At the June 30, 2015 public meeting, the Government Records Council (“Council”) considered the March 24, 2015 Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director and all related documentation submitted by the parties. The Council, by a majority vote, adopted the entirety of said findings and recommendations. The Council, therefore, finds that:

1. The Custodian complied with the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order because he responded within the prescribed extended time frame for producing the responsive records and simultaneously provided certified confirmation of compliance to the Executive Director.

2. The Custodian unlawfully denied access to the records identified in the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order. However, the Custodian produced the identified records to the Complainant in compliance with the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order. Additionally, the evidence of record does not indicate that the Custodian’s violation of OPRA had a positive element of conscious wrongdoing or was intentional and deliberate. Therefore, the Custodian’s actions do not rise to the level of a knowing and willful violation of OPRA and unreasonable denial of access under the totality of the circumstances.

This is the final administrative determination in this matter. Any further review should be pursued in the Appellate Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey within forty-five (45) days. Information about the appeals process can be obtained from the Appellate Division Clerk’s Office, Hughes Justice Complex, 25 W. Market St., PO Box 006, Trenton, NJ 08625-0006. Proper service of submissions pursuant to any appeal is to be made to the Council in care of the Executive Director at the State of New Jersey Government Records Council, 101 South Broad Street, PO Box 819, Trenton, NJ 08625-0819.
Final Decision Rendered by the
Government Records Council
On The 30th Day of June, 2015

Robin Berg Tabakin, Esq., Chair
Government Records Council

I attest the foregoing is a true and accurate record of the Government Records Council.

Steven Ritardi, Esq., Secretary
Government Records Council

Decision Distribution Date: July 2, 2015
STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
GOVERNMENT RECORDS COUNCIL  

Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director  
June 30, 2015 Council Meeting

Harry B. Scheeler, Jr.¹  
Complainant  

v.  

Woodbine Board of Education²  
Custodial Agency  

Records Relevant to Complaint: PDF³ formatted copies of:⁴  

1. “2013-2014 Budget  
2. A list of all expenditures for the current year.  
3. Current contact [sic] with school business administrator  
4. Current contract with school superintendent  
5. All legal bills submitted in 2013 please include complete detailed billing  
6. Current contract for Child Study Team Services  
8. Financial Disclosure Statements for all Board members, Mrs. Towns and Mr. Parmelee”  

Custodian of Record: Alan Parmelee  
Request Received by Custodian: January 2, 2014⁵  
GRC Complaint Received: January 15, 2014  

Background  

January 30, 2015⁶ Council Meeting:  

At its January 30, 2015 public meeting, the Council considered the November 10, 2014⁷ Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director and all related documentation  

¹ No legal representation listed on record.  
² Represented by Susan Hodges, Esq., of Archer & Greiner (Haddonfield, NJ).  
³ “Portable Document Format.”  
⁴ The Complainant requested additional records within his OPRA request, but they are not at issue in this matter.  
⁵ The Custodian claimed he received the ORPA request on January 6, 2014.  
⁶ The Council meeting was originally scheduled for January 27, 2015, but was moved due to inclement weather.  
⁷ This complaint was prepared for adjudication at the Council’s November 18, 2014 and December 16, 2014 meeting, but could not be adjudicated due to lack of quorum.
submitted by the parties. The Council voted unanimously to adopt the entirety of said findings and recommendations. The Council, therefore, found that:

1. The Custodian’s failure to respond immediately in writing to the Complainant’s OPRA request for contracts, bills, expenditures, and employee salary information results in a violation of OPRA’s immediate access provision at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e). See Herron v. Twp. of Montclair, GRC Complaint No. 2006-178 (February 2007).

2. The evidence in the record demonstrates that the Custodian unlawfully denied access to the salary information for seven (7) Woodbine Elementary School employees for the 2013-2014 academic year because the previously provided record did not contain the same. N.J.S.A. 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall provide the Complainant with the salary information for the following employees:
   a. Jasmine Murray
   b. Drew Albany
   c. Sandy Germann
   d. Jacquline Anderson
   e. Lisa Lombardo
   f. Michelle Wendt
   g. Alfonzo Toney

3. The Custodian shall comply with Item No. 2 above within five (5) business days from receipt of the Council’s Interim Order with appropriate redactions, including a detailed document index explaining the lawful basis for each redaction, and simultaneously provide certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with N.J. Court Rule 1:4-4, to the Executive Director.

