



CITY OF SUFFOLK

Freedom of Information Act Office

P.O. Box 1858; Suffolk, VA 23439 - Phone: 757.514.4103-FAX: 757.514-4109

January 12, 2022

The Honorable Council
City of Suffolk, Virginia

RE: FOIA Office Report

Dear Council Members:

In accordance with City Ordinance 07-O-032, which states that there be a report on the City of Suffolk FOIA Office annually, this annual report is being submitted for your information.

The City of Suffolk FOIA Office continues to serve as the centralized and accountable office for FOIA requests from the general public and the media. The FOIA office works with the FOIA Departmental Contacts in providing responsive records for FOIA requests. Customer service and responsiveness is critical to the continued success of the City of Suffolk FOIA Office. As of July 13, 2020, the City's (5) Constitutional Officer's FOIA Officers have been directly handling FOIA requests of their records. As per State Code, each Office is required to have a FOIA Officer to address requests.

Policies: The FOIA Office utilizes the City's FOIA Rights and Responsibilities document as a guideline for standard FOIA operating procedures. This document serves as an internal reference for FOIA Departmental Contacts and the general City of Suffolk employee base. The City of Suffolk's FOIA webpage is featured on the City's homepage and can be directly accessed via www.suffolkva.us/foia. The site includes information on how to contact the FOIA Office, procedures to file a request, and an online FOIA form that is sent directly to the FOIA Office once completed.

Public Relations: The Human Resources Department on-boarding process includes access to a two-page information guide, copy attached, so that new employees are aware of their role in assisting the City of Suffolk with the goal of promoting an institutional culture for compliance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act and open government. All City Council Members, as of January 2021, have been updated as to the function of the City of Suffolk FOIA Office during City Council orientation briefings.

A FOIA display is prominently featured in the Media & Community Relations Office, and includes copies of the City of Suffolk FOIA Request form, as well as various information from the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council.

Training: Members of the FOIA Office continue to develop their skills in responding to requests from our citizens by keeping abreast of updates and revisions provided by the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council. Effective, July 1, 2020, Virginia Code section § 2.2-3704.2 E calls for each FOIA Officer to "possess specific knowledge of the provisions of this chapter and be trained at least once during each consecutive period of two calendar years commencing with the date on which they last completed a training session by legal counsel for the public body or the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council (the Council) or through an online course offered by the Council. Any such training shall document that the training required by this subsection has been fulfilled." Staff in the FOIA Office have completed online FOIA training offered through the State Advisory Council which fulfilled the noted requirement. The Media & Community Relations Department had previously worked with the City Attorney's Office to create a FOIA/COIA video for use in the training of boards and commission members on the role they play in assisting the City of Suffolk in following Virginia FOIA/COIA laws and regulations. This video is updated as new laws come into effect related to FOIA/COIA.

FOIA Requests: The FOIA Office logged a total of **1061** FOIA requests from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021. A total of **514** requests were logged for the time period July 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021. In comparison, we logged a total of **1,376** requests for the year 2020 and **618** for the period July 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Requests have been submitted to the FOIA Office and other City of Suffolk offices in person, by mail, telephone, fax, online form, and email. A copy of the FOIA log can be made available upon your request.

FOIA Responses: All FOIA requests for this reporting period have been completed within the five-day deadline, by the additional seven working-day extended deadline when invoked, or by extended deadline as agreed upon with the requestor.

For the time period January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021, the FOIA Office charged requestors **\$3,908.85** for FOIA requests to cover research time by City staff and resources needed to respond to requestors. The Police Department regularly submits a report on the fees that they collect for accident reports, record checks, fingerprints, incident reports, and other computer-generated reports which, from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021, totaled **\$33,010.37**.

I trust that this report provides a comprehensive overview of the operation of the City of Suffolk FOIA Office from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Timothy E. Kelley
FOIA Officer
City of Suffolk FOIA Office

Encl.

cc: Al Moor, City Manager
William Hutchings, City Attorney
Erika S. Dawley, City Clerk