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Vermont League of Cities and Towns Municipal Data and Records



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Municipalities Maintain a Variety of Public Records

Various state laws prescribe the type of records that municipalities are required to maintain. In the course of daily work, municipal officials (staff, elected, appointed) also create records which are subject to public records law. Examples, non-exhaustive:

- Land records
- Permits, applications, appeals
- Meeting minutes, agendas, notices, recordings
- Voter rolls
- Emails, texts, calendars
- Marriage Licenses
- RFPs, bids, contracts
- Employment related
- Budget: expenses, payments, receipts, tax bills, abatements, delinquency
- Property valuations, grand list



Municipalities are required to provide public records upon request

Some appropriate exemptions are prescribed by the law; records may be withheld in part (redacted) or in whole. Records do not need to be created if they do not exist. If records are withheld, the requestor may appeal. Allowable exemptions include:

- Various law enforcement related exemptions
- Tax returns and related
- Student records
- Related to contract negotiations, including collective bargaining
- Development of policy (deliberative)
- Library patron registries
- Judicial and quasi-judicial deliberations
- Various types of personal identifying information
- Banking information

The management of public records and public record requests are part of the daily business of local government

Public records administration can, at times, be burdensome - especially for low-resource municipalities.

- Officials responsible for requests could be a records clerk or municipal attorney, often it falls to the town clerk or selectboard members
- Any person can make a request (non-residents)
- There is no limit to the volume of records that can be requested
- The official must inspect each record and assess whether exemptions should apply
- The expense from staff time can easily and substantially exceed the associated fees
- Municipal officials report requests that are harassing, may be purposefully excessive to interrupt the function of government, may have an intent malicious to the public interest

Modernization of Government presents new challenges

- Some municipalities have open data policies for publicly available information
- Lacking a policy, many municipalities still make proactive attempts to make information and records readily available online
- With no residency requirement, requests can come in from anyone, anywhere, anytime
- Some municipalities have begun to report AI generated public records requests



Buying and Selling Public Information

- VLCT is not aware of any municipalities selling data or records
- Intergovernmental agency data sharing agreements are common, particularly related to public safety

For the development of public policy, municipalities may commission data collections or surveys, purchase types of industry specific data, or use open source data.

Examples:

- Pedestrian or traffic census
- Property transfers
- Rental rates
- Unique cell phone users, foot traffic

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Questions???



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