

DETROIT WATER AND SEWERAGE DEPARTMENT 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, the following is the Written Public Summary of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's [DWSD] FOIA Procedures and Guidelines relevant to the general public

This is only a summary of the DWSD's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines. For more details and information, copies of DWSD's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines are available at no charge at DWSD's offices, and on the city website at www.detroitmi.gov.

1. How do I submit a FOIA request to the DWSD?

A request must be in writing.

No specific form to submit a written request is required. However a DWSD FOIA Request Form is available for your use at www.detroitmi.gov, and at the Detroit Water Board Building, 735 Randolph Street, Detroit, MI 48226.

A request must sufficiently describe a public record so as to enable the DWSD to find it.

Please include the words "FOIA" or "FOIA Request" in the request to assist the DWSD in providing a prompt response.

Requests to inspect or obtain copies of public records prepared, owned, used, possessed or retained by the DWSD may be submitted on the DWSD's FOIA Request Form, or in any other form of writing (letter, fax, email, etc.).

Written requests may be delivered to DWSD in person or by mail. Requests by mail may be sent to:

FOIA COORDINATOR
Detroit Water and Sewerage Department
Water Board Building
735 Randolph
Detroit, MI 48226

dwsd-publicaffairs@detroitmi.gov

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

Within 5 business days after receiving a FOIA request the DWSD will issue a response. If a request is received by fax or email, the request is deemed to have been received on the following business day. DWSD will respond to your request in one of the following ways:

1. Grant the request;
2. Issue a written notice denying the request;
3. Grant the request in part and issue a written notice denying in part the request, or issue a notice indicating that, due to the nature of the request, the DWSD needs an additional 10 business days to respond;
or
4. Issue a written notice indicating that the public record requested is available at no charge on the city website.

If the request is granted, or granted in part, DWSD 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 \$50.00, or if you have not paid for a previously granted request, the DWSD will require a deposit before processing the request.

3. What are DWSD's deposit requirements?

If DWSD has made a good faith calculation that the total fee for processing the request will exceed \$50.00, DWSD will require that you provide a deposit in the amount of 50% of the total estimated fee. When DWSD requests the deposit, it will provide you with a non-binding best efforts estimate of how long it will take to process the request after you have paid your deposit.

If DWSD receives a request from a person who has not paid DWSD for copies of public records made in fulfillment of a previously granted written request, DWSD 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:

1. The final fee for the prior written request is not more than 105% of the estimated fee;
2. The public records made available contained the information sought in the prior written request remain in DWSD's possession;
3. The public records were made available to the individual, subject to

payment, within the best effort time frame estimated by DWSD to provide the records;

4. Ninety (90) days have passed since DWSD notified the individual in writing that the public records were available for pickup or mailing;
5. The individual is unable to show proof of prior payment to DWSD; and
6. DWSD has calculated an estimated detailed itemization that is the basis for the current written request's increased fee deposit.

DWSD will not require the 100% estimated fee deposit if any of the following apply:

1. The person making the request is able to show proof of prior payment in full to DWSD;
2. DWSD is subsequently paid in full for all applicable prior written requests; or
3. Three hundred sixty five (365) days have passed since the person made the request for which full payment was not remitted to DWSD.

4. How does DWSD calculate FOIA processing fees?

The Michigan FOIA statute permits the DWSD to charge for the following costs associated with processing a request. However, a fee will not be charged for the cost of search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from non-exempt information, unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the DWSD because of the nature of the request. In such cases, DWSD will specifically identify the nature of the unreasonably high costs.¹

1. 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.
2. 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 DWSD.

¹ Costs are unreasonably high when they are excessive and beyond the normal or usual amount for those services compared to DWSD's usual FOIA requests, because of the nature of the request in the particular instance. DWSD must specifically identify the nature of the unreasonably high costs in writing.

3. 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 DWSD.

The cost of copying or duplication, not including labor, of paper copies of public records. This may include the cost for copies of records already on the city's website if you ask for DWSD to make copies.

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 DWSD's website if you ask for DWSD to make copies.

The cost to mail or send a public record to a requester.

Labor Costs

All labor costs will be estimated and charged in 15-minute increments, with all partial time increments rounded down. If the time involved is less than 15 minutes, there will be no charge.

