

**PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY**  
**FOR**  
**UNICOI COUNTY, TENNESSEE**

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(g), the following Public Records Policy for Unicoi County, Tennessee is hereby adopted by the Unicoi County Commission to provide economical and efficient access to public records as provided under the Tennessee Public Records Act (TPRA) in Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-501 et seq.

The TPRA provides that all state, county and municipal records shall, at all times during business hours, which for public hospitals shall be during the business hours of their administrative offices, be open for personal inspection by any citizen of this state, and those in charge of the records shall not refuse such right of inspection to any citizen, unless otherwise provided by state law. See Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(a)(2)(A). Accordingly, the public records of Unicoi County are presumed to be open for inspection unless otherwise provided by law.

Personnel of Unicoi County shall timely and efficiently provide access and assistance to persons requesting to view or receive copies of public records. No provisions of this Policy shall be used to hinder access to open public records. However, the integrity and organization of public records, as well as the efficient and safe operation of Unicoi County, shall be protected as provided by current law. Concerns about this Policy should be addressed to the Public Records Request Coordinator for Unicoi County or to the Tennessee Office of Open Records Counsel (“OORC”). This Policy is available for inspection and duplication in the office of the County Mayor. This policy is posted on the County’s website at [www.unicoicountytn.gov](http://www.unicoicountytn.gov). This Policy shall be reviewed every two years.

This Policy shall be applied consistently throughout the various offices, departments, and/or divisions of Unicoi County except the following offices, departments, or divisions of Unicoi County, which have separate public records policies:

- a. Unicoi County Schools
- b. Unicoi County Health Department

**I. Definitions:**

A. Records Custodian: The office, official or employee lawfully responsible for the direct custody and care of a public record. See Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(a)(1)(C). The records custodian is not necessarily the original preparer or receiver of the record.

B. Public Records: All documents, papers, letters, maps, books, photographs, microfilms, electronic data processing files and output, films, sound recordings, or other material, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received pursuant to law or

ordinance or in connection with the transaction of official business by any governmental agency. See Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(a)(1)(A).

C. Public Records Request Coordinator: The individual, or individuals, designated in Section III, A.3 of this Policy who has, or have, the responsibility to ensure public record requests are routed to the appropriate records custodian and are fulfilled in accordance with the TPRA. See Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(a)(1)(B).

D. Requestor: A person seeking access to a public record, whether it is for inspection or duplication

## **II. Requesting Access to Public Records**

A. Public record requests may be made to the Public Records Request Coordinator (“PRRC”) or any Elected or Appointed Official of Unicoi County. In the event that the Elected or Appointed Official need assistance with following the TPRA requirements, the Elected or Appointed Official shall immediately provide the request to the PRRC in order to ensure public records are fulfilled in a timely manner.

B. Requests for inspection only cannot be required to be made in writing. The PRRC should request a mailing or email address from the requestor for providing any written communication required under the TPRA.

C. Requests for inspection may be made orally or in writing, using the Public Records Request Form attached to this policy, to any Elected or Appointed Official of Unicoi County.

D. Requests for copies, or requests for inspection and copies, shall be made in writing, using the Public Records Request Form attached to this policy, to any Elected or Appointed Official of Unicoi County.

E. Proof of Tennessee citizenship by presentation of a valid Tennessee driver’s license (or alternative acceptable form of ID) is required as a condition to inspect or receive copies of public records.

## **III. Responding to Public Records Requests**

### **A. Public Record Request Coordinator**

1. The PRRC shall review public record requests and make an initial determination of the following:

- a. If the requestor provided evidence of Tennessee citizenship;
- b. If the records requested are described with sufficient specificity to identify them; and

- c. If the Governmental Entity is the custodian of the records.
2. The PRRC shall acknowledge receipt of the request and take any of the following appropriate action(s):
- a. Advise the requestor of this Policy and the elections made regarding:
    - i. Proof of Tennessee citizenship;
    - ii. Form(s) required for copies;
    - iii. Fees (and labor threshold); and
    - iv. Aggregation of multiple or frequent requests.
  - b. If appropriate, deny the request in writing, providing the appropriate ground such as one of the following:
    - i. The requestor is not, or has not presented evidence of being, a Tennessee citizen.
    - ii. The request lacks specificity. (Offer to assist in clarification)
    - iii. An exemption makes the record not subject to disclosure under the TPRA. (Provide the exemption in written denial)
    - iv. The Governmental Entity is not the custodian of the requested records.
    - v. The records do not exist.
  - c. If appropriate, contact the requestor to see if the request can be narrowed.
  - d. Forward the records request to the appropriate records custodian in Unicoi County.
  - e. If requested records are in the custody of a different governmental entity, and the PRRC knows the correct governmental entity, advise the requestor of the correct governmental entity and PRRC for that entity if known.