4. The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian’s compliance with the Council’s Interim Order.

Procedural History:

On February 3, 2015, the Council distributed its Interim Order to all parties. On February 4, 2015, the Custodian e-mailed the Government Records Council (“GRC”), claiming that he produced the missing salary information of the individuals listed in the Interim Order via e-mail on January 28, 2014. On February 10, 2015, the Custodian submitted nine (9) copies of the responsive documents to the GRC but did not include a certification confirming delivery of said documents to the Complainant. On February 13, 2015, the GRC e-mailed the Custodian,

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8 “I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.”

9 Satisfactory compliance requires that the Custodian deliver the record(s) to the Complainant in the requested medium. If a copying or special service charge was incurred by the Complainant, the Custodian must certify that the record has been made available to the Complainant but the Custodian may withhold delivery of the record until the financial obligation is satisfied. Any such charge must adhere to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5.
informing him that the terms of the Council’s Interim Order were to release the responsive records to the Custodian and certify same to the Executive Director. The GRC granted the Custodian an additional five (5) business days to resubmit his response to the Council’s Interim Order.

On February 18, 2015, the Custodian submitted his certification to the Executive Director, stating that he had produced the responsive documents to the Complainant that day. The Custodian also certified that one of the identified employees was not a Woodbine Board of Education employee, and thus he did not disclose her salary information.

**Analysis**

**Compliance**

At its January 30, 2015 meeting, the Council ordered the Custodian to produce the salary information of the identified employees and to submit certified confirmation of compliance to the Executive Director. On February 3, 2015, the Council distributed its Interim Order to all parties, providing the Custodian five (5) business days to comply with the terms of said Order. Thus, the Custodian’s response was due by close of business on February 10, 2015.

On February 10, 2015 the fifth (5th) business day after receipt of the Council’s Order, the Custodian submitted nine (9) copies of responsive records to the GRC. On February 13, 2015, the GRC informed the Custodian that he was ordered to provide the responsive records to the Complainant and granted an additional five (5) business days to comply. On February 18, 2015, the second (2nd) business day after receipt of the GRC’s correspondence, the Custodian submitted certified confirmation of compliance to the GRC, via e-mail.

Therefore, the Custodian complied with the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order because he responded within the prescribed extended time frame producing the responsive records and simultaneously provided certified confirmation of compliance to the Executive Director.

**Knowing & Willful**

OPRA states that “[a] public official, officer, employee or custodian who knowingly or willfully violates [OPRA], and is found to have unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances, shall be subject to a civil penalty.” N.J.S.A. 47:1A-11(a). OPRA allows the Council to determine a knowing and willful violation of the law and unreasonable denial of access under the totality of the circumstances. Specifically OPRA states “[i]f the council determines, by a majority vote of its members, that a custodian has knowingly and willfully violated [OPRA], and is found to have unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances, the council may impose the penalties provided for in [OPRA].” N.J.S.A. 47:1A-7(e).

Certain legal standards must be considered when making the determination of whether the Custodian’s actions rise to the level of a “knowing and willful” violation of OPRA. The
The following statements must be true for a determination that the Custodian “knowingly and willfully” violated OPRA: the Custodian’s actions must have been much more than negligent conduct (Alston v. City of Camden, 168 N.J. 170, 185 (2001)); the Custodian must have had some knowledge that his actions were wrongful (Fielder v. Stonack, 141 N.J. 101, 124 (1995)); the Custodian’s actions must have had a positive element of conscious wrongdoing (Berg v. Reaction Motors Div., 37 N.J. 396, 414 (1962)); the Custodian’s actions must have been forbidden with actual, not imputed, knowledge that the actions were forbidden (id.; Marley v. Borough of Palmyra, 193 N.J. Super. 271, 294-95 (Law Div. 1993)); the Custodian’s actions must have been intentional and deliberate, with knowledge of their wrongfulness, and not merely negligent, heedless or unintentional (ECES v. Salmon, 295 N.J. Super. 86, 107 (App. Div. 1996)).

The Custodian unlawfully denied access to the records identified in the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order. However, the Custodian produced the identified records to the Complainant in compliance with the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order. Additionally, the evidence of record does not indicate that the Custodian’s violation of OPRA had a positive element of conscious wrongdoing or was intentional and deliberate. Therefore, the Custodian’s actions do not rise to the level of a knowing and willful violation of OPRA and unreasonable denial of access under the totality of the circumstances.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Executive Director respectfully recommends the Council find that:

1. The Custodian complied with the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order because he responded within the prescribed extended time frame for producing the responsive records and simultaneously provided certified confirmation of compliance to the Executive Director.

