

E-mail Retention Policy and Procedure

I. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the use and limited need for retention of e-mails sent or received by City of Hickory employees.

II. E-mail and the Public Records Act

E-mail is a method of communication commonly used in the City of Hickory. Most e-mail is a public record when sent or received as part of normal business transactions. Some examples of e-mail messages (including messages with attachments) that are public records include policies and directives, correspondence related to official business, meeting agendas or minutes, official reports, or material that has legal or historic value.

Personal e-mail is not a public record. E-mail related to legally protected issues such as Personnel, Economic Development, Attorney-client privilege, etc., are public records but may not be open to the public for review. If there is a question as to whether an e-mail is open to the public, please consult the City's Public Records Policy or confer with your supervisor or the City's Staff Attorney.

III. Custodian of e-mail messages

The custodian of an e-mail message will normally be the originator if that person is a City of Hickory employee; otherwise, it will be the person to whom the message is addressed once the message has been received. The custodian is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Public Records Act and with the Municipal Records Retention and Disposition Schedule issued by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. Although the Information Technology department performs back-ups of the e-mail system, it is done as a safety measure and not for the purpose of complying with the retention schedule.

IV. Retention of e-mail messages

Many of the e-mails that are sent and received have limited or short-term value and should be deleted as soon as it no longer serves an administrative purpose. Some examples of this type of e-mail include e-mail that is equivalent to a phone conversation or brief discussion about daily functions, meeting requests, appointment confirmations, general announcements, advertisements, news from other organizations or companies, "junk" e-mails, personal e-mail, and e-mail that functions as telephone messages. The City's integrated phone/e-mail system creates e-mail from voicemail messages. These e-voicemail messages are not public record and should be deleted as soon as they no longer serve an administrative purpose.

E-mail containing information of lasting value, such as policy interpretation or decision issuance, must be retained in accordance with the Municipal Records Retention and Disposition Schedule. Each department has a copy of the schedule or it can be found on the internet at <http://www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/records/local/>. Generally, if the e-mail must be retained for longer than one year, it should be printed and filed as a paper copy. Other e-mails that are retained should be moved from the server to a personal folder that is stored on your hard drive and not on the server, and the folders should be organized logically so that records can be easily retrieved. The IT Department can help with setting up personal folders.

