

State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs 101 South Broad Street

101 SOUTH BROAD STREET PO Box 819 Trenton, NJ 08625-0819

LT. GOVERNOR SHEILA Y. OLIVER Commissioner

FINAL DECISION

November 13, 2018 Government Records Council Meeting

Charles Hughes Complainant v. Township of Logan (Gloucester) Custodian of Record

PHILIP D. MURPHY

Governor

Complaint No. 2016-187

At the November 13, 2018 public meeting, the Government Records Council ("Council") considered the November 7, 2018 Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director and all related documentation submitted by the parties. The Council voted unanimously to adopt the entirety of said findings and recommendations. The Council, therefore, finds that:

- 1. The Custodian failed to comply with the Council's September 25, 2018 Interim Order because she failed to provide the certification to the Council Staff within the prescribed time frame.
- The Custodian has borne her burden of proof that the she lawfully denied access to the portion of the Complainant's OPRA request seeking a contract between himself and the Township. Specifically, the Custodian certified that no such contract exists. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6; see Pusterhofer v. N.J. Dep't of Educ., GRC Complaint No. 2005-49 (July 2005).
- 3. Because it is determined that the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's June 15, 2016 and June 16, 2016 OPRA requests, the GRC declines to address whether a knowing and willful violation occurred.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in the Appellate Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey within forty-five (45) days. Information about the appeals process can be obtained from the Appellate Division Clerk's Office, Hughes Justice Complex, 25 W. Market St., PO Box 006, Trenton, NJ 08625-0006. Proper service of submissions pursuant to any appeal is to be made to the Council in care of the Executive Director at the State of New Jersey Government Records Council, 101 South Broad Street, PO Box 819, Trenton, NJ 08625-0819.



Final Decision Rendered by the Government Records Council On The 13th Day of November, 2018

Robin Berg Tabakin, Esq., Chair Government Records Council

I attest the foregoing is a true and accurate record of the Government Records Council.

Steven Ritardi, Esq., Secretary Government Records Council

Decision Distribution Date: November 15, 2018

STATE OF NEW JERSEY GOVERNMENT RECORDS COUNCIL

Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff November 13, 2018 Council Meeting

Charles Hughes¹ Complainant GRC Complaint No. 2016-187

v.

Township of Logan (Gloucester)² Custodial Agency

Records Relevant to Complaint: See Exhibits A-F.

Custodian of Record: Linda L. Oswald **Requests Received by Custodian:** June 15, 2016; June 16, 2016 **Response Made by Custodian:** June 23, 2016 **GRC Complaint Received:** July 6, 2016

Background

September 25, 2018 Council Meeting:

At its September 25, 2018 public meeting, the Council considered the September 18, 2018 Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff and all related documentation submitted by the parties. The Council voted unanimously to adopt the entirety of said findings and recommendations. The Council, therefore, found that:

- The Complainant's OPRA requests identified as Exhibits A-D are invalid because they fail to seek identifiable government records. <u>MAG Entm't v. Div. of ABC</u>, 375 <u>N.J.</u> <u>Super.</u> 534, 546 (App. Div. 2005); <u>Bent v. Stafford Police Dep't</u>, 381 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 30, 37 (App. Div. 2005); <u>N.J. Builders Ass'n v. New Jersey Council on Affordable Hous.</u>, 390 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 166, 180 (App. Div. 2007); <u>Schuler v. Borough of Bloomsbury</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2007-151 (February 2009). Thus, the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's requests. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.
- The Complainant's ORPA request identified as Exhibit F is invalid as it consists of questions or seek information from the Custodian, and thus does not seek identifiable government records. See <u>Watt v. Borough of North Plainfield (Somerset)</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2007-246 (September 2009), and <u>LaMantia v. Jamesburg Public</u> <u>Library (Middlesex)</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2008-140 (February 2009). Therefore, the

Charles Hughes v. Township of Logan (Gloucester), 2016-187 - Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff

¹ No representation listed on record.

² Represented by Brian J. Duffield, of Law Office of Brian J. Duffield (Mullica Hill, NJ).

Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's request. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.

