

# **HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THURSTON COUNTY PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY**

## **1. AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE**

It is the policy of the Housing Authority of Thurston County (“HATC”) to release HATC records in compliance with the Washington Public Records Act (“PRA”), Chapter 42.56 RCW, and any other applicable federal or state law.

This policy establishes the procedures HATC will follow in order to provide full access to public records. This policy provides information to persons requesting access to HATC’s public records and establishes request processes for both requestors and HATC staff.

The purposes of this policy are: (1) to describe HATC’s organization and (2) to ensure that HATC complies with the PRA. Except where these guidelines are mandated by statute, the guidelines in this policy are discretionary and advisory only and shall not impose any affirmative duty on HATC. HATC reserves the right to apply and interpret this policy within its sole discretion and to revise or change the policy at any time.

This policy shall be available at HATC’s main office and posted on HATC’s website.

## **2. AGENCY DESCRIPTION**

The Housing Authority of Thurston County is a public housing authority and local government agency that serves citizens by providing Housing Choice Vouchers, emergency housing, and other affordable housing and related programs in Thurston County, Washington.

The HATC’s main office is located at 1206 12th Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501.

## **3. PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICER**

The Executive Director of HATC shall designate a Public Records Officer.

The Public Records Officer shall oversee HATC’s compliance with the PRA and this policy. The Public Records Officer may delegate the responsibilities of processing requests to other staff. Accordingly, any reference in this Policy to the “Public Records Officer” means the Public Records Officer or applicable designee.

The Public Records Officer shall provide full assistance to requestors, ensure that public records are protected from damage, disorganization, and improper disclosure, and prevent the fulfillment of any PRA request from causing excessive interference with HATC’s essential functions.

## **4. AVAILABILITY OF PUBLIC RECORDS**

Public records are available for inspection and copying during HATC’s normal business hours, which are Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding legal holidays.

Records must be inspected at HATC's main office, 1206 12th Avenue SE, Olympia, WA 98501, unless the requester pays for copies as provided in this policy and in Chapter 42.56 RCW.

Many commonly requested HATC documents are available on our website at [www.hatc.org](http://www.hatc.org).

## **5. MAKING A REQUEST FOR PUBLIC RECORDS**

Public Records Act requestors, or those seeking assistance in making a PRA request, are directed to contact:

Public Records Officer  
Housing Authority of Thurston County  
1206 12th Avenue SE  
Olympia, WA 98501  
Phone: (360) 753-8292 ext. 123  
E-mail:Publicrecords@hatc.org

PRA information is also available at the HATC's website: [www.hatc.org](http://www.hatc.org)

HATC directs all persons requesting HATC's public records to make their requests in writing on the HATC's request form to the Public Records Officer. The form is available for use by requestors at the office of the Public Records Officer and on-line at: [www.hatc.org/publicrecords](http://www.hatc.org/publicrecords). In order to aid timely disclosure, requests should include the following information:

- a. The name and address of the requestor
- b. The date of the request
- c. A detailed description of the public record being requested
- d. Whether the requestor wants copies, or wants to inspect the requested records
- e. If copies are requested, the address where copies should be mailed
- f. A statement regarding whether the records requested are for commercial purposes
- g. The signature of the requestor

The Public Records Officer shall confirm in writing (e-mail allowed) all oral requests made in person or by telephone, indicating receipt of the information and the substance of the request.

## **6. PROCESSING PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS**

### **6.1 Response to Records Request**

Within five business days of receipt of the request, the Public Records Officer shall do one or more of the following:

- a. Notify the requestor in writing that the documents are available;
- b. Send copies to the requestor upon receipt or waiver of copying fees, with a letter acknowledging or closing the request as appropriate;
- c. Send an acknowledgment letter and provide a reasonable estimate of the time necessary for HATC to respond to the request;

- d. If the request is unclear or does not sufficiently identify the requested records, send a letter requesting clarification from the requestor; or,
- e. Send a letter denying the request, including an exemption log if responsive exempt records exist.

HATC reserves the right to direct requestors to the HATC website for commonly requested documents. The Public Records Officer shall assist any requestor who cannot easily access the internet.

## **6.2 Reasons for Additional Time to Respond**

HATC may require additional time to respond to a request based on the need to do any of the following:

- a. Clarify what documents are being sought in the request;
- b. Locate and assemble the information requested;
- c. Use the requested record in HATC's normal course of business;
- d. Notify third persons or agencies affected by the request; or
- e. Determine whether any of the information requested is exempt and that a denial should be made as to all or part of the request.

This list is not exhaustive, and HATC reserves the right to require additional time as permitted by the PRA or other applicable federal or state law.

## **6.3 Unclear Requests**

In acknowledging receipt of a request that is unclear or ambiguous, HATC may ask the requestor to clarify what information the requestor is seeking. If the requestor fails to clarify the request, HATC may deem the request abandoned and need not respond to it.

