

**RICHLAND TOWNSHIP
RIGHT-TO-KNOW POLICY FOR PUBLIC RECORDS**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Township of Richland of Allegheny County (“Township”) is a local agency for purposes of the Right-to- Know Law, Act 3 of 2008 (“Act”).

A. Access to Public Records

The Township shall provide public records in accordance with the Right-to-Know Law. Public records shall be available for inspection, retrieval, and duplication at the township office during normal business hours (Monday-Friday: 8:30 AM- 4:30 PM), with the exception of township-designated holidays. Therefore, any record in the possession of the Township shall be presumed to be a public record, except in the following circumstances:

- (a) The record is exempt under section 708 of the Right-to-Know Law;
- (b) The record is protected by the attorney-work product doctrine, the attorney-client privilege, or other privilege recognized by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (i.e., statute or case law); or
- (c) The record is exempt from disclosure under any other federal or state law or regulation, or judicial order or decree.

B. Definition of Record

Records are broadly defined under the Right-to-Know Law. The term includes a document, paper, letter, map, book, tape, photograph, film or sound recording, information stored or maintained electronically, and a data-processed or image-processed document, and which documents a transaction or activity of the Township and that is created, received, or retained pursuant to law or in connection with a transaction, business, or activity of the Township.

C. Who Can Request Records

Requests for public records can be made by any person or who is a legal resident of the United States, including resident aliens. Anonymous requests will not be accepted. A full name, valid mailing address, and contact information shall be provided to be considered a legal resident of the United States. Requests to the Township can also be made by other local agencies, Commonwealth agencies (e.g., The Department of the Auditor General or the Treasury Department), judicial agencies (i.e., the courts), or legislative agencies (e.g., the Senate and House of Representatives).

II. ACCESS AND PROCEDURE

A. Form of Request

Requests shall be made in writing to the township's Open Records Officer on the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records' Standard Right-to-Know Request Form. The standard form can be found on the township's website, on the Pennsylvania Office of Open Records' official website, or the requester can retrieve a paper form at the office during regular business hours. A written request for access to records may be submitted in person, by mail, by e-mail, or by facsimile. No telephone requests will be accepted.

B. Open Records Officer

The Township has designated the Assistant Township Manager, which office is currently held by Natalie Thiess, to act as the Open Records Officer ("Officer"). The Officer's contact information is set forth below:

Township Open Records Officer
Attn: Natalie Thiess
Township of Richland
4019 Dickey Road
Gibsonia, PA 15044-9731
Phone: (412) 443-5921

Fax: (412) 443-8860
E-mail: info@richland.pa.us

The Township has designated the Land Use Administrator, which office is currently held by George Anderson, and the Administrative Assistant to the Township Manager, which office is currently held by Christine Castora, to act as the Alternate Open Records Officers ("Alternate Officers"), in the event the Officer is unavailable or otherwise unable to perform the duties of the position. The address, phone and fax numbers and email address for the Alternate Officers are the same as that for the Officer.

Questions regarding this policy may be directed to the Officer at the telephone or e-mail address listed above.

All written requests must be addressed to the Agency (Richland Township, Allegheny County)

C. Content of Request

Written requests should identify or describe the record sought with sufficient specificity to enable the Township to ascertain which records are being requested. Unless otherwise required by law, a written request need not include any explanation of the requester's reason for requesting the records or the intended use of such records. Anonymous written, e-mail, fax or in person requests shall not be accepted. The Township may track each filed form by number or otherwise, so as to track the Township's progress in responding to requests under the Right-to-Know Law.

D. Payment of Fees

Prior to granting a request for access in accordance with the Right-to-Know Law, the Township may require a requester to prepay an estimate of the fees authorized by law, if the fees required to fulfill the request are expected to exceed \$100.00. The fees must be reasonable and based on prevailing fees for comparable duplication services provided by

local business entities. Except as otherwise provided by statute, no other fees may be imposed unless the agency necessarily incurs costs for complying with the request, and such fees must be reasonable.

In all circumstances, the requester must agree to pay applicable fees authorized by the new Right-to-Know Law, such as (but not limited to) postage (not to exceed actual cost of mailing), duplication and certification. **All applicable fees shall be paid before a requester receives access to the record(s) requested.**

The fee structure shall follow the fee structure then adopted by the Office of Open Records, a copy of which is attached to this Policy. The copy fee for a standard 8.5" x 11" black and white document is \$.25 per page.