2. The Custodian unlawfully denied access to the records identified in the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order. However, the Custodian produced the identified records to the Complainant in compliance with the Council’s January 30, 2015 Interim Order. Additionally, the evidence of record does not indicate that the Custodian’s violation of OPRA had a positive element of conscious wrongdoing or was intentional and deliberate. Therefore, the Custodian’s actions do not rise to the level of a knowing and willful violation of OPRA and unreasonable denial of access under the totality of the circumstances.

Prepared By: Samuel A. Rosado
Staff Attorney

Approved By: Dawn R. SanFilippo
Deputy Executive Director

10 This complaint was prepared for adjudication for the Council’s March 31, 2015, April 28, 2015, and May 26, 2015 meeting, but could not be adjudicated due to lack of quorum.

Harry B. Scheeler, Jr. v. Woodbine Board of Education (Cape May), 2014-17 – Supplemental Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director
INTERIM ORDER

January 30, 2015 Government Records Council Meeting

Harry B. Scheeler, Jr. Complainant
v. Complaint No. 2014-17
Woodbine Board of Education (Cape May)

Custodian of Record

At the January 30, 2015 public meeting, the Government Records Council (“Council”) considered the November 10, 2014 Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director and all related documentation submitted by the parties. The Council, by a majority vote adopted the entirety of said findings and recommendations. The Council, therefore, finds that:

1. The Custodian’s failure to respond immediately in writing to the Complainant’s OPRA request for contracts, bills, expenditures, and employee salary information results in a violation of OPRA’s immediate access provision at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e). See Herron v. Twp. of Montclair, GRC Complaint No. 2006-178 (February 2007).

2. The evidence in the record demonstrates that the Custodian unlawfully denied access to the salary information for seven (7) Woodbine Elementary School employees for the 2013-2014 academic year because the previously provided record did not contain the same. N.J.S.A. 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall provide the Complainant with the salary information for the following employees:
   a. Jasmine Murray
   b. Drew Albany
   c. Sandy Germann
   d. Jacqueline Anderson
   e. Lisa Lombardo
   f. Michelle Wendt
   g. Alfonzo Toney

3. The Custodian shall comply with Item No. 2 above within five (5) business days from receipt of the Council’s Interim Order with appropriate redactions, including a detailed document index explaining the lawful basis for each redaction, and simultaneously provide certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with N.J. Court Rule 1:4-4,1 to the Executive Director.2

1 “I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.”

2 New Jersey is an Equal Opportunity Employer • Printed on Recycled paper and Recyclable
4. The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian’s compliance with the Council’s Interim Order.

Interim Order Rendered by the
Government Records Council
On The 30th Day of January, 2015

Robin Berg Tabakin, Esq., Chair
Government Records Council

I attest the foregoing is a true and accurate record of the Government Records Council.

Steven Ritardi, Esq., Secretary
Government Records Council

Decision Distribution Date: February 3, 2015

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2 Satisfactory compliance requires that the Custodian deliver the record(s) to the Complainant in the requested medium. If a copying or special service charge was incurred by the Complainant, the Custodian must certify that the record has been made available to the Complainant but the Custodian may withhold delivery of the record until the financial obligation is satisfied. Any such charge must adhere to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5.
STATE OF NEW JERSEY
GOVERNMENT RECORDS COUNCIL

Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director
January 30, 2015 Council Meeting

Harry B. Scheeler, Jr.1 Complainant

v.

Woodbine Board of Education2 Custodial Agency

Records Relevant to Complaint: PDF3 formatted copies of:4

1. “2013-2014 Budget
2. A list of all expenditures for the current year.
3. Current contact [sic] with school business administrator
4. Current contract with school superintendent
5. All legal bills submitted in 2013 please include complete detailed billing
6. Current contract for Child Study Team Services
7. List of ALL WES [Woodbine Elementary School] employees and salary information for
   2013-2014 school year. Please include Board member salaries.
8. Financial Disclosure Statements for all Board members, Mrs. Towns and Mr. Parmelee”

Request and Response:

On January 2, 2014, the Complainant submitted an Open Public Records Act (“OPRA”)
request to the Custodian seeking the above-mentioned records. On January 8, 2014, four (4)

1 No legal representation listed on record.
2 Represented by Susan Hodges, Esq., of Archer & Greiner (Haddonfield, NJ).
3 “Portable Document Format.”
4 The Complainant requested additional records within his OPRA request, but they are not at issue in this matter.
5 The Custodian claimed he received the ORPA request on January 6, 2014.
6 The parties may have submitted additional correspondence or made additional statements/assertions in the
   submissions identified herein. However, the Council includes in the Findings and Recommendations of the
   Executive Director the submissions necessary and relevant for the adjudication of this complaint.