- 3. The Custodian may have unlawfully denied access to records responsive to the Complainant's OPRA request identified as Exhibit E. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall conduct a search for a contract between the Complainant and the Township and certify to the results.
- 4. The Custodian shall comply with conclusion No. 3 above within five (5) business days from receipt of the Council's Interim Order with appropriate redactions, including a detailed document index explaining the lawful basis for each redaction, and simultaneously provide certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with <u>N.J. Court Rules</u>, <u>R.</u> 1:4-4,³ to the Council Staff.⁴
- 5. The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian's compliance with the Council's Interim Order.

Procedural History:

On September 27, 2018, the Council distributed its Interim Order to all parties. On October 10, 2018, the Custodian responded to the Council's Interim Order with a certification. Therein, the Custodian certified that no contract existed between the Complainant and the Township of Logan ("Township").

<u>Analysis</u>

Compliance

At its September 25, 2018 meeting, the Council ordered the Custodian to conduct a search for any contract between the Complainant and the Township and to submit certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with <u>N.J. Court Rules</u>, <u>R.</u> 1:4-4, to the Council Staff. On September 27, 2018, the Council distributed its Interim Order to all parties, providing the Custodian five (5) business days to comply with the terms of said Order. Thus, the Custodian's response was due by close of business on October 4, 2018.

On October 10, 2018, the eight (8th) business day after receipt of the Council's Order, the Custodian submitted a certification, stating that no contract between the Complainant and the Township existed.

Charles Hughes v. Township of Logan (Gloucester), 2016-187 - Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff

³ "I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment."

⁴ Satisfactory compliance requires that the Custodian deliver the record(s) to the Complainant in the requested medium. If a copying or special service charge was incurred by the Complainant, the Custodian must certify that the record has been *made available* to the Complainant but the Custodian may withhold delivery of the record until the financial obligation is satisfied. Any such charge must adhere to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5.

Therefore, the Custodian failed to fully comply with the Council's September 25, 2018 Interim Order because she did not submit a certification of compliance to the Council Staff within the prescribed time frame.

Unlawful Denial of Access

OPRA provides that government records made, maintained, kept on file, or received by a public agency in the course of its official business are subject to public access unless otherwise exempt. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-1.1. A custodian must release all records responsive to an OPRA request "with certain exceptions." <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-1. Additionally, OPRA places the burden on a custodian to prove that a denial of access to records is lawful pursuant to <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.

The Council has previously found that, where a custodian certified that no responsive records exist, no unlawful denial of access occurred. <u>See Pusterhofer v. N.J. Dep't of Educ.</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2005-49 (July 2005). Here, a portion of the Complainant's OPRA request sought any contract between himself and the Township. In response to the Council's September 25, 2018 Interim Order, the Custodian certified that no contract existed between the Complainant and the Custodian. Thus, the GRC is satisfied that no unlawful denial of access occurred with respect to this request item.

Accordingly, the Custodian has borne her burden of proof that the she lawfully denied access to the portion of the Complainant's OPRA request seeking a contract between himself and the Township. Specifically, the Custodian certified that no such contract exists. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6; see <u>Pusterhofer</u>, GRC 2005-49.

Knowing & Willful

Because it is determined that the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's June 15, 2016 and June 16, 2016 OPRA requests, the GRC declines to address whether a knowing and willful violation occurred.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Council Staff respectfully recommends the Council find that:

- 1. The Custodian failed to comply with the Council's September 25, 2018 Interim Order because she failed to provide the certification to the Council Staff within the prescribed time frame.
- The Custodian has borne her burden of proof that the she lawfully denied access to the portion of the Complainant's OPRA request seeking a contract between himself and the Township. Specifically, the Custodian certified that no such contract exists. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6; see <u>Pusterhofer v. N.J. Dep't of Educ.</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2005-49 (July 2005).

3. Because it is determined that the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's June 15, 2016 and June 16, 2016 OPRA requests, the GRC declines to address whether a knowing and willful violation occurred.

Prepared By: Samuel A. Rosado Staff Attorney

November 7, 2018

ITEM #6

HBIT A

#15-2016

TOWNSHIP OF LOGAN OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST FORM

125 Main Street, PO Box 314, Bridgeport, NJ 08014

Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (856) 467-1061

linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

Important Notice

The last page of this form contains important information related to your rights concerning government records. Please read it carefully.

