Public Records Requests

How to submit a request and what to expect

SUBMIT PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS TO

Email: publicrecords@cherokeecounty-nc.gov

Mail: Cherokee County Public Records Request
75 Peachtree Street
Murphy, NC 28906

Use the email inbox or mailing address above to submit public records requests. A single point of contact gives the public one clear place to send requests and helps the County acknowledge, route, track, and coordinate responses consistently. Centralized intake also reduces delay or duplication when a request involves more than one department, while preserving the responsibility of the appropriate records custodian to identify and provide responsive records.

1. What to include in a public records request

A public records request asks to inspect or obtain copies of identifiable, existing records made or received in connection with public business. Records may include paper documents, emails, photographs, recordings, maps, reports, spreadsheets, and other documentary materials, regardless of physical form.

To help the County respond efficiently, describe the records sought as clearly as possible. When known, include:

- the type or category of record;
- the subject matter;
- an approximate date range;
- the department, office, or person likely to maintain the records; and
- the preferred format for receiving copies, if the County can provide that format.

Please note: The Public Records Act generally provides access to existing records. It does not require the County to answer questions, provide legal conclusions, conduct an investigation, prepare a narrative or explanation, or create or compile a record that does not already exist. A request will not be denied merely because confidential information is mixed with public information. When required, confidential information will be separated or redacted, and the nonconfidential portion will be provided.

2. What to expect after submitting a request

Review and response

The County will review the request to determine whether responsive records exist, where they are maintained, and whether any law limits or prohibits disclosure. Depending on the request, the County's response may include:

- responsive, nonexempt existing records;

- records with confidential information redacted or separated;
- a description of where the records are available online;
- a request for reasonable clarification if the records cannot be identified from the description provided;
- notice that no responsive record was identified; or
- an explanation applicable to a denied request for a computer database.

Timing

North Carolina law requires copies to be furnished as promptly as possible, but it does not set a fixed response period. Response time depends on the clarity and scope of the request, the number and location of potentially responsive records, the number of departments involved, the need to retrieve electronic information, and the need to review and redact confidential information. The volume and complexity of pending requests at any given time can impact the speed with which a response can be provided. When narrowing or prioritizing a request would help records be identified and produced more efficiently, the County may contact the requester to discuss practical options.

Cost

Public records are generally available free or at minimal cost. For uncertified copies, charges ordinarily may not exceed the County's actual cost of reproduction. If a request requires extensive use of information technology resources or extensive clerical or supervisory assistance, the County will assess a reasonable special service charge based on actual costs allowed by law. The County bears the cost of separating confidential information from nonconfidential information. If a special service charge will apply, the County will provide notice so the requester may consider narrowing the request before substantial chargeable work proceeds.

3. Keep public records requests focused on records

Please use the public records inbox and mailing address for public records inquiries only. A public records request should identify the records the requester wishes to inspect or obtain. The public records process is not intended for disagreements, complaints, accusations, policy arguments, legal claims, or other concerns directed to the County.

This guidance does not minimize or discourage public comment. Separating concerns from records requests helps County staff identify the records being sought, avoids confusion about which portions of a submission require a records search, and supports a more efficient response for all requesters. Concerns about County policy or operations may be directed through the County's ordinary public-comment and constituent-contact channels.

Legal references: N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 132-1, 132-2, 132-6, and 132-6.2.