



Agenda Report

Fullerton City Council

MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 2025

TO: CITY COUNCIL

SUBMITTED BY: LUCINDA WILLIAMS, CITY CLERK

PREPARED BY: LUCINDA WILLIAMS, CITY CLERK

SUBJECT: PUBLIC RECORDS REQUESTS PROCESS OVERVIEW

SUMMARY

Council Member Zahra requested, supported by Mayor Pro Tem Charles, a presentation on the Fullerton public records requests process.

PROPOSED MOTION

Receive and file.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- Approve the Proposed Motion
- Other options brought by City Council.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Proposed Motion.

CITY MANAGER REMARKS

None.

POLICY PRIORITY STATEMENT

Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACT

None.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

California Public Records Act

California passed the California Public Records Act (CPRA) in 1968 to allow public access to government records unless a specific exemption applies. The public may request public records in writing or orally and inspect and obtain copies of "public records" - any writing related to the public's business prepared, owned, used or retained by a California state or local agency. Agencies must respond to requests within ten calendar days indicating how and when they will produce records. The law allows a 14-day extension for this determination in cases involving voluminous and/or complex requests. Agencies must declare records located but exempt from production along with the citation permitting the exemption. Common exemptions include personnel and medical records, attorney-client privilege, utility customer information and preliminary drafts.

Public Records Requests Trends

The *Granicus 2025 Public Record Complexity Benchmark Report*¹ notes public records request volume rose 161% and complexity increased by 72% since 2018, driven by increased public engagement, media and commercial request for records and expanding digital communication platforms use. The 2017 *City of San Jose v. Superior Court* ruling clarified that public employees and officials must disclose electronic communications when using personal accounts or devices to conduct public business under the California Public Records Act, adding more complexity to retrieving records in response to a public records request. This expanded scale, diversity and complexity in requests places a significant strain on existing resources to respond accurately and timely while also attending to other agency work

City of Fullerton Public Records Request Process

The City of Fullerton implemented a records request management application to facilitate public records requests in FY 2020-21. The public may submit requests online through the public portal. Staff uploads requests received outside the portal into the online system. Staff encourages the public to use the portal as it guides the requestor to provide specific information to help staff respond as quickly as possible to the request. Requestors providing an email with their request receive updates and communication through the portal and notification when staff complete the request with a link to the records posted online. The portal also helps users find records available without submitting a request with a frequently asked questions section and pop-up suggestions to find responses to similar requests or point to records available on the City website. The City posts responses to all public records requests in this public portal. Attachment 2 provides a brief tutorial to use the public records request portal.

The Deputy City Clerk spends approximately 85% of work hours processing records requests, working with department records coordinators to gather responsive records, coordinating with Information Technology to search for responsive emails and reviewing responsive records with the City Attorney to redact confidential or personal information.