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125 Main Street, PD Box 314, Bridgeport, NJ 08014

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linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

Important Notice

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EXHIBIT ITern #1.10 TOWNSHIP OF LOGAN =# 414-2010 OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST FORM 125 Main Street, PO Box 314, Bridgeport, NJ 08014 Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (856) 467-1961 linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk **Important** Notice The last page of this form contains important information related to your rights concerning government records. Please read it carefully. Payment Information Requestor Information -- Please Print Maximum Authorization Gost \$ Last Name Hughri MI First Name Churdles Select Payment Method charles buy hes 14 @ gmail an Check / Money Order E-mail Address PLCFB Yo bit Lides Less DE Cash Mailing Address NAL 8P966 Letter size pages - \$0.05 Faes: per page Zip DBD6 ' State Legal size pages - \$0.07 City Lainens per page Other materials (CD, DVD, etc) - actual cost of material FAX Telephone On-Site Pick Fax_____E-mail__ Delivery / postage fees additional depending upon US Mall Inspect Delivery: Preferred Delivery: Up If you are requesting records containing personal information, please circle one: Under penalty of N.J.S.A. 20:28-3, I certify that I HAVE / HAVE NOT been convicted of any indictable offense under the laws of New Jersey, any other state, or the United States. delivery type. Special service charge dependent upon request. Extras: DUNYILL Date hal Signature -Record Request Information: Please be as specific as possible in describing the records being requested. Also, please note that your preferred method of delivery will only be accommodated if the custodian has the technological means and the integrity of the records will not be jeopardized by such method of delivery. Privide in Accurdence with Human nights thus treatise, contract conveyance, international or pomestic that well allow the township of loogth lemployees) the night to administrate the tangible and the night to administrate the tangible and intangible rights of the many culled churles Hughe. AGENCY USE ONLY AGENCY USE ONLY Final Cost AGENCY USE ONLY 7 1 Tracking Information

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125 Main Street, PO Box 314, Bridgeport, NJ 08014 Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (856) 467-1061

linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

Important Notice

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Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (866) 467-1061 linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

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Open request questions

06/16/16

- 1. Under which codes and ordinances are the civil rules of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 2. Under which codes and ordinances are the civil rules of evidence for the municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 3. Under which codes and ordinances are the local rules of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 4. Under which codes and ordinances are the criminal rules of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 5. Under which codes and ordinances are the civil rules of procedure of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 6. Under which codes and ordinances are the officers and employees of Logan Township Corporation government required to be sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America?
- 7. Under which codes and ordinances are the officers and employees of Logan Township Corporation government required to be sworn to uphold the Constitution for the State of New Jersey?
- 8. Under which codes and ordinances are you sworn/required to uphold any constitutions or mandates under foreign or domestic circumstance?
- 9. Under which legislative act by the State of New Jersey is the corporate Logan Township authorized to operate ?
- 10. As an independent government complete with your own legislation/codes what specific legislation from the State of New Jersey authorizes Logan Township to use state Statutes ?
- 11. How much money does the corporate logan township return to the State of New Jersey ?
- 12. Provide any verifiable evidence that Logan Township corporation is not under direct or indirect influence of a foreign government or foreign power.
- 13. Provide any verifiable evidence that Logan Township and the acts committed by Logan Township are not Acts of War being perpetrated against the men and women of the Land of the Americas.

- 14. Under which codes and ordinanaces are the officers and employees of the Logan Township corporation sworn or required not to commit Human Rights violations against the man and woman of the State of New Jersey ?
- 15. Under which codes and ordinances are the officers and employees of the Logan Township corporation sworn not to interfere with with the tangible and intangible rights of the man and woman of the State of New Jersey ?
- 16. Under which codes and ordinances are the Police employees of the Logan Township corporation (company) sworn or required not to use deadly force on men and women (customers) of the State of New Jersey?
- 17. Under which codes and ordinances are the instructions for the police employees regarding use of deadly force ?
- 18. Under which edict, canon or international treaty is the corporate Logan Township authorized to operarte as an independent government in the State of New Jersey ?