3. The designated PRRC(s) is:

- a. Name or title: Unicoi County Attorney
- b. Contact information: Shults Law Offices  
111 Gay Street  
P.O. Box 129  
Erwin, TN 37650-0129  
(423) 743-9179 Fax (423) 743-3924  
doug@shultsandshults.com

## B. Records Custodian

1. Upon receiving a public records request, a records custodian shall promptly make requested public records available in accordance with Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503. If the records custodian is uncertain that an applicable exemption applies, the custodian may consult with the PRRC, counsel, or the OORC.
2. If not practicable to promptly provide requested records because additional time is necessary to determine whether the requested records exist; to search for, retrieve, or otherwise gain access to records; to determine whether the records are open; to redact records; or for other similar reasons, then a records custodian shall, within seven (7) business days from the records custodian's receipt of the request, send the requestor a completed Public Records Request Response Form similar to the Form attached to this Policy, which is based on the form developed by the OORC.
3. If a records custodian denies a public record request, he or she shall deny the request in writing as provided in Section III.A.2.b using the Public Records Request Response Form.
4. If a records custodian reasonably determines production of records should be segmented because the records request is for a large volume of records, or additional time is necessary to prepare the records for access, the records custodian shall use the Public Records Request Response Form to notify the requestor that production of the records will be in segments and that a records production schedule will be provided as expeditiously as practicable. If appropriate, the records custodian should contact the requestor to see if the request can be narrowed.
5. If a records custodian discovers records responsive to a records request were omitted, the records custodian should contact the requestor concerning the omission and produce the records as quickly as practicable.

## C. Redaction

1. If a record contains confidential information or information that is not open for public inspection, the records custodian shall prepare a redacted copy prior to providing access. If questions arise concerning redaction, the records custodian should coordinate with counsel or other appropriate parties regarding review and redaction of records. The records custodian and the PRRC may also consult with the OORC.
2. Whenever a redacted record is provided, a records custodian should provide the requestor with the basis for redaction. The basis given for redaction shall be general in nature and not disclose confidential information.

#### **IV. Inspection of Records**

- A. There shall be no charge for inspection of open public records.
- B. The location for inspection of records within the offices of Unicoi County should be determined by either the PRRC or the records custodian.
- C. Under reasonable circumstances, the PRRC or a records custodian may require an appointment for inspection or may require inspection of records at an alternate location

#### **V. Copies of Records**

- A. A records custodian shall promptly respond to a public record request for copies in the most economic and efficient manner practicable.
- B. Copies will be available for pickup at a location specified by the records custodian or PRRC.
- C. Upon payment for postage, copies will be delivered to the requestor's home address by the United States Postal Service. Upon payment, records may also be delivered by email if requested by the requestor.
- D. A requestor will be allowed to make copies of records with personal equipment, as long as the records do not contain confidential information or information that is not open for public inspection.

#### **VI. Fees and Charges and Procedures for Billing and Payment**

- A. Fees and charges for copies of public records should not be used to hinder access to public records.
- B. Records custodians shall provide requestors with an itemized estimate of the charges prior to producing copies of records and may require pre-payment of such charges before producing requested records.
- C. Fees and charges for copies are as follows (unless copier charges are set at a specific rate by statute, and in that event, fees and charges shall be as set by state law.):
  - 1. \$0.15 per page for letter- and legal-size black and white copies. If producing duplex (front and back) copies, a charge for two separate pages may be imposed for each single duplex copy.
  - 2. \$0.50 per page for letter- and legal-size color copies.
  - 3. Actual out-of-pocket costs for CDs, DVDs, flash drives, or other similar storage devised on which electronic copies are provided.

#### 4. Labor Charges

- a. A records custodian shall utilize the most cost efficient method of producing requested records. Accordingly, a records custodian should strive to utilize current employees at the lowest practicable hourly wage to fulfill public records requests for copies.
- b. "Labor" is the time (in hours) reasonably necessary to produce requested records, including the time spent locating, retrieving, reviewing redacting, and reproducing records.
- c. "Labor threshold" is the first (1<sup>st</sup>) hour of labor reasonably necessary to produce requested material(s). A records custodian is only permitted to charge for labor exceeding the labor threshold of one (1) hour.
- d. "Hourly wage of an employee" is based upon the base salary of the employee and does not include benefits. If any employee is not paid on an hourly basis, the hourly wage shall be determined by dividing the employee's annual salary by the required hours to be worked per year.
- e. In calculating labor charges, a records custodian should determine the total amount of labor for each employee and subtract the labor threshold from the labor of the highest paid employee. The records custodian should then multiply the amount of labor for each employee by each employee's hourly wage to calculate the total amount of labor charges associated with the request.

