

2014 Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent

Ready for Notebook

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Budget Action Title: Development of consistent City policies and procedures regarding responses to Public Disclosure Requests

Councilmembers: Bagshaw; Clark; Rasmussen

Staff Analyst: Ben Noble

Date		Total	SB	BH	TR	RC	TB	NL	JG	SC	MO
	Yes										
	No										
	Abstain										
	Absent										

Statement of Legislative Intent:

Statement of Legislative Intent

Council requests that the City Clerk, the City Attorney’s Office and the Executive, including representatives from the Mayor’s Office, the Department of Finance and Administrative Services, and the Department of Information Technology form a PDR Task Force to: (i) identify shortcomings in the City’s current approach to fulfilling PDRs; and (ii) make recommendations regarding the appropriate City-wide policies, procedures and organizational structures needed to address any such shortcomings. Council anticipates that the Task Force will coordinate with staff currently involved in the development an electronic records management solution for the City.

To support this effort and to provide leadership and staff support to the Task Force, Council will fund a new, policy-level position in FAS and provide additional resources for consultants or other complementary services. This position could potentially take on a long-term role in City-wide PDR coordination and compliance, depending on the Task Force’s final recommendations.

Council requests that the Task Force provide a review of current practices and an initial set of recommendations regarding City-wide policies, procedures and organizational structures by July 31, 2014.

Background

Fulfilling public disclosure requests (PDRs) in a consistent, efficient and effective manner remains a significant challenge for the City. The number of PDRs has grown significantly over the past few years. In 2012, the City received more than 5,750 requests, and it appears the final total for 2013 will be higher.

At the same time, the rapid growth in electronic communications and digital records has made timely response an ever more complicated and time-consuming process. City staff and the technology available to them are being stretched thin by the volume and complexity of these requests.

To date, each department has been responsible for responding to the PDRs that are applicable to them, with the Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) providing a coordination function. However, the City has not established a consistent set of procedures, policies and standards that are enforced across the City. This has the potential to create delays in providing requested materials and errors in fully meeting the specifics of certain requests. Failure to provide thorough and timely responses can undermine the City's overall goal of transparency and puts the City at risk of legal action and monetary fines. And in fact, the City has been the subject of legal action and has paid settlements that total nearly \$600,000 over the past 4 years.

Responsible Council Committee(s): Government Performance and Finance

Date Due to Council: July 31, 2014