

McKinley County enacts new IPRA policy, rates

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 04 November 2016 05:29



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County Attorney: Departments get fair share of IPRA requests

The McKinley County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved an Inspection of Public Records operating policy that impacts the manner in which official information requests are handled.

The new policy was instituted via resolution at the Nov. 1 regular county commission meeting. Commissioner Genevieve Jackson did not attend the meeting.

"Prior to this method, the county was pretty much in line with what the state was doing," McKinley County Attorney Doug Decker explained after the meeting.

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Decker introduced the matter to commission members.

“Now, this is county policy,” he said.

Decker said practically every department at the county receives its share of public information requests. He said over the past few years there have been instances whereby some county departments have been inundated with formal requests. Decker named roads, the detention center, and personnel as departments that get numerous informational requests on a daily basis from regular citizens and media outlets alike.

McKinley County Manager Anthony Dimas informed commissioners that the new IPRA matter would go up on the county’s website within a matter of time so that people know about the change. He said the proper informational meetings have been held with senior department heads and staffers.

What is IPRA in New Mexico?

The New Mexico Inspection of Public Records Act was enacted to provide the public with access to information pertaining to governmental affairs. The law ensures public access to practically all public records, with exception to a few such records and some aspects of personnel files like social security numbers.

Each state agency and governmental entity has a designated records custodian to whom requests for the inspection of public records are addressed.

Decker said fees have been put in place for county inspection requests. He said there is no cost associated with county personnel researching records, but that there is a cost for copying and manpower hours.

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Information on fee schedules and the like wasn't immediately available from the state, but Decker distributed the McKinley County fee schedule for public records requests:

"I've read through this," Commissioner Carol Bowman-Muskett said of the new policy. "I don't have any problems with it."

The new policy states:

If inspection is not permitted within three business days, then the person making the request will receive a written response explaining when the records will be available for inspection or when the public body will respond to the request.

Protected personal identifier information contained in public records may be redacted before inspection or the copying of a record. The presence of protected personal identifier information on a record does not exempt the record from inspection. Also, the redaction of other protected or a non-public portion of a record may be redacted.

Generally, the rules that govern the inspection of public records are important in that newspapers, in particular, are government watchdogs and the timely release of information becomes crucial in controversial matters.

Decker said the new policy helps county employees in every department to better understand the essence of inspecting public documents. Decker said county staffers have, for years, taken classes on inspecting public records.

"This is something that pertains to every department," he reiterated. "We will continue our employee training with respect to how it relates to [IPRA]."

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