work of Dinwiddie County nor does it require Dinwiddie County to create a record that does not exist.
- You may choose to receive electronic records in any format used by Dinwiddie County in the regular course of business.
  - For example, if you are requesting records maintained in an Excel database, you may elect to receive those records electronically, via e-mail or on a computer disk, or to receive a printed copy of those records.
- If we have questions about your request, please cooperate with staff's efforts to clarify the type of records that you are seeking, or to attempt to reach a reasonable agreement about a response to a large request. Making a FOIA request is not an adversarial process, but we may need to discuss your request with you to ensure that we understand what records you are seeking.

**To request records from Dinwiddie County you may direct your request as follows:**

Requests regarding the Board of Supervisors, County Administration, Planning & Zoning, Parks & Recreation, Economic Development, Finance, Procurement, or General Services can be directed to Heather Jennings, Paralegal, at (804) 469-4500 option 1, ext. 2149, or email [hjennings@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:hjennings@dinwiddieva.us).

Requests regarding Fire & EMS can be directed to Amanda Archer Program Support Specialist, at (804) 469-5388, or email [aarcher@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:aarcher@dinwiddieva.us).

Requests regarding Social Services can be directed to Kathy Vaughan at (804) 469-4524, or email [Kathy.vaughan@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:Kathy.vaughan@dss.virginia.gov).

**There are five constitutional officers for Dinwiddie County: the Clerk of the Circuit Court, the Commissioner of the Revenue, the Commonwealth's Attorney, the Sheriff, and the Treasurer. These constitutional officers are directly elected by the voters of the County of Dinwiddie and are separate and independent from the County of Dinwiddie and the Board of Supervisors of Dinwiddie County, Virginia, and their employees are not employees of the County of Dinwiddie. However, for the purposes of this FOIA Rights and Responsibilities statement, references to Dinwiddie County shall apply to the County of Dinwiddie and the Board of Supervisors of Dinwiddie County, Virginia as well as the five constitutional officers for the County of Dinwiddie.**

**To request records from the constitutional officers for Dinwiddie County you may direct your request as follows:**

Requests regarding the Clerk of the Circuit Court's Office can be directed to Heather Jennings at (804) 469-4500 x2149, or [hjennings@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:hjennings@dinwiddieva.us).

Requests regarding the Commissioner of the Revenue's Office can be directed to Troy Taylor, Deputy Commissioner of the Revenue, at (804) 469-4500 x2123, or email [ttaylor@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:ttaylor@dinwiddieva.us).

Requests regarding the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office can be directed to Jonathan Bourlier, Commonwealth's Attorney, at (804) 469-4536, or email [jboulier@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:jboulier@dinwiddieva.us)

Request regarding the Sheriff's Office can be directed to William Knott, Major, at (804) 469-4550, or email [wknott@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:wknott@dinwiddieva.us).

Requests regarding the Treasurer's Office can be directed to Heather Jennings, Paralegal, at (804) 469-4500 x2149, or [hjennings@dinwiddieva.us](mailto:hjennings@dinwiddieva.us).

**In addition, the Freedom of Information Advisory Council is available to answer any questions you may have about FOIA. The Council may be contacted by e-mail at [foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov](mailto:foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov), or by phone at (804) 225-3056 or toll free 1-866-448-4100.**

## **Dinwiddie County's Responsibilities in Responding to Your Request**

- Dinwiddie County must respond to your request within five working days of receiving it. "Day One" is considered the day after your request is received. The five-day period does not include weekends or holidays.
- The reason behind your request for public records from Dinwiddie County is irrelevant, and you do not have to state why you want the records before we respond to your request. FOIA does, however, allow Dinwiddie County to require you to provide your name and legal address.
- FOIA requires that Dinwiddie County make one of the following responses to your request within the five-day time period:
  - 1) We provide you with the records that you have requested in their entirety.
  - 2) We withhold all of the records that you have requested, because all of the records are subject to a specific statutory exemption. If all of the records are being withheld, we must send you a response in writing. That writing must identify the volume and subject matter of the records being withheld, and state the specific section of the Code of Virginia that allows us to withhold the records.
  - 3) We provide some of the records that you have requested, but withhold other records. We cannot withhold an entire record if only a portion of it is subject to an exemption. In that instance, we may redact the portion of the record that may be withheld, and must provide you with the remainder of the record. We must provide you with a written response stating the specific section of the Code of Virginia that allows portions of the requested records to be withheld.
  - 4) We inform you in writing that the requested records cannot be found or do not exist (we do not have the records you want). However, if we know that another public body has the requested records, we must include contact information for the other public body in our response to you.
  - 5) If it is practically impossible for Dinwiddie County to respond to your request within the five-day period, we must state this in writing, explaining the conditions that make the response impossible. This will allow us seven additional working days to respond to your request, giving us a total of 12 working days to respond to your request.

