

MODEL PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY

PUBLIC RECORDS POLICY FOR BLOUNT COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-503(g), the following Public Records Policy for Blount County Government is hereby adopted by Blount County Board of Commissioners 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 Blount County Government are presumed to be open for inspection unless otherwise provided by law.

Personnel of Blount County Government 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 Blount County Government, shall be protected as provided by current law. Concerns about this Policy should be addressed to the Public Records Request Coordinator for Blount County Government or to the Tennessee Office of Open Records Counsel ("OORC").

This Policy is available for inspection and duplication in the office of the Blount County Clerk's Office. This Policy can be found online at <https://www.blounttn.gov/178/Records-Management> ([Public Records Policies](#)). This Policy shall be reviewed annually.

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

- A. Blount County Sheriff's Office
- B. Industrial Development Board
- C. Smoky Mountain Tourism Development Authority
- D. Register of Deeds
- E. County Clerk
- F. Property Assessor
- G. Clerk & Master

The Circuit Court, Register of Deeds, County Clerk, Clerk & Master, and Property Assessor will follow the Blount County Government Open Records Policy when requests are made for Human Resource Records.

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). The Public Records Request Coordinator may also be a records custodian.
- 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 shall be made to the Public Records Request Coordinator ("PRRC") or his/her designee in order to ensure public record requests are routed to the appropriate records custodian and 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 in person at the Blount County Records Management and Archives Office located at 1229 McArthur Road, Maryville, TN 37804, in writing using the Form located online at <https://www.blounttn.gov/178/Records-Management> ([Public Records Request Center](#)), or by phone at 865-380-4295.
- D. Requests for copies, or requests for inspection and copies, may be made orally in person at the Blount County Records Management and Archives Office located at 1229 McArthur Road, Maryville, TN 37804, by phone at 865-380-4295, in writing by mail or by email, or by using the Form located online at <https://www.blounttn.gov/178/Records-Management> ([Public Records Request Center](#)).
- E. Proof of Tennessee citizenship shall accompany a records request. The records custodian may also require any citizen making a request to view a public record or to make a copy of a public record to present a photo identification, if the person possesses a photo identification issued by a governmental entity that includes the person's address. If a person does not possess a photo identification, the records custodian may require other forms of identification acceptable to the records custodian. Exceptions may be made for records requested from out of state for persons involved in creating the record,

official government agencies, property records, or for archival records older than twenty-five years.

F. Meeting public notices and other meeting documents may be found at <https://blounttn.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>.

G. The Public Records Request Coordinator created a Records Request Form and SSDS Information Request Form in the GovQA software located online at <https://www.blounttn.gov/178/Records-Management> ([Public Records Request Center](#)) to provide reporting information for quarterly records requests reports.

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; and
 - 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 requester 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 waivers, if applicable); 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 (if proof of citizenship is required).
 - 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 Blount County Government.
 - e. If requested records are in the custody of a different governmental entity, and the PRRC knows the correct governmental entity, advise the requester of the correct governmental entity and PRRC for that entity if known.
3. The designated PRRC(s) is(are):
- a. Joni Seratt, Blount County Records Manager and Archivist
 - b. Contact Information
1229 McArthur Road
Maryville, TN 37804
865-380-4295
allrecords@blounttn.gov
4. The PRRC shall make a Quarterly report to the Blount County Legislative Body providing the requestor's name, the information requested and the approximate time required to answer the request.

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, 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.
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. An appointment is required for inspection.
- B. The location for inspection of records within the offices of Blount County Government 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. The time for appointments should be made within normal business hours unless mutually agreed upon by PRRC and the requester.

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.
- C. Upon payment for postage, copies will be delivered to the requestor's home address by the United States Postal Service and/or email.
- D. A requestor will not be allowed to make copies of records with personal equipment, unless, copies are allowed to be made with personal equipment pursuant to and in accordance with T.C.A. 10-7-506(a).

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. Requests for waivers for fees must be presented to the County Mayor, who is authorized to determine if such waiver is in the best interest of Blount County and for the public good.
- D. Fees and charges for copies are as follows in accordance with and pursuant to T.C.A. 10-7-506(c).
 - 1. \$0.50 per page for letter- and legal-size black and white copies.
 - 2. \$0.50 per page for letter- and legal-size color copies.
 - 3. \$5.00 per certification.
 - 4. Labor when time exceeds 1 hour.
 - 5. If an outside vendor is used, the actual costs assessed by the vendor.
- E. No duplication costs will be charged for requests for less than \$1.00.
- F. Payment is to be made via cash, personal check, or credit card to applicable offices, payable to Blount County presented to the PRRC.
- G. Payment in advance will be required when costs are estimated to exceed \$25.00.
- H. Aggregation of Frequent and Multiple Requests
 - 1. Blount County Government 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 working in concert).
 - 2. [If aggregating]:
 - a. The level at which records requests will be aggregated is Blount County Government (whether by agency, entity, department, office or otherwise).
 - b. The PRRC is responsible for making the determination that a group of individuals are working in concert.