For all questions you are willing to answer provide you answer in the same number format, thank you for your time.

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State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs 101 South Broad Street PO Box 819

TRENTON, NJ 08625-0819

LT. GOVERNOR SHEILA Y. OLIVER Commissioner

INTERIM ORDER

September 25, 2018 Government Records Council Meeting

Charles Hughes Complainant v. Township of Logan (Gloucester) Custodian of Record

PHILIP D. MURPHY

Governor

Complaint No. 2016-187

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- 3. The Custodian may have unlawfully denied access to records responsive to the Complainant's OPRA request identified as Exhibit E. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall conduct a search for a contract between the Complainant and the Township and certify to the results.
- 4. The Custodian shall comply with conclusion No. 3 above within five (5) business days from receipt of the Council's Interim Order with appropriate redactions, including a detailed document index explaining the lawful basis for each



redaction, and simultaneously provide certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with <u>N.J. Court Rules</u>, <u>R.</u> 1:4-4,¹ to the Council Staff.²

5. The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian's compliance with the Council's Interim Order.

Interim Order Rendered by the Government Records Council On The 25th Day of September, 2018

Robin Berg Tabakin, Esq., Chair Government Records Council

I attest the foregoing is a true and accurate record of the Government Records Council.

Steven Ritardi, Esq., Secretary Government Records Council

Decision Distribution Date: September 27, 2018

¹ "I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment."

² Satisfactory compliance requires that the Custodian deliver the record(s) to the Complainant in the requested medium. If a copying or special service charge was incurred by the Complainant, the Custodian must certify that the record has been *made available* to the Complainant but the Custodian may withhold delivery of the record until the financial obligation is satisfied. Any such charge must adhere to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5.

STATE OF NEW JERSEY GOVERNMENT RECORDS COUNCIL

Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff September 25, 2018 Council Meeting

Charles Hughes¹ Complainant GRC Complaint No. 2016-187

v.

Township of Logan (Gloucester)² Custodial Agency

Records Relevant to Complaint: See Exhibits A-F.

Custodian of Record: Linda L. Oswald **Requests Received by Custodian:** June 15, 2016; June 16, 2016 **Response Made by Custodian:** June 23, 2016 **GRC Complaint Received:** July 6, 2016

Background³

Request and Response:

On June 15, 2016, the Complainant submitted five (5) Open Public Records Act ("OPRA") requests identified as Exhibits A-E to the Custodian seeking the above-mentioned records. On June 16, 2016, the Custodian submitted an additional OPRA request identified as Exhibit F to the Custodian seeking the above-mentioned records.

Denial of Access Complaint:

On July 6, 2016, the Complainant filed a Denial of Access Complaint with the Government Records Council ("GRC"). The Complainant asserted that the Township of Logan ("Township") received his OPRA requests on June 16, 2016. The Complainant asserted that to date, the Custodian had not responded to the OPRA requests.

Statement of Information:⁴

On November 17, 2106, the Custodian filed a Statement of Information ("SOI"). The

Charles Hughes v. Township of Logan (Gloucester), 2016-187 - Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff

¹ No representation listed on record.

² Represented by Brian J. Duffield, of Law Office of Brian J. Duffield (Mullica Hill, NJ).

³ The parties may have submitted additional correspondence or made additional statements/assertions in the submissions identified herein. However, the Council includes in the Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff the submissions necessary and relevant for the adjudication of this complaint.

⁴ On July 27, 2016, this complaint was referred to mediation. On November, 2016, this complaint was referred back to the GRC for adjudication.

Custodian certified that she received the Complainant's OPRA requests on June 15, 2016, and June 16, 2016. The Custodian certified that she responded in writing to all six (6) OPRA requests on June 23, 2016.⁵

The Custodian asserted that OPRA requests A-E were broad and unclear, and did not seek an identifiable government record, thereby making them invalid OPRA requests. <u>See Bent v.</u> <u>Stafford Police Dep't</u>, 381 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 30, 37 (App. Div. 2005), ⁶ and <u>N.J. Builders Ass'n v. New</u> <u>Jersey Council on Affordable Hous.</u>, 390 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 166, 180 (App. Div. 2007). The Custodian also argued that OPRA request F did not request or identify records, but instead was a series of questions.

