

NORTH STAR TOWNSHIP'S WRITTEN PUBLIC SUMMARY OF FOIA PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

It is the public policy of this state that all persons, except those persons incarcerated in state or local correctional facilities, are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees.

Consistent with the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended, the following is the Written Public Summary of North Star Township's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines relevant to the general public. This is only a summary of the FOIA Procedures and Guidelines. For more details and information, copies of the FOIA Procedures Guidelines and are available at no charge at the clerk's office and on our website www.northstartwp.com.

1. How do I submit a FOIA request to North Star Township?

- A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable the Township to find it.
- Please include the words "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the request to assist the Township in providing a prompt response.
- Requests to the Township may be submitted in any form of writing (letter, fax, email, etc.), or by verbal request.
- Written requests may be delivered to the Township in person or by mail:

FOIA Coordinator
3064 S Crapo Rd
Ithaca, MI 48847

- Requests may be emailed to: hdrowley@cmsinter.net To ensure a prompt response, email requests should contain the term "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the subject line.
- Requests must include the requesting person's complete name, address, and contact information, and, if the request is made by a person other than an individual, the complete name, address, and contact information of the person's agent who is an individual. Contact information must include a valid telephone number or electronic mail address.

2. What kind of response can I expect to my request?

- Within 5 business days of receipt of a FOIA request the Township will issue a response. If a request is received by facsimile or e-mail the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. The Township will respond to your request in one of the following ways:

- Grant the request.
- Issue a written notice denying the request.
- Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request.
- Issue a notice indicating that due to the nature of the request the Township needs an additional 10 business days to respond.
- Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on the Township's website www.northstartwp.com

- If the request is granted, or granted in part, the Township will ask that payment be made for the allowable fees associated with responding to the request before the public record is made available.
- If the cost of processing the request is expected to exceed \$50, or if you have not paid for a previously granted request, the Township will require a deposit before processing the request.

3. What are the Township's fee deposit requirements?

- If the Township has made a good faith calculation that the total fee for processing the request will exceed \$50.00, the Township will require that you provide a deposit in the amount of 50% of the total estimated fee. When the Township requests the deposit it will provide you a non-binding best efforts estimate of how long it will take to process the request following receipt by the Township of your deposit.
- If the Township receives a request from a person who has not paid the Township for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, the Township will require a deposit of 100% of the estimated processing fee before it begins to search for the public record for any subsequent written request when **all** of the following conditions exist:
 - the final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
 - the public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request and remain in the Township's possession;
 - the public records were made available to the individual, subject to payment, within the time frame estimated by the Township to provide the records;
 - 90 days have passed since the Township notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
 - the individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to the Township; and
 - The Township has calculated an estimated detailed itemization which is the basis for the current written request's increased fee deposit.

- The Township will not require the 100% estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:
 - the person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to the Township;
 - the Township is subsequently paid in full for all applicable prior written requests; or
 - 365 days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to the Township.
- If a deposit that is required is not received by the Township within 45 days from receipt by the requesting person of the notice that a deposit is required, the request shall be considered abandoned by the requesting person and the Township is no longer required to fulfill the request.

4. How does North Star Township calculate FOIA processing fees?

The Michigan FOIA statute permits the Township to charge for the following costs associated with processing a request:

- Labor costs associated with copying or duplication, which includes making paper copies, making digital copies, or transferring digital public records to non-paper physical media or through the Internet.
- Labor costs associated with searching for, locating and examining a requested public record, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the Township.
- Labor costs associated with a review of a record to separate and delete information exempt from disclosure, when failure to charge a fee will result in unreasonably high costs to the Township.
- The cost of copying or duplication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records.
- The cost of computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media when the requester asks for records in non-paper physical media. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the Township's website if you ask for copies.

Labor Costs

- All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15 minute increments with all partial time increments rounded down.
- Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid Township employee capable of doing the work in the specific fee category, regardless of who actually performs work.
- Labor costs will also include a charge to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits.
- Contracted labor costs will be charged at the hourly rate of 6 times the state minimum wage, as adjusted. This rate is currently \$55.50/hour.