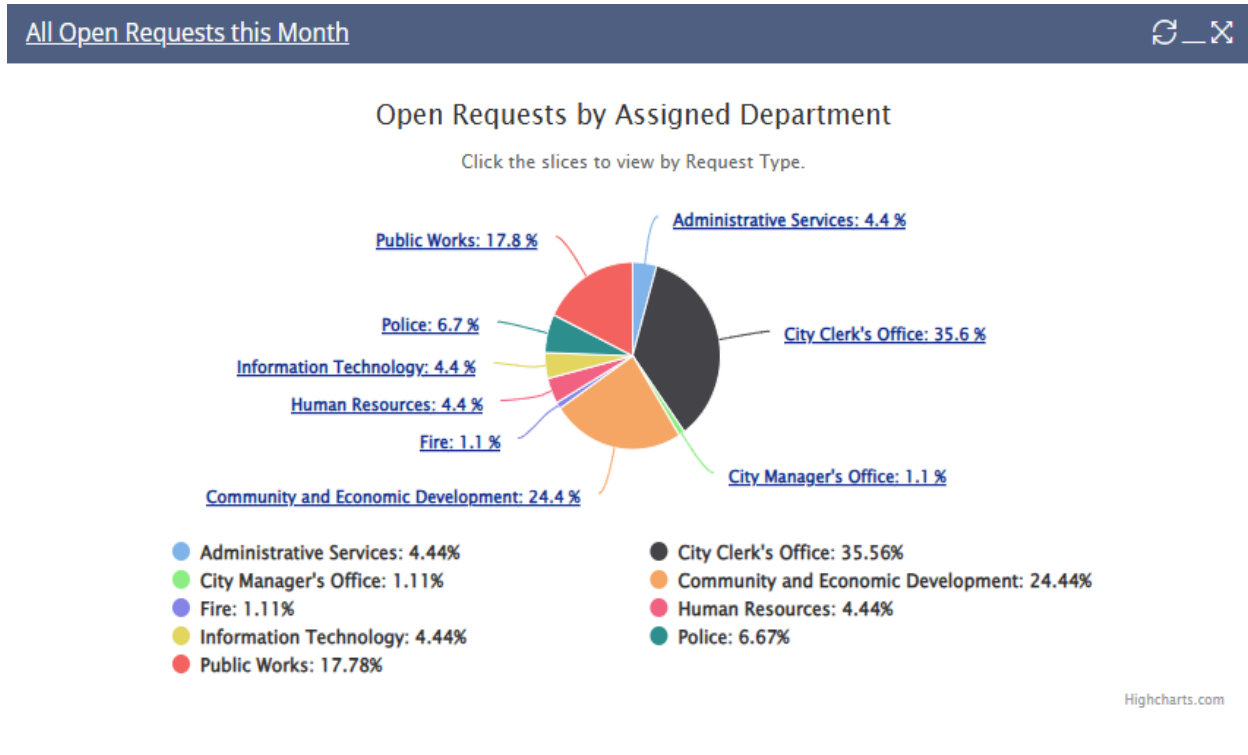
The system usually has between 15 and 25 open requests at any moment. That number has increased to 25 to 40 open requests at any time in recent months with 51 records requests in progress on November 10, 2025. The following table shows the number of requests processed since 2021.

¹ <https://granicus.com/resource/2025-public-records-complexity-benchmark-report/>

Calendar Year	Number of Requests
2021	875
2022	877
2023	833
2024	904
2025	1006*

* As of November 10, 2025

The following chart illustrates the typical percentage of requests by department but does not indicate the complexity of requests.



Many of the requests seek routine categories of records. The Public Works Department regularly receives requests for infrastructure plans or bid documents. The Community and Economic Development Department routinely receives requests for code enforcement records, building plans and permits.

Additional requests, however, have become increasingly complex in recent years, particularly those seeking email and other communications on personal accounts. Searches for responsive email records can garner hundreds, if not thousands, of results depending on the search criteria provided by the requestor. Staff will work with the requestor to try to narrow the search parameters to respond more efficiently. Staff must review each email for responsiveness, work with the City Attorney to identify non-disclosable emails, redact personal information and then produce the records. This process also applies for text and other communications on personal devices and often requires more time for manual retrieval and review and then to forward messages to the City Clerk's Office for legal review and redaction.

Other City Comparisons

Agencies statewide have experienced an increase in public records request volume and complexity. A brief survey of Orange County cities revealed the following:

Agency	Increased Requests Overall?	Increased Requests for Email Communications?	Number Requests Received Annually	Number of Staff Processing Requests	Other Information
Buena Park	Yes	No	673 year to date	One person / 30% time	Requesting full time records / records request manager
Stanton	Yes	Yes - email	353 FY 2024-25	One person	
San Clemente	Yes	Yes	1153 (as of 9/30/25)	One person	One coordinator in each department
Laguna Beach	Yes	Yes	603 Year to date	Two people	
La Habra	Yes (doubled in past two years)	No	Close to 900	One person / 50% time	
Costa Mesa	Yes	Yes	1300	One staff person with assistance from City Clerk and part time specialist	
Rancho Santa Margarita	No	Yes	550 Per year	One person processes / One person managing online system	

Villa Park	No	No	45	One person	
Orange	Yes – 200% increase over five years	Yes	1300 to 1500	Hired records coordinator in 2024 with Deputy and City Clerk assisting	

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Presentation
- Attachment 2 – Online Records Request Portal Tutorial

cc: Interim City Manager Eddie Manfro