<u>Analysis</u>

Unlawful Denial of Access

OPRA provides that government records made, maintained, kept on file, or received by a public agency in the course of its official business are subject to public access unless otherwise exempt. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-1.1. A custodian must release all records responsive to an OPRA request "with certain exceptions." <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-1. Additionally, OPRA places the burden on a custodian to prove that a denial of access to records is lawful pursuant to <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.

The New Jersey Appellate Division has held that:

While OPRA provides an alternative means of access to government documents not otherwise exempted from its reach, it is not intended as a research tool litigants may use to force government officials to identify and siphon useful information. Rather, OPRA simply operates to make identifiable government records "readily accessible for inspection, copying, or examination." N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.

[MAG Entm't v. Div. of ABC, 375 N.J. Super. 534, 546 (App. Div. 2005).]

The Court reasoned that:

Most significantly, the request failed to identify with any specificity or particularity the governmental records sought. *MAG provided neither names nor any identifiers other than a broad generic description of a brand or type of case prosecuted by the agency in the past.* Such an open-ended demand required the Division's records custodian to manually search through all of the agency's files, analyze, compile and collate the information contained therein, and identify for MAG the cases relative to its selective enforcement defense in the OAL litigation. Further, once the cases were identified, the records custodian would then be

⁵ The GRC notes that OPRA requests identified as Exhibits C, D, and E sought in whole or in part a contract, which is an "immediate access" record under <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-5(e). However, the GRC will not address the this issue as the Complainant did not raise it in his Denial of Access Complaint.

⁶ Affirming Bent v. Stafford Police Dep't, GRC Complaint No. 2004-78 (October 2004).

Charles Hughes v. Township of Logan (Gloucester), 2016-187 - Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff

required to evaluate, sort out, and determine the documents to be produced and those otherwise exempted.

[Id. at 549 (emphasis added).]

The Court further held that "[u]nder OPRA, *agencies are required to disclose only 'identifiable' government records* not otherwise exempt . . . In short, OPRA does not countenance open-ended searches of an agency's files." <u>Id.</u> at 549 (emphasis added). <u>See also Bent</u>, 381 <u>N.J.</u> <u>Super.</u> at 37; <u>N.J. Builders Ass'n</u>, 390 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 180; <u>Schuler v. Borough of Bloomsbury</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2007-151 (February 2009).

In <u>Donato v. Twp. of Union</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2005-182 (February 2007), the Council held that pursuant to <u>MAG</u>, a custodian is obligated to search his or her files to find identifiable government records listed in a requestor's OPRA request. The complainant in <u>Donato</u> requested all motor vehicle accident reports from September 5, 2005 to September 15, 2005. The custodian sought clarification of said request on the basis that it was not specific enough. The Council stated that:

Pursuant to [MAG], the Custodian is obligated to search her files to find the identifiable government records listed in the Complainant's OPRA request (all motor vehicle accident reports for the period of September 5, 2005 through September 15, 2005). However, the Custodian is not required to research her files to figure out which records, if any, might be responsive to a broad or unclear OPRA request. The word search is defined as "to go or look through carefully in order to find something missing or lost." The word research, on the other hand, means "a close and careful study to find new facts or information." (Footnotes omitted.)

[<u>Id.</u>]

Invalid OPRA requests typically fall into three (3) categories. The first is a request that is overly broad ("any and all," requests seeking "records" generically, etc.) requires a custodian to conduct research. <u>MAG</u>, 375 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 534; <u>Donato</u>, GRC 2005-182. The second is those requests seeking information or asking questions. <u>See Rummel v. Cumberland Cnty. Bd. of Chosen Freeholders</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2011-168 (December 2012). The final category is a request that is either not on an official OPRA request form or does not invoke OPRA. <u>See e.g.</u>, <u>Naples v. N.J.</u> <u>Motor Vehicle Comm'n</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2008-97 (December 2008).

