

# **TOWN of NORTHBRIDGE**

## **Public Records Access Guidelines**

Effective January 1, 2017, the Massachusetts Public Records Law, G.L. c.66 and c.4, §7(26) provides that a municipality must, within 10 business days (Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays), respond to a request for records by providing access to or a copy of such records, or explaining any delay or denial. These guidelines are intended to assist members of the public seeking access to public records in the custody of the Town of Northbridge.

### **General Information:**

1. **Business Hours.** The regular business hours of Town Hall and Town Hall Annex are:  
Monday 8:30A - 7P, Tuesday-Thursday 8:30A – 4:30P, Friday 8:30A – 1pm.
2. **Records Access Officers.** The following Records Access Officers ("RAO") have been designated:

Doreen A. Cedrone, Town Clerk, (Super Records Access Officer)  
7 Main Street  
Whitinsville MA 01588  
Phone: 508-234-2001  
Email: [publicrecords@northbridgemass.org](mailto:publicrecords@northbridgemass.org)

Walter J. Warchol, Chief of Police (Records Access Officer)  
1 Hope Street  
Whitinsville, MA 01588  
Phone: 508-234-6211  
Email: [npdpublicrecords@northbridgemass.org](mailto:npdpublicrecords@northbridgemass.org)

Timothy Labrie, Police Lieutenant (Records Access Officer)  
1 Hope Street  
Whitinsville, MA 01588  
Phone: 508-234-6211  
Email: [npdpublicrecords@northbridgemass.org](mailto:npdpublicrecords@northbridgemass.org)

Kristen Ferrante, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent of Schools (Records Access Officer)  
87 Linwood Avenue  
Whitinsville, MA 01588  
Phone: 508-234-8156  
Email: [kferrante@nps.org](mailto:kferrante@nps.org)

3. **Public Records Law Information.** General information about the public records law and public records requests is found in the Secretary of the Commonwealth's, "A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law," January 2017 edition, found online at: [www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf).

### **Making Public Records Requests:**

4. **Public Records Requests.** Any person may make a public records request:
  - a. In person at Northbridge Town Hall, 7 Main Street, in the Whitinsville section of Northbridge;
  - b. By first class mail addressed to the RAO at the RAO's business address set forth on the previous page; or
  - c. By e-mail addressed to the RAO at the e-mail address set forth on the previous page.
5. **Requests Encouraged to be in Writing.** Although not required, it is strongly encouraged that public records requests be in writing to ensure the most efficient and accurate response. All written public records requests, including via email and facsimile, shall be addressed/directed to an RAO, and contain the requester's name and contact information, so that the RAO is able to provide the required response.
6. **Contact Information.** Individuals making in-person requests will not be requested or required to give their names or contact information. For in-person requests that require additional time for a comprehensive response, requesters will be advised to check in periodically with the RAO or department from which records are sought, or requesters may voluntarily provide contact information. Voluntary Public Records Request Forms shall be available in all municipal offices.
7. **Specificity of Requests.** To facilitate timely responses to public records requests, requests should be as specific as possible, detailing, if known, records custodian(s), and date and subject matter parameters. The more specific the request, the better able the Town will be to respond, as broad requests often require more extensive staff efforts to locate, review and copy all possibly responsive records.
8. **Receipt of Requests.** Written requests received during normal business hours, as defined in paragraph 1 on previous page, will be considered received on that date. Written requests sent via email or facsimile after normal business hours shall not be considered received until the following business day. Business days shall not include Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays.
9. **Purpose of Request.** The RAO will not ask a requester to identify the purpose of the request, but may ask for more information to assist the requester to make an appropriate request and/or to enable the RAO to respond more efficiently.

### **Responses to Public Records Requests:**

10. **Fees.** If fees will be assessed, a written estimate of the same will be provided to the Requester.