5. If an outside vendor is used, the actual costs assessed by the vendor.

D. Payment is to be made in cash or check, payable to Unicoi County, presented to the records custodian or the PRRC.

E. Payment in advance will be required.

#### F. Aggregation of Frequent and Multiple Requests

1. Unicoi County will aggregate record requests in accordance with the Frequent and Multiple Request Policy promulgated by the OORC when more than (4) requests are received within a calendar month either from a single individual or a group of individuals deemed to be working in concert.

2. When Aggregating the following shall apply:

- a. The level at which records requests will be aggregated is four (4).
- b. The PRRC is responsible for making the determination that a group of individuals are working in concert. The PRRC or the records custodian must inform the individuals that they have been deemed to be working in concert and that they have the right to appeal the decision to the OORC.

c. Routinely released and readily accessible records excluded from aggregation including, but are not limited to:

1. Accident Reports;
2. Arrest Records.

## PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST FORM

*The Tennessee Public Records Act (TPRA) grants Tennessee citizens the right to access open public records that exist at the time of the request. The TPRA does not require records custodians to compile information or create or recreate records that do not exist.*

**To:**

[Insert Governmental Entity Name and Name and Contact Information for the Public Records Request Coordinator]

**From:**

[Requestor's Name and Contact Information (include an address for any TPRA required written response)]

**Is the requestor a Tennessee citizen?**  Yes  No

**Request:**       Inspection (The TPRA does not permit fees or require a written request for inspection on1y<sup>1</sup>)

Copy/Duplicate

If costs for copies are assessed, the requestor has a right to receive an estimate. Do you wish to waive your right to an estimate and agree to pay copying and duplication costs in an amount not to exceed \$\_\_\_\_\_ ? If so, initial here: \_\_\_\_\_

Delivery preference:     On-Site Pick-Up       USPS First-Class Mail  
 Electronic                       Other:\_\_\_\_\_

**Records Requested:**

Provide a detailed description of the record(s) requested, including: (1) type of record; (2) timeframe or dates for the records sought; and (3) subject matter or key words related to the records. Under the TPRA, record requests must be sufficiently detailed to enable a governmental entity to identify the specific records sought. As such, your record request must provide enough detail to enable the records custodian responding to the request to identify the specific records you are seeking.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Requestor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date submitted

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Public Records  
Request Coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Received

<sup>1</sup> Note Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-504(a)(20)(C) permits charging for redaction of private records of a utility.

**PUBLIC RECORD REQUEST RESPONSE FORM**

Governmental Entity Name and Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Requestors' Name and Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

In response to your records request received on \_\_\_\_\_, our office is taking the action(s)  
<sup>1</sup> indicated below:

The public record(s) responsive to your request will be made available for inspection:

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Copies of public record(s) responsive to your request are:

Attached;

Available for pickup at the following location:

\_\_\_\_\_ ; or

Being delivered via:  USPS First-Class Mail  Electronically  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Your request is denied on the following grounds:

Your request was not sufficiently detailed to enable identification of the specific \_\_\_\_\_ requested record(s).

You need to provide additional information to identify the requested record(s).

No such record(s) exists or this office does not maintain record(s) responsive to your \_\_\_\_\_ request.

No proof of Tennessee citizenship was presented with your request. Your request will be reconsidered upon presentation of an adequate form of identification.

You are not a Tennessee citizen.

You have not paid the estimated copying/production fees.

The following state, federal, or other applicable law prohibits disclosure of the \_\_\_\_\_ requested records:

\_\_\_\_\_.

It is not practicable for the records you requested to be made promptly available for inspection and/or copying because:

It has not yet been determined that records responsive to your request exist; or

The office is still in the process of retrieving, reviewing, and/or redacting the requested \_\_\_\_\_ records.

The time reasonably necessary to produce the record(s) or information and/or to make a \_\_\_\_\_ determination of a proper response to your request is: \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any additional questions regarding your record request, please contact [Records Custodian or Public Records Request Coordinator].

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name, Title, and Contact Information)

<sup>1</sup> If all requested records do not have the same response, so indicate.