- If you make a request for a very large number of records, and we feel that we cannot provide the records to you within 12 working days without disrupting our other organizational responsibilities, we may petition the court for additional time to respond to your request. However, FOIA requires that we make a reasonable effort to reach an agreement with you concerning the production of the records before we go to court to ask for more time.

## Costs

- A public body may make reasonable charges not to exceed its actual cost incurred in accessing, duplicating, supplying, or searching for the requested records. No public body shall impose any extraneous, intermediary, or surplus fees or expenses to recoup the general costs associated with creating or maintaining records or transacting the general business of the public body. Any duplicating fee charged by a public body shall not exceed the actual cost of duplication. All charges for the supplying of requested records shall be estimated in advance at the request of the citizen as set forth in subsection F of § 2.2-3704 of the Code of Virginia.
- You may have to pay for the records that you request from Dinwiddie County. FOIA allows us to charge for the actual costs of responding to FOIA requests. This would include items like staff time spent searching for the requested records, copying costs, or any other costs directly related to supplying the requested records. It cannot include general overhead costs.
- Reasonable charges as allowed by FOIA will generally be assessed to the requester; however the reasonable charge is waived for two requests per calendar year provided that the total cost for each such request is under \$200. After two requests from the same requestor, business, or attorney's office in one calendar year or for responses in which the total cost exceeds \$200, the entire actual cost is applied to the request. Requestor is charged the hourly rate of county employee time spent searching for the requested records. Requester could also be charged for printing, if the request cannot be answered in an electronic format, for a request over 50 pages, and postage.
- If we estimate that it will cost more than \$200 to respond to your request, we may require you to pay a deposit, not to exceed the amount of the estimate, before proceeding with your request. The five days that we have to respond to your request does not include the time between when we ask for a deposit and when you respond.
- You will be notified prior to request being fulfilled if their request may incur any costs. You may request that we estimate in advance the charges for supplying the records that they have requested. This will allow you to know about any costs upfront, or give you the opportunity to modify their request in an attempt to lower the estimated costs. If an estimate for cost is left unanswered by you for more than 30 days, it is considered withdrawn.
- If you owe us money from a previous FOIA request that has remained unpaid for more than 30 days, Dinwiddie County may require payment of the past-due bill before it will respond to your new FOIA request.

## **Types of records**

Dinwiddie County maintains various records necessary for the operation of local government.

## **Commonly used exemptions**

The Code of Virginia allows any public body to withhold certain records from public disclosure. Dinwiddie County commonly withholds records subject to the following exemptions:

- Personnel records (§ 2.2-3705.1 (1) of the Code of Virginia)
- Records subject to attorney-client privilege (§ 2.2-3705.1 (2)) or attorney work product (§ 2.2-3705.1(3))
- Vendor proprietary information (§ 2.2-3705.1(6))
- Records relating to the negotiation and award of a contract, prior to a contract being awarded (§ 2.2-3705.1(12))
- Persona Contact Information (§2.2-3705.1(10))
- Health Records (§2.2-3705.5(1))
- Criminal Investigative Files (§2.2-3706(B)(1))
- Victim/Witness/Undercover Office (§2.2-3706(B)(10))
- Anonymous Witness (§2.2-3706(B)(10))
- Noncriminal Record (§2.2-3706(D))
- Social Security Number (§2.2-3815)
- Confidential Taxpayer Information (§58.1-3)
- Other exemptions may be applicable

## **Policy regarding the use of exemptions**

*The County does not have any written policy regarding statutory exemptions. Exemptions are exercised on a case by case basis.*