E. Form of Record Supplied

A record being provided to a requester shall be provided in the medium requested if it exists in that medium; otherwise, it shall be provided in the medium in which it exists. **The Township shall not be required to create a record which does not currently exist or to otherwise compile, maintain, format or organize a record in a manner in which it does not currently compile, maintain, format or organize such record.** The Township may impose fees in accordance with the Office of Open Records fee structure (current Fee Structure attached as Appendix A), for official certification of copies if the certification is at the behest of the requester and for the purpose of legally verifying the public record.

F. Steps for Open Records Officer to Follow

Upon receipt of a written request for a public record, the Officer shall do the following:

- (a) Note the date of the receipt on the written request;

- (b) Compute the day on which the five-day period (see discussion of response, below) will expire, and make a notation of that date on the written request; and
- (c) Create a file for the retention of the original request, a copy of the response, a record of written communications with the requester, and a copy of other communications.

III. TOWNSHIP'S RESPONSE

A. Initial Determination

Upon receipt of a written request addressed to the Officer and seeking access to a record, the Township shall make a good faith effort to determine if the record requested is a public record and whether the Township has possession, custody or control of the identified record. When doing so, the Township will respond as promptly as possible under the circumstances existing at the time of the request. **Under the Right-to-Know Law, the Township must send a response within five (5) business days of receipt of the written request for access, or else the written request shall be deemed denied.** For purposes of this policy, a business day is any Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday or Friday, except those days when the Township's office is closed for all or part of a day due to a holiday.

B. Prepare Appropriate Response Form

Upon receipt of a written request for access, the Officer shall determine if one of the following applies:

- (a) The request for access requires redaction of a record in accordance with the Right-to-Know Law;
- (b) The request for access requires the retrieval of a record stored in a remote location;
- (c) A timely response to the request for access cannot be accomplished due

to bona fide and specified staffing limitations;

- (d) A legal review is necessary to determine whether the record is a record subject to access under the Right-to-Know Law;
- (e) The requester has not complied with the Township's policies regarding access to records;
- (f) The requester refuses to pay applicable fees authorized by the Right-to-Know Law; or
- (g) The extent or nature of the request precludes a response within the required time period of five (5) business days.

Upon the determination that one or more of the factors listed above applies, the Officer shall send written notice to the requester within five (5) business days of receipt of the request for access. The notice shall include a statement notifying the requester that the request for access is being reviewed, the reason for the review, a reasonable date that a response is expected to be provided, and an estimate of applicable fees owed when the record becomes available. Information which the Township redacts in accordance with the Right-to-Know Law shall be deemed a denial.

If the date that a response is expected to be provided is in excess of thirty (30) calendar days, following the five (5) business days allowed for above, the request for access shall be deemed denied unless the requester has agreed in writing to an extension to the date specified in the notice. If the requester agrees to the extension, the request shall be deemed denied on the day following the date specified in the notice if the Township has not provided a response by that date.

For purposes of this policy, the "mailing date" shall be the date affixed to a: (1) response from the Officer to a request, which is to be the date the response is deposited in

the U.S. mail; (2) final determination from the Officer, which is to be the date the final determination is deposited in the U.S. mail.

IV. APPEAL OF TOWNSHIP'S DETERMINATION

If a written request for access to a record is denied or deemed denied, the requester may file an appeal with the Office of Open Records within fifteen (15) business days of the mailing date of the Township's response or within fifteen (15) business days of a deemed denial. The appeal shall state the grounds upon which the requester asserts that the record is a public record and shall address any grounds stated by the Township for delaying or denying the request.

V. ACCESS TO EXEMPT RECORDS

The Township in its discretion may disclose exempt records upon following the standards set forth in § 506(c) of the Act, upon completion of the Township's Certification of Access to Exempt Records, Appendix B, by the Open Records Officer and upon notification to appropriate third parties under § 707(a) of the Act.

VI. TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS

Elected and appointed Township officers shall be provided with public records for their personal use, without need to complete a written request form and without charge for the first six photocopies requested by such official per month.

VII. TOWNSHIP WEBSITE

Township operates a website (richland.pa.us) and makes public records available thereon, requesters will be advised upon their first request of their ability to obtain such records from the website pursuant to § 704 of the Act. Requesters may nevertheless request that a website

record be converted to paper under § 704(b).