Regarding requests requiring research, the distinction between search and research can at times be relatively narrow. That is, there are instances where the very specificity of a request requires only a search, as would the case would be with OPRA requests for communications properly containing all three (3) criteria set forth in <u>Elcavage v. West Milford Twp. (Passaic)</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2009-7 (April 2010). To that end, the Council has provided guidance on how requests containing the <u>Elcavage</u> criteria do not require research:

[A] valid OPRA request requires a search, not research. An OPRA request is thus only valid if the subject of the request can be readily identifiable based on the

request. Whether a subject can be readily identifiable will need to be made on a case-by-case basis. When it comes to e-mails or documents stored on a computer, a simple keyword search may be sufficient to identify any records that may be responsive to a request. As to correspondence, a custodian may be required to search an appropriate file relevant to the subject. In both cases, e-mails and correspondence, a completed "subject" or "regarding" line may be sufficient to determine whether the record relates to the described subject. Again, what will be sufficient to determine a proper search will depend on how detailed the OPRA request is, and will differ on a case-by-case basis. What a custodian is not required to do, however, is to actually read through numerous e-mails and correspondence to determine if same is responsive: in other words, conduct research.

[Verry v. Borough of South Bound Brook (Somerset), GRC Complaint Nos. 2013-43 and 2013-53 (Interim Order dated September 24, 2013).]

Additionally, in LaMantia v. Jamesburg Public Library (Middlesex), GRC Complaint No. 2008-140 (February 2009), the complainant requested the number of Jamesburg residents that held library cards. The GRC determined that the complainant's request was not for an identifiable government record, but for information. Id. As such, the request was deemed invalid pursuant to MAG. Id.; see also Ohlson v. Twp. of Edison (Middlesex), GRC Complaint No. 2007-233 (August 2009). Similarly, in Watt v. Borough of North Plainfield (Somerset), GRC Complaint No. 2007-246 (September 2009), the complainant made an OPRA request in the form of several questions regarding when a property was added to the "tax rolls," how much tax was owed, and why there was any delay in adding the property to the tax roll. The Council determined that the request was an invalid because it failed to identify government records.

OPRA Requests A-D

In the instant matter, the Complainant sought various "documents" and records, including "applications," "conveyances," and a "treatise." The Complainant also requested a "contract" in Request D. However, throughout these requests, the Complainant described these records as referencing the "flesh and blood" of the Complainant, and the Township's authority to administer its "private rules" to infringe upon the Complainant's rights. The Complainant repeatedly described the Township as a private business, and appeared to describe himself in the third person. Within each request, the Complainant obfuscates the subject of the records sought with jargon that does not sufficiently describe specific government records, and would require the Custodian to conduct research. <u>See MAG</u>, 375 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 534, <u>Bent</u>, 381 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 37, and <u>Verry</u>, GRC 2013-43, *et al*.

Therefore, the Complainant's OPRA requests identified as Exhibits A-D are invalid because they fail to seek identifiable government records. <u>MAG</u>, 375 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 534; <u>Bent</u>, 381 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 37; <u>N.J. Builders Ass'n</u>, 390 <u>N.J. Super.</u> at 180; <u>Schuler</u>, GRC 2007-151. Thus, the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's requests. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.

OPRA Request F

The Complainant's request did not seek records; rather, it consisted of sixteen (16) questions for the Custodian to answer and two (2) requests for "verifiable evidence." Pursuant to <u>Watt</u>, a request consisting of questions for the Custodian to answer is invalid because it failed to identify government records. GRC 2007-246. Additionally, a request for "verifiable evidence" is invalid, as evidence can come in multiple forms of documents and records, and thus does not seek identifiable government records. <u>See LaMantia</u>, GRC 2008-140.

Therefore, the Complainant's ORPA request identified as Exhibit F is invalid as it consists of questions or seek information from the Custodian, and does not seek identifiable government records. <u>See Watt</u>, GRC 2007-246, and <u>LaMantia</u>, GRC 2008-140. Therefore, the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's request. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.