11. Response if Longer than 10 Days or Denial in Whole or in Part. If a full response, including provision of records, cannot be made within 10 business days of receipt of the request, the RAO or designee will respond to the requester in writing: explaining the anticipated time frame for complete response; identifying any records that the Town does not have in its custody; identifying records which the Town does not expect will be provided, or that will be redacted, specifying the relevant exemption and its application to the requested record or portion thereof; providing a good faith fee estimate; and including a statement of appeal rights.
12. Clarification of Request. Depending upon the scope of the request, the requester may be asked to clarify the request, provide more specific detail, and/or agree to a voluntary extension of time for the Town to respond fully to the request.
13. Time for Response. Typically, a complete response will be provided within 25 business days of receipt of the requests. If, due to the scope of the request, the need for redactions, or other complications, the Town is concerned that it will not be able to provide a complete response within that time frame, the Town may ask the requester for an extension of time to comply or petition the Supervisor of Public Records for additional time.
14. Publicly Available Records. The Town maintains a searchable website at [www.northbridgema.org](http://www.northbridgema.org) where certain public records are available for inspection, downloading or printing. If a request seeks documents publicly available on the Town's website, the requester will be directed to the website in satisfaction of the request, unless the requester does not have the ability to receive or access the records in a usable electronic form.
15. Electronic Records Delivery Preference. To the extent feasible, the RAO or designee will provide public records in response to a request by electronic means unless the record is not available electronically or the requester does not have the ability to receive or access the records electronically. To the extent available and feasible, the RAO will provide an electronic record in the requester's preferred format.
16. Request for Records to be Mailed. Should a requester seek to have responsive records provided by mail, the requester will be charged the actual cost of postage, using the least expensive form of mailing possible, unless the requester requests, and agrees to pay for, an expedited form of mailing and such fees are paid in advance.
17. Creation of Records. The Town is only required to provide records that are in existence at the time of a request and is not required to create a new record to accommodate a specific request.
18. Answering Questions. The Town is not required to answer questions in response to a public records request.
19. Supplementing Responses. The Town is not required to supplement its response to a previous public records request in the event that responsive records are created in the future.
20. Unique Right of Access. Pursuant to the provisions of 950 CMR 32.06(1)(g) , if a requester or requester's representative (such as an attorney), has "a unique right of access by

statutory, regulatory, judicial or other applicable means", a request for records will not be considered a G.L. c.66, §10 public records request.

### **Categories of Records:**

21. Attachment "A" describes with specificity different categories of records maintained by the various Town departments. You may also refer to the Municipal Records Retention Schedule, issued by the Supervisor of Public Records, and found at [https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Municipal\\_Retention\\_Schedule\\_20161109.pdf](https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcpdf/Municipal_Retention_Schedule_20161109.pdf), which schedule identifies various categories of records maintained by municipal departments and so-called "records in common".
22. Regional School District Records. School-related records are generally maintained by the Blackstone Valley Regional School District for grades K through 12, and requests for such records should typically be directed to the District. Their website is <https://www.valleytech.k12.ma.us>.

### **Exemptions:**

23. Exemptions/Redaction/Withholding. Some public records, or portions of records, may not be provided in response to a public records request because the Town has determined such records to be exempt from disclosure pursuant to the provisions of G.L. c.4, §7(26), the attorney-client privilege, or other applicable exemptions or common law privileges. For more information about exemptions to the Public Records Law, see the Secretary of the Commonwealth's, "A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law," January 2017 edition, available at [www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf).

### **Fees:**

24. Reasonable Fees. In some circumstances, the Town may assess a reasonable fee for the production of public records.
25. Categories of Permissible Charges. Permissible charges include, but are not limited to:
  - a. five cents (\$0.05) per page of black and white printouts or copies;
  - b. actual cost for storage devices or materials such as CDs or thumb/flash drives;
  - c. actual cost for duplication of records not susceptible to ordinary means of reproduction, such as color copies and large format plans;
  - d. postage fees (where applicable; see paragraph 16, previous page); and
  - e. fees for employee time required to satisfy a public records request (see paragraph 26 below).

No copying fee will be charged for records provided in electronic form.

26. Employee Time for Locating and Segregating Records. A fee may be charged for employee time necessary to identify, locate, and compile the records requested. A fee may also be charged for employee time necessary to review, and, as applicable, segregate and/or redact information exempt from public disclosure. The hourly rate for such fees shall be the hourly

rate of the lowest paid employee capable of performing the task, provided, however, that this hourly rate shall not exceed twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) per hour, unless the Town has obtained the approval of the State Supervisor of Public Records to charge a higher hourly rate. Depending upon the nature of the request, different rates may be charged for different types of work (i.e., a different hourly rate for search time and a different hourly rate for segregation/redaction time).

27. **Small Municipality Exception.** As of the 2010 Decennial Census, the Town had 15,707 residents. See <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/census/Northbridge.htm>. In accordance with 950 CMR 32.07(2)(m)(2), therefore, the Town may assess fees for all employee time, including the first two hours.
28. **Requests for Commercial Purposes.** Said fee limitations may not apply when a request for records is for a commercial purpose as determined by the Commonwealth's Supervisor of Records.
29. **Petition for Higher Fee.** In certain circumstances, the Town may petition the Supervisor of Public Records for permission to assess fees for employee time at a rate in excess of \$25.00.