## **6.4 Notice to Third Parties**

In the event that the requested records contain personal information that identifies an individual or organization or other information that may affect the rights of others, the Public Records Officer may provide notice to those individuals or organizations or such others whose rights may be affected by disclosure. HATC may send this notice to the individual or organization if releasing the personal information could damage the individual or organization, or government operations, or is not in the best interest of the public. The notice to the affected persons shall include a copy of the records request, the date HATC intends to release the record, and how the individual or organization can prevent the record's release. HATC will release such records by the specified date if no one objects or the contacted party does not respond by the specified date. This procedure shall not create any rights to third parties to such notice.

## **6.5 Records Exempt from Disclosure**

Some records are exempt from disclosure, in whole or in part, based on the laws and regulations identified in Appendix A, or under other state or federal law. If HATC believes that a record is exempt from disclosure and should be withheld, the Public Records Officer shall provide an

exemption log including the specific exemption and a brief explanation of why the record or a portion of the record is being withheld. If only a portion of a record is exempt from disclosure, but the remainder is not exempt, the Public Records Officer will redact the exempt portions, provide the nonexempt portions, and indicate to the requestor why portions of the record are being redacted.

Pursuant to the PRA, HATC reserves the right to seek to enjoin the examination of any specific record if HATC determines that the examination is clearly not in the public interest and will substantially and irreparably damage any person or will substantially and irreparably damage vital governmental functions.

## **6.6 Providing Electronic Records**

When records are requested in an electronic format, the Public Records Officer shall provide the nonexempt records, or portions of the records that are reasonably locatable, in an electronic format that is used by HATC and is generally commercially available, or in a format that is reasonably translatable from the format that HATC keeps the records. HATC will charge an hourly fee for transferring and translating the format of electronic documents.

## **6.7 Customized Access to Databases**

With the consent of the requestor, HATC may provide customized access under RCW 43.41A.130 if the record is not reasonably locatable or not reasonably translatable into the format requested. HATC may charge a fee consistent with RCW 43.41A.130 for customized access.

## **6.8 Inspection of Records**

The requestor must claim or review the assembled records within fifteen (15) days of HATC's notification to the requestor that the records are available for inspection or copying. HATC shall notify the requestor in writing of this requirement and direct the requestor to contact the agency to make arrangements to claim or review the records. If the requestor fails to claim or review the records within the 15-day period or make other arrangements, HATC may consider the request abandoned unless the requestor seeks an additional amount of time to review the records.

HATC shall deny and terminate a requestor's inspection and withdraw the requested records if the Public Records Officer determines that a requestor, when reviewing the records, acts in a manner that will damage or substantially disorganize the records or interfere with other essential HATC functions.

## **6.9 Protection of Records**

In order to protect HATC's public records from damage or disorganization as required by the PRA, HATC shall use the following procedures and practices:

- a. No public records shall be removed from HATC's main office without the Public Records Officer's permission;

- b. Inspection of any public records shall be conducted in the presence of the Public Records Officer or designated staff;
- c. No public record may be marked, defaced, torn, damaged, destroyed, unreasonably disorganized or removed from its proper location or order by a member of the public;
- d. Public records maintained in a file jacket or binders, or in chronological order, may not be dismantled except for the purpose of copying, and then only by HATC staff; and
- e. Public records may be copied only on HATC copying machines unless other arrangements are made by the Public Records Officer.

#### **6.10 Large Requests - Providing Records in Installments**

When the request is for a large volume of records, the Public Records Officer may elect to provide records on an installment basis. In such cases, the Public Records Officer shall provide a reasonable estimate in the initial response as to when the first installment will be available and when the entire request will be completed. The Public Records Officer shall send additional written notice as installments become ready for inspection or copying. If a requestor does not contact the Public Records Officer within 15 days of any such notification to arrange for the review of the first installment or any subsequent installment, HATC may deem the request abandoned and stop fulfilling the remainder of the request.

#### **6.11 Completion of Inspection**

Once HATC provides all copies of requested records to the requestor, the requestor has reviewed the requested records, or 15 days have passed since a notice of availability was sent to the requestor and the requestor has failed to contact the Public Records Officer to arrange for the review of those records or for payment for copies, the Public Records Officer shall mail (e-mail allowed) the requestor a "Closing Letter" informing the requestor that HATC has fully responded to the records request. Upon receipt of the Closing Letter, the requestor should immediately inform the Public Records Officer if the requestor does not think HATC has fully complied, or needs additional time to review the records. If the requestor does not respond within ten (10) business days after the Closing Letter was sent, HATC may treat the matter as closed.

#### **6.12 Later Discovered Documents**

If, after HATC has informed the requestor that it has provided all available records, HATC becomes aware of additional responsive documents existing at the time of the request, it shall promptly inform the requestor of the additional documents and provide them on an expedited basis.