A labor cost will not be charged for the search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from nonexempt information unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the Township. Costs are unreasonably high when they are excessive and beyond the normal or usual amount for those services compared to the Township's usual FOIA requests, because of the nature of the request in the particular instance. The Township must specifically identify the nature of the unreasonably high costs in writing.

Copying, Duplication and Mailing Costs

The Township must use the most economical method for making copies of public records, including using double-sided printing, if cost-saving and available.

- **Non-paper Physical Media**

- The cost for records provided on non-paper physical media, such as computer discs, computer tapes or other digital or similar media will be at the actual and most reasonably economical cost for the non-paper media.
- This cost will only be assessed if the Township has the technological capability necessary to provide the public record in the requested non-paper physical media format.

- **Paper Copies**

- Paper copies of public records made on standard letter (8 ½ x 11) or legal (8 ½ x 14) sized paper will not exceed \$.10 per sheet of paper.
- Copies for non-standard sized sheets will reflect the actual cost of reproduction.

- **Mailing Costs**

- The cost to mail public records will use a reasonably economical and justified means.
- The Township may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.
- No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless requested.

5. How do I qualify for a waiver or discount on the fee?

Waiver or reduction

- The cost of the search for and copying of a public record may be waived or reduced if in the sole discretion of the FOIA Coordinator a waiver or reduction of the fee is in the public interest because it can be considered as primarily benefiting the public. The Township Board may identify specific records or types of records it deems should be made available for no charge or at a reduced cost.

Indigence discount

- The Township will waive the first \$20.00 of fees for a request if you submit an affidavit stating that you are:
 - indigent and receiving specific public assistance; or
 - if not receiving public assistance, stating facts demonstrating an inability to pay because of indigence.

- You are not eligible to receive the \$20.00 waiver if you:
 - have previously received discounted copies of public records from the Township twice during the calendar year; or
 - are requesting information on behalf of other persons who are offering or providing payment to you to make the request.

Nonprofit discount

- The Township will waive the fee for a nonprofit organization which meets all of the following conditions:
 - the organization is designated by the State under federal law to carry out activities under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 and the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act;
 - the request is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients;
 - the request is made for a reason wholly consistent with the provisions of federal law under Section 931 of the Mental Health Code; and
 - the request is accompanied by documentation of the organization’s designation by the State

6. How may I challenge the denial of a public record or an excessive fee?

Appeal of a Denial of a Public Record

If you believe that all or a portion of a public record has not been disclosed or has been improperly exempted from disclosure, you may file an appeal of the denial with the North Star Township Board. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word “appeal” and identify the reason or reasons you are seeking a reversal of the denial. The Township may create a FOIA Appeal Form, which, if created, will be available upon request.

Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the North Star Township Board will respond in writing by:

- reversing the disclosure denial;
- upholding the disclosure denial; or
- reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.

Whether or not you submitted an appeal of a denial to the Board, you may file a civil action in the Gratiot County Circuit Court within 180 days after the Township's final determination to deny your request. Should you prevail in the civil action the Court will award you reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the Court determines that the Township acted arbitrarily and capriciously in refusing to disclose or provide a public record, the Court shall award you damages in the amount of \$1000.00

Appeal of an Excessive FOIA Processing Fee

If you believe that the fee charged by the Township to process your FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, you must first submit a written appeal for a fee reduction to the North Star Township Board. The appeal must be in writing, specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted. The Township may create a FOIA Fee Appeal Form, which, if created, will be available upon request

Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the North Star Township Board will respond in writing by:

- waiving the fee;
- reducing the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee;
- upholding the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the required fee; or
- issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the North Star Township Board will respond to the written appeal.

Within 45 days after receiving notice of the Board's determination of the processing fee appeal, you may commence a civil action in the Gratiot County Circuit Court for a fee reduction. If you prevail in the civil action by receiving a reduction of 50% or more of the total fee, the Court may award all or appropriate amount of reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the Court determines that the Township acted arbitrarily and capriciously by charging an excessive fee, Court may also award you punitive damages in the amount of \$500.00.

Need more details or information?

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