OPRA Request E

Here, the Complainant sought a contract entered into between himself and the Township. The court in <u>Burnett v. Cnty. of Gloucester</u>, 415 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 506 (App. Div. 2010), evaluated a request for "[a]ny and all settlements, releases or similar documents entered into, approved or accepted from 1/1/2006 to present." <u>Id.</u> at 508. The Appellate Division determined that the request was not overly broad because it sought a specific type of document, despite failing to specify a particular case to which such document pertained. <u>Id.</u> at 515-16. Likewise, the court in <u>Burke v.</u> <u>Brandes</u>, 429 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 169 (App. Div. 2012), found a request for the E-Z Pass benefits of Port Authority retirees to be valid because it was confined to a specific subject matter that was clearly and reasonably described with sufficient identifying information. <u>Id.</u> at 176.

Unlike those records requests, the Complainant's OPRA request here is clear as to the record sought, and is not muddled by ambiguous and opaque descriptors. Therefore, the Township cannot assert that this request is invalid, as the Custodian in this matter is tasked with conducting a search for a contract. <u>See Donato</u>, GRC 2005-182.

Accordingly, the Custodian may have unlawfully denied access to records responsive to the Complainant's OPRA request identified as Exhibit E. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall conduct a search for a contract between the Complainant and the Township and certify to the results.

Knowing & Willful

The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian's compliance with the Council's Interim Order.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Council Staff respectfully recommends the Council find that:

1. The Complainant's OPRA requests identified as Exhibits A-D are invalid because they fail to seek identifiable government records. <u>MAG Entm't v. Div. of ABC</u>, 375 <u>N.J.</u>

<u>Super.</u> 534, 546 (App. Div. 2005); <u>Bent v. Stafford Police Dep't</u>, 381 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 30, 37 (App. Div. 2005); <u>N.J. Builders Ass'n v. New Jersey Council on Affordable Hous.</u>, 390 <u>N.J. Super.</u> 166, 180 (App. Div. 2007); <u>Schuler v. Borough of Bloomsbury</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2007-151 (February 2009). Thus, the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's requests. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.

- The Complainant's ORPA request identified as Exhibit F is invalid as it consists of questions or seek information from the Custodian, and thus does not seek identifiable government records. See <u>Watt v. Borough of North Plainfield (Somerset)</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2007-246 (September 2009), and <u>LaMantia v. Jamesburg Public Library (Middlesex)</u>, GRC Complaint No. 2008-140 (February 2009). Therefore, the Custodian did not unlawfully deny access to the Complainant's request. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6.
- 3. The Custodian may have unlawfully denied access to records responsive to the Complainant's OPRA request identified as Exhibit E. <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall conduct a search for a contract between the Complainant and the Township and certify to the results.
- 4. The Custodian shall comply with conclusion No. 3 above within five (5) business days from receipt of the Council's Interim Order with appropriate redactions, including a detailed document index explaining the lawful basis for each redaction, and simultaneously provide certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with <u>N.J. Court Rules</u>, <u>R.</u> 1:4-4,⁷ to the Council Staff.⁸
- 5. The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian's compliance with the Council's Interim Order.

Prepared By: Samuel A. Rosado Staff Attorney

September 18, 2018

Charles Hughes v. Township of Logan (Gloucester), 2016-187 - Findings and Recommendations of the Council Staff

⁷ "I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment."

⁸ Satisfactory compliance requires that the Custodian deliver the record(s) to the Complainant in the requested medium. If a copying or special service charge was incurred by the Complainant, the Custodian must certify that the record has been *made available* to the Complainant but the Custodian may withhold delivery of the record until the financial obligation is satisfied. Any such charge must adhere to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5.

ITEM #6

HBIT A

#15-2016

TOWNSHIP OF LOGAN OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST FORM

125 Main Street, PO Box 314, Bridgeport, NJ 08014

Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (856) 467-1061

linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

Important Notice

The last page of this form contains important information related to your rights concerning government records. Please read it carefully.

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If you are requesting records containing personal information, please circle one: Under penalty of <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 26:28-3, I certify that I HAVE / HAVE NOT been convicted of any indictable offense under the laws of New	delivery type.
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linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

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Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (856) 467-1061 linda@logan-twp.org

Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

Important Notice

The last page of this form contains important information related to your rights concerning government records. Please read it carefully.