Harry B. Scheeler, Jr. v. Woodbine Board of Education (Cape May), 2014-17 – Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director
business days later,

the Custodian responded in writing, via e-mail, to each request item as follows:

1. “The 2013-2014 budget can be found on the WES web site at [URL omitted].

2. All expenditures for the current year – This request is overly broad and unclear. Currently, your request fails to identify with reasonable clarity the specific government records sought, as is required by Bent v. Stafford Police Department, 381 N.J. Super. [sic] 30, 37 (App. Div. 2005). At this time, we request clarification of your OPRA request. Please in writing and identify the specific government records sought so that we may process your request. Failure to provide written clarification of your request will result in the closure of this OPRA request.

3. The current contact [sic] with the School Business Administrator will be provided by January 30, 2014.

4. The current contact [sic] with the Superintendent will be provided by January 10, 2014.

5. All legal bills submitted for payment in 2013 – Currently, your request fails to identify with reasonable clarity the specific government records sought, as is required by Bent v. Stafford Police Department, 381 N.J. Super. [sic] 30, 37 (App. Div. 2005). At this time, we request clarification of your OPRA request. Please [sic] in writing and identify the specific government records sought so that we may process your request. Failure to provide written clarification of your request will result in the closure of this OPRA request.

6. Current contract for the Child Study Team will be provided by January 10, 2014.

7. List of all WES employees and salary information – please see Board minutes of May 13, 2014 [sic] on the WES web site – [URL omitted].

8. Financial Disclosure Statements – Financial Disclosures are done electronically now on the NJ Ethics Commission website at [URL omitted].”

(Emphasis added). That same day, the Complainant responded to the Custodian via e-mail, objecting to the Custodian’s reference to websites as sufficient responses to his request items. The Complainant also objected to the need for any clarification of his request.

On January 9, 2014, the Custodian provided the Complainant with responsive records to request Item Nos. 3-8. On January 10, 2014, the Custodian provided responsive records to request Item No. 1. After receiving another e-mail from the Complainant, the Custodian provided responsive records to Item No. 2 on January 13, 2014.

Denial of Access Complaint:

On January 15, 2014, the Complainant filed a Denial of Access Complaint with the Government Records Council (“GRC”). The Complainant asserted that the Custodian violated N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e) by not providing immediate access to the above-mentioned records.

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7 The GRC takes judicial notice that on January 3, 2014, Woodbine Board of Education was closed due to a snowstorm. Therefore January 3, 2014 is not counted as a business day.
On January 28, 2014, the Complainant submitted an Amended Denial of Access Complaint to the GRC. The Complainant stated that he was denied access to request Item No. 7, arguing that the record received from the Custodian was insufficient and missing the salary information of a number of Woodbine Elementary School ("WES") employees.

Statement of Information:

On January 30, 2014, the Custodian filed a Statement of Information ("SOI"). The Custodian certified that he did not receive the Complainant’s OPRA request until January 6, 2014, asserting that he was on vacation on January 2, 2014, and the school district was closed on January 3, 2014 due to a snowstorm.

The Custodian certified that although he could have responded on January 6, 2014 via e-mail, he elected not to in favor of verifying the availability of the immediate access records. After objections from the Complainant, the Custodian certified that he produced the requested records on January 9, 10, and 13, 2014. The Custodian argued that considering the Complainant had submitted several subsequent OPRA requests, it was difficult to expeditiously fulfill the current request due to the limited resources available.

Analysis

Timeliness

OPRA provides that:

“Immediate access ordinarily shall be granted to budgets, bills, vouchers, contracts, including collective negotiations agreements and individual employment contracts, and public employee salary and overtime information.” N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e) (emphasis added).

Each request item at issue is specifically classified under OPRA as “immediate access” records pursuant to N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e). In Herron v. Twp. of Montclair, GRC Complaint No. 2006-178 (February 2007), the GRC held that “immediate access language of OPRA (N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e)) suggests that the Custodian was still obligated to immediately notify the Complainant[.]” Inasmuch that OPRA requires a custodian to respond within a statutorily required time frame, when immediate access records are sought, a custodian must respond to the request for those records immediately, granting or denying access, requesting additional time to respond or seek clarification of the request.