#### **Appeals:**

30. If a requester wishes to assert a claim that they have been denied access to public records, they may appeal the RAO's determination to the Supervisor of Records pursuant to 950 CMR 32.08(1). The Supervisor shall make a final determination on the appeal within ten (10) business days of receipt.
31. If the requester is dissatisfied with the determination of the Supervisor of Records, the requester may appeal to Superior Court. Alternatively, a requester may bypass the Supervisor and go directly to Superior Court.
32. For further information on appeals, see the Secretary of the Commonwealth's "A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law," January 2017 edition, available at [www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prepdf/guide.pdf)

## ATTACHMENT "A"

### Department/Board General Description of Public Records Maintained

#### **Town Manager/Board of Selectmen Office**

General Correspondence  
All Alcohol Common Victualler License  
All Alcohol Package Store License  
All Alcohol General on Premise License  
Club License  
Wines and Malts Common Victualler License  
Wines and Malts Package Store License  
Wines and Malts General on Premise License  
One-day All Alcohol License  
One-day Wines and Malts License  
Non-Alcoholic Common Victualler License  
Class II – Used Car Dealer License  
Class III – Motor Vehicle Junk License  
Auctioneers License  
Junk Dealers License  
Bowling/Billiards/Pool Table Licenses  
Weekday Entertainment License  
Sunday Entertainment License  
Automatic Amusement Device License  
Dance Permit  
Carnival Permit  
Lodging License  
Taxi/Livery Operator's License  
Taxi/Livery Vehicle License

#### **Town Clerk**

Town Meeting Minutes  
Town Meeting / Election Warrants  
Election Results  
Annual Town Report  
Street List  
Voter Extracts  
Dog Owner Lists  
Business Certificate Listing  
Raffle permit listing  
Meeting Notices/Agendas  
Meeting Minutes  
Public Records Requests  
Town Charter - Copies  
Town Bylaws - Copies  
Conflict of Interest Disclosures

Campaign Finance Reports  
Perspective Juror List  
Planning & Zoning Decisions  
State Ethics – Employee Compliance Documents

**Assessors**

Property record cards  
Town maps  
Real Estate/Personal Property preliminary and actual tax bills  
Property values  
Deed references  
Motor Vehicle/Real Estate Abatements  
Exemptions (ex. Veterans, Elderly, Blind)  
Meeting notices  
Meeting minutes

**Building Inspector's Office**

Building permits  
Electrical, gas, and plumbing permits  
Sheet metal permits  
Sign and sidewalk permits

**Conservation Commission**

Meeting Minutes  
Request for Determination of Applicability  
Determination of Applicability  
Abbreviated Notice of Resource Area Delineation  
Order of Resource Area Delineation  
Notification of Non-Significance  
Notice of Intent  
Order of Conditions  
Extensions to Orders of Conditions  
Certificate of Compliance  
Enforcement Orders

**Fire Department**

Fire Incident Reports  
Smoke detector Inspections  
Oil Burner Inspections  
Underground tank storage and removal  
Blasting permits  
Fireworks permits  
Fire Safety inspections  
LP gas permits  
Fire alarm systems permits  
Welding permits  
Miscellaneous Fire Permits

### **Board of Health**

Licensed Food Establishments and Inspection Reports  
On-Site Sewage Disposal Plans & Title 5 Inspection Reports  
Well Permits & Water Analysis Reports  
Tobacco Sales Permits  
Licensed Trash Haulers and Dumpster Permit Holders  
Housing Inspections and Lead Paint Abatements  
Recreational Camp Facilities and Inspection Reports  
Board of Health Meeting Minutes  
Board of Health Regulations

### **DPW**

Road opening Permits  
Water Connections  
Sewer Connections  
Trench Permits  
ROW Permits  
Building, Planning & Construction Meeting Minutes  
Building, Planning & Construction Meeting Agendas

### **Planning Board**

Meeting Minutes  
Site Plan Review Filings  
ANR Plan Application Filings  
Preliminary Subdivision Plan Filings  
Definitive Subdivision Plan Filings  
Scenic Road Special Permit Filings  
Common Driveway Special Permit Filings  
Flexible Development Special Permit Filings  
Historic Mill Adaptive Reuse Special Permit Filings  
Planned Business Development Special Permit Filings  
MA Historic Commission Grant Applications  
CDBG –Community Development Block Grant Archives  
OSRP –Open Space & Recreation Plan  
Master Plan  
Zoning Amendments -Report & Recommendations

### **Police Department**

Accident reports  
Police logs

### **Retirement Office/Board**

Meeting Minutes  
Meeting Agendas  
Vendor Bills  
Annual Reports  
Audits  
Financial Statements  
List of Retirees



**School Department**

School Committee Minutes  
Contracts  
Accounts Payable  
Payroll

**Town Accountant**

Paid Invoices  
Current Vendor Contracts  
Budget Reports  
Financial Statements  
Audit Reports

**Treasurer/Collector's Office**

Real Estate Bills  
Personal Property Bills  
Payroll (Salary only)  
Municipal Lien Certificates

**Zoning Board of Appeals**

Special permits  
Variances  
Meeting notices  
Meeting minutes

**Housing Authority**

Property maintenance records  
Capital improvement planning records  
Policies and procedures  
Budget information