### **7. EXEMPTIONS**

The Public Records Act provides that a number of types of documents are exempt from public inspection and copying. In addition, documents are exempt from disclosure if any other statute exempts or prohibits disclosure. Requestors should be aware of PRA exemptions and

exemptions outside of the PRA that may restrict or prohibit the HATC's ability to disclose certain documents. Some of these exemptions are described in Appendix A.

The HATC is prohibited by statute from disclosing lists of individuals for commercial purposes.

## **8. COSTS OF PROVIDING COPIES OF PUBLIC RECORDS**

There is no fee for inspecting public records in person at HATC's main office. For records requests requiring copies of documents, the requestor shall pay the appropriate reproduction and mailing costs listed below.

### **8.1 Reproduction Costs**

Black & White Copies (per side)	\$0.15 per page
Color Copies (8½ x 11)	\$0.15 per page
Scanning & PDFs (to supply electronic copies)	\$0.10 per page
CD-ROM or DVD	\$1.00 per disc, not inclusive of scanning, PDF, or electronic document transfer fees.
Mailing	Actual cost of postage and mailing materials
Other Media	Actual cost of production

Depending on the size or number of requested copies, document copying may be contracted to another provider, and the actual cost of the copies shall be the responsibility of the requestor.

For larger requests, HATC may require a deposit of up to ten percent of the estimated costs of copying all the records. The Public Records Officer or designee may also require the payment of the remainder of the copying costs before providing all the records, or the payment of the costs of copying an installment before providing that installment.

### **8.2 Payment**

Payment may be made by cash, check, or money order to Housing Authority of Thurston County.

## **9. RECORDS PRESERVATION**

HATC shall comply with state and federal laws affecting the maintenance and preservation of public records, including but not limited to the guidelines promulgated by the Secretary of State Division of Archives and Records Management.

Nothing in this policy prevents HATC from destroying information relating to employee misconduct or alleged misconduct in accordance with RCW 41.06.450. However, if a record request is made at a time when such record exists but is scheduled for destruction in the near future for any reason, the Public Records Officer shall retain possession of the record and may not destroy or erase the record until the request is resolved.

## **10. PUBLIC RECORDS INDEX**

For the reasons stated in Resolution 2014-07-24-002 incorporated herein by reference, HATC finds that it would be unduly burdensome and would interfere with HATC operations to maintain an index of records. HATC will make available for public disclosure all indices which may at a future time be developed for HATC use.

## **11. REVIEW OF PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST DENIALS**

Any person who objects to the initial denial or partial denial of a records request may petition in writing (e-mail allowed) to the Public Records Officer for a review of that decision. The petition must include a copy of, or reasonably identify, the written statement by the Public Records Officer or designee denying the request.

The Public Records Officer shall promptly provide the petition and any other relevant information to HATC's Executive Director. The Executive Director will immediately consider the petition and either affirm or reverse the denial within two business days following HATC's receipt of the petition, or within such other time as HATC and the requestor mutually agree.

Any person may obtain court review of any HATC records decision pursuant to RCW 42.56.550 at the conclusion of two business days after the initial denial regardless of any internal administrative appeal.

## **12. DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY**

Neither HATC nor any of its officers, employees, officials, or custodians shall be liable, nor shall cause of action exist, for any loss or damage based upon release of public records if the person releasing the records acted in good faith in attempting to comply with this policy.

This policy is not intended to expand or restrict the rights of privacy or the rights to inspect and copy public records as they exist under state and federal law. Despite the use of any mandatory terms such as "shall," nothing in this policy is intended to impose mandatory duties on HATC beyond those imposed by state and federal law.

## Appendix A

### Exemption and Prohibition Statutes Pertaining to HATC Public Records

The following statutes are listed in addition to any exemptions in Chapter 42.56 RCW. This list is for informational purposes and is not intended to be exclusive or exhaustive. Public records may be exempt from disclosure under other laws.

#### Washington State Statutes

RCW 4.24.550	Information on sex offenders to public
RCW 5.60.070	Court-ordered mediation records
RCW 19.34.240(3)	Private digital signature keys
RCW 19.108.020	Misappropriation of trade secrets
RCW 19.215.020	Destruction of personal health and financial information
RCW 19.215.030	Compliance with federal rules
RCW 26.44.030	Reports of child abuse/neglect
RCW 42.23.070(4)	Municipal officer disclosure of confidential information prohibited
RCW 42.41.030(7)	Identity of local government whistleblower
RCW 42.41.045	Non-disclosure of protected information (whistleblower)
RCW 48.62.101	Local government insurance transactions – access to information
RCW 50.13.060	Access to employment security records by local government agencies
RCW 51.28.070	Worker’s compensation records
RCW 51.36.060	Physician information on injured workers
RCW 70.123.075	Client records of domestic violence programs

#### Federal Statutes

42 U.S.C. § 405(c)(2)(vii)(I)	Limits on Use and Disclosure of Social Security Numbers.
5 U.S.C. § 552a	Federal Privacy Act