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ITEM *6 IBIT # 19-2016 TOWNSHIP OF LOGAN OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST FORM 125 Main Street, PO Box \$14, Bridgeport, NJ 08014 Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (856) 467-1061 linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk Important Notice The last page of this form conteins important information related to your rights concerning government records. Please read it carefully. Payment Information Requestor Information - Please Print Maximum Authorization Cost \$ Last Name Hugher MI Select Payment Method First Name Charles hughes 14 D gmail con Money Order Cash Check E-mail Address 40 617 Ledus Loss DE DICEB Malling Address ______AAL 8996 Letter size pages - \$0.05 Fees: per page Zip DRDE 4 Legal size pages - \$0.07 State City Laineys per page Other materials (GD, DVD, etc) - actual cost of material FAX Telephone On-Sile Pick E-mail_ Delivery: Delivery / postage fees additional depending upon Fax ... Inspect US Mall If you are requesting records containing personal information, please circle one: Under penalty of <u>N.J.S.A.</u> 20:28-3, I certify that I HAVE / HAVE NOT been convicted of any indictable offense under the laws of New Jersey, any other state, or the United States. Preferred Delivery: Up delivery type. Special service charge Extras: dependent upon request. Duliy/116 Date Signature l Record Request Information: Please be as specific as possible in describing the records being requested. Also, please note that your preferred method of delivery will only be accommodated if the custodian has the technological means and the integrity of the records will not be leopardized by such method of delivery. A formal request for a contract with the tourship become with your man numer Charles Hughes 14-13 Nr. AGENCY USE ONLY AGENCY USE ONLY Final Cost AGENOV LISE ONLY

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TOWNSHIP OF LOGAN **OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT REQUEST FORM** 125 Main Street, PO Box 314, Bridgsport, NJ 08014

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Phone: (856) 467-3424 ext. 9 Fax: (866) 467-1061 linda@logan-twp.org Linda Oswald, Municipal Clerk

Important Notice

The last page of this form contains important information related to your rights concerning government records, Please read it carefully.

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Open request questions

06/16/16

- 1. Under which codes and ordinances are the civil rules of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 2. Under which codes and ordinances are the civil rules of evidence for the municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 3. Under which codes and ordinances are the local rules of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 4. Under which codes and ordinances are the criminal rules of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 5. Under which codes and ordinances are the civil rules of procedure of municipal court for Logan township found ?
- 6. Under which codes and ordinances are the officers and employees of Logan Township Corporation government required to be sworn to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America?
- 7. Under which codes and ordinances are the officers and employees of Logan Township Corporation government required to be sworn to uphold the Constitution for the State of New Jersey?
- 8. Under which codes and ordinances are you sworn/required to uphold any constitutions or mandates under foreign or domestic circumstance?
- 9. Under which legislative act by the State of New Jersey is the corporate Logan Township authorized to operate ?
- 10. As an independent government complete with your own legislation/codes what specific legislation from the State of New Jersey authorizes Logan Township to use state Statutes ?
- 11. How much money does the corporate logan township return to the State of New Jersey ?
- 12. Provide any verifiable evidence that Logan Township corporation is not under direct or indirect influence of a foreign government or foreign power.
- 13. Provide any verifiable evidence that Logan Township and the acts committed by Logan Township are not Acts of War being perpetrated against the men and women of the Land of the Americas.

- 14. Under which codes and ordinanaces are the officers and employees of the Logan Township corporation sworn or required not to commit Human Rights violations against the man and woman of the State of New Jersey ?
- 15. Under which codes and ordinances are the officers and employees of the Logan Township corporation sworn not to interfere with with the tangible and intangible rights of the man and woman of the State of New Jersey ?
- 16. Under which codes and ordinances are the Police employees of the Logan Township corporation (company) sworn or required not to use deadly force on men and women (customers) of the State of New Jersey ?
- 17. Under which codes and ordinances are the instructions for the police employees regarding use of deadly force ?
- 18. Under which edict, canon or international treaty is the corporate Logan Township authorized to operarte as an independent government in the State of New Jersey ?

For all questions you are willing to answer provide you answer in the same number format, thank you for your time.

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