Labor costs will be charged at the hourly wage of the lowest-paid DWSD 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. DWSD may add up to 50% to the applicable labor charge amount to cover or partially cover the cost of fringe benefits, but in no case may it exceed the actual cost of fringe benefits.

Overtime wages will not be included in labor costs unless agreed to by the requester; overtime costs will not be used to calculate the fringe benefit cost.

Contracted labor costs will be charged at the hourly rate of six (6) times the state minimum hourly wage.

A labor cost will not be charged for the search, examination, review and the deletion and separation of exempt from non-exempt information unless failure to charge a fee would result in unreasonably high costs to the DWSD.

Copying and Duplication

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

Non-paper Copies on 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 be charged only if the DWSD 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 DWSD may charge for the least expensive form of postal delivery confirmation.

No cost will be made for expedited shipping or insurance unless you request it.

Waiver of Fees

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

5. How do I qualify for an indigence discount on the fee?

DWSD will discount 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 discount if you:

1. Have previously received discounted copies of public records from DWSD two times (2) during the calendar year; or
2. Are requesting information on behalf of other persons who are offering or providing payment to you to make the request.

6. May a nonprofit organization receive a discount on the fee?

A nonprofit organization advocating for developmentally disabled or mentally ill individuals that is formally designated by the state to carry out activities under subtitle C of the federal developmental disabilities assistance and bill of rights act of 2000, Public Law 106-402, and the protection and advocacy for individuals with mental illness act, Public Law 99-319, may receive a \$20.00 discount if the request meets **all** of the following requirements in the Act:

1. The request is made directly on behalf of the organization or its clients;
2. The request is made for a reason wholly consistent with the mission and provisions of those laws under section 931 of the mental health code, 1974 PA 258, MCL 330.1931; and
3. The request is accompanied by documentation of its designation by the state, if requested by the public body.

7. 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, a requester has the option of appealing the denial to the Director of DWSD, or commencing an action in Wayne County Circuit Court.

Appeal to Director of DWSD

A requester may appeal to the Director of DWSD by filing an appeal of the denial, as follows:

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.

DWSD - Response to Appeal

Within 10 business days of receiving the appeal the Director of DWSD will respond in writing by:

1. Reversing the disclosure denial;
2. Upholding the disclosure denial; or
3. Reverse the disclosure denial in part and uphold the disclosure denial in part.

Appeal to Wayne County Circuit Court

Whether or not you submitted an appeal of a denial to the Director of DWSD, you may file a civil action in Wayne County Circuit Court within 180 days after DWSD's final determination to deny your request. If you prevail in the civil action the court will award you reasonable attorneys' fees, costs and disbursements. If the court determines that DWSD acted arbitrarily and capriciously in refusing to disclose or provide a public record, the court shall award you damages in the amount of \$1,000.

Appeal of an Excessive FOIA Processing Fee

If you believe that the fee charged by DWSD to process your FOIA request exceeds the amount permitted by state law, you must first appeal to the Director of DWSD, by filing a written appeal for a fee reduction. The appeal must specifically state the word "appeal" and identify how the required fee exceeds the amount permitted.

DWSD - Response to Appeal for Excessive Fee

Within 10 business days after receiving the appeal, the Director of DWSD will respond in writing by:

1. Waiving the fee;
2. Reducing the fee and issue a written determination indicating the specific basis that supports the remaining fee;
3. Upholding the fee and issue a written determination indicating the

specific basis that supports the required fee; or

4. Issuing a notice detailing the reason or reasons for extending for not more than 10 business days the period during which the Director will respond to the written appeal.

Within **45 days** after receiving notice of the Director's determination of the processing fee appeal, you may commence a civil action in Wayne 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 DWSD acted arbitrarily and capriciously by charging an excessive fee, court may also award you punitive damages in the amount of \$500.

Penalty for Violation of the Act

If the court determines in either an appeal of a denial of a public record, or appeal of an excessive fee, that the public body willfully and intentionally failed to comply with the FOIA or otherwise acted in bad faith, then in addition to any other award or sanction, the court shall impose a civil fine of not less than \$2,500.00, or more than \$7,500.00 for each occurrence.

In determining the amount of the civil fine, the court is required to consider the budget of the public body and whether the public body has previously been assessed penalties for violations of the Michigan Freedom of Information Act.

The civil fine, if any, will be deposited in the general fund of the treasury.