BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS HILLSBOROUGH
COUNTY
TAMPA, FLORIDA 33601

BOARD POLICY - SECTION NUMBER: 01.16.01.01

SUBJECT: Public Records Requests

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 6, 2016

SUPERSEDES: April 20, 2011

Purpose:

A policy approving and adopting the Public Records Requests Process for the processing of public records requests, and setting out the procedures for responding to requests to Commissioners for written or electronic documents.

Background:

On April 7, 2010, the Board of County Commissioners voted to request that the Hillsborough County Tax Collector assist in outlining a course of action for administering the Sterling Management System to improve the County's public records request process. A task force was formed and a new process was developed to ensure a consistent, transparent, and comprehensive process to handle public records requests. On April 20, 2011, the Board of County Commissioners formally approved and adopted the new process.

Due to the recent dramatic increase in public records requests for Commissioners’ written and electronic documents, the Board desires to establish procedures for responding to requests to the Board of County Commissioners.

Policy:

If there is public knowledge of an investigation by any state or federal law enforcement agency or attorney's office, the County Attorney’s Office will contact that agency prior to the release of any public records related to that investigation. This contact, whether written or verbal, must be noted in the CRM system, indicating the name of the person contacted and the date of the contact.

The County Administrator shall be responsible for implementing the Public Records Request Process for all departments under the County Administrator via Administrative Directive. This Administrative Directive shall require systematic training for all public record liaisons. The County Administrator must also appoint a staff person who will be responsible for ensuring that all required information is placed into the CRM system. The County Attorney and the Internal Auditor must also follow this process.
A mechanism will be established to electronically archive public records requests and responsive public records and make these documents easily accessible by the public. When a request is received that may be related to a prior request, the requestor will be made aware of the archived public records and will be asked if the archived public records satisfies some or all of the records request.

If a Commissioner receives a request, the request must be forwarded to the County Attorney’s Office for processing. Public records requests that come to the county attorney’s office will be forwarded to the affected Commissioner(s) and their aides. In addition to other established procedures, a Public Records Request Checklist shall be created to assist in tracking and fulfilling public records requests made of Commissioners. Once the requested records are compiled, the Commissioner or his or her aides will forward the documents to the County Attorney’s Office. The County Attorney’s Office will review the documents and redact confidential or exempt information as necessary. The County Attorney’s Office shall be responsible for forwarding the responsive records to the requestor.

The Commissioners will be provided a County owned cell phone to conduct all official County business. All text messages on the County issued cell phones will be automatically retained and archived. It is the responsibility of a county staff person to ensure archival of any written communication between the staff person and a Commissioner.

The County Attorney’s Office will, on an as needed basis, provide public records training for the Commissioners’ aides.