The evidence of record indicates that the Custodian did not conform to his statutory obligation under OPRA to respond immediately to the Complainant’s OPRA request in writing granting access, denying access, or requesting an extension of time to respond. Instead, the Custodian elected to respond to the Complainant’s OPRA request on the fourth (4th) business day after receipt, while admitting he could have responded on the second (2nd) business day. Thus, the Custodian has violated OPRA pursuant to N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e).
Therefore, the Custodian’s failure to respond immediately in writing to the Complainant’s OPRA request for contracts, bills, expenditures, and employee salary information results in a violation of OPRA’s immediate access provision at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e). See Herron, GRC No. 2006-178.

Unlawful Denial of Access

OPRA provides that government records made, maintained, kept on file, or received by a public agency in the course of its official business are subject to public access unless otherwise exempt. N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1. A custodian must release all records responsive to an OPRA request “with certain exceptions.” N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1. Additionally, OPRA places the burden on a custodian to prove that a denial of access to records is lawful pursuant to N.J.S.A. 47:1A-6.

On January 28, 2014, the Complainant submitted an Amended Denial of Access Complaint, stating that the Custodian’s response to request Item No. 7 was incomplete. The Complainant requested all WES employee and salary information for the 2013-2014 academic year. In response, the Custodian provided the May 13, 2013 Woodbine Board of Education (“Woodbine BOE”) meeting minutes (“minutes”) via e-mail on January 9, 2014. The minutes contained a list of Tenured, Non-Tenured, and Support personnel with their respective salaries approved by Woodbine BOE for the 2013-2014 academic year.

The Complainant claimed that there are seven (7) employees identified on the Woodbine BOE’s website that are not listed in the minutes, and provided a print out of WES’s staff directory as evidence. After review of the Complainant’s print out and the previously produced minutes, there are seven (7) employees listed as WES staff whose salary information are not identified in the minutes.

The evidence in the record demonstrates that the Custodian unlawfully denied access to the salary information for seven (7) WES employees for the 2013-2014 academic year, because the previously provided record did not contain the same. N.J.S.A. 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall provide the Complainant with the salary information for the following employees:

1. Jasmine Murray
2. Drew Albany
3. Sandy Germann
4. Jacqueline Anderson
5. Lisa Lombardo
6. Michelle Wendt
7. Alfonzo Toney

Knowing & Willful

The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian’s compliance with the Council’s Interim Order.

Harry B. Scheeler, Jr. v. Woodbine Board of Education (Cape May), 2014-17 – Findings and Recommendations of the Executive Director
Conclusions and Recommendations

The Executive Director respectfully recommends the Council find that:

1. The Custodian’s failure to respond immediately in writing to the Complainant’s OPRA request for contracts, bills, expenditures, and employee salary information results in a violation of OPRA’s immediate access provision at N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(e). See Herron v. Twp. of Montclair, GRC Complaint No. 2006-178 (February 2007).

2. The evidence in the record demonstrates that the Custodian unlawfully denied access to the salary information for seven (7) Woodbine Elementary School employees for the 2013-2014 academic year because the previously provided record did not contain the same. N.J.S.A. 47:1A-6. The Custodian shall provide the Complainant with the salary information for the following employees:
   a. Jasmine Murray
   b. Drew Albany
   c. Sandy Germann
   d. Jacqueline Anderson
   e. Lisa Lombardo
   f. Michelle Wendt
   g. Alfonzo Toney

3. The Custodian shall comply with Item No. 2 above within five (5) business days from receipt of the Council’s Interim Order with appropriate redactions, including a detailed document index explaining the lawful basis for each redaction, and simultaneously provide certified confirmation of compliance, in accordance with N.J. Court Rule 1:4-4,8 to the Executive Director.9

4. The Council defers analysis of whether the Custodian knowingly and willfully violated OPRA and unreasonably denied access under the totality of the circumstances pending the Custodian’s compliance with the Council’s Interim Order.

Staff Attorney                  Deputy Executive Director

November 10, 201410

8 “I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.”
9 Satisfactory compliance requires that the Custodian deliver the record(s) to the Complainant in the requested medium. If a copying or special service charge was incurred by the Complainant, the Custodian must certify that the record has been made available to the Complainant but the Custodian may withhold delivery of the record until the financial obligation is satisfied. Any such charge must adhere to the provisions of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5.
10 This complaint was prepared for adjudication at the Council’s November 18, 2014 and December 16, 2014 meeting, but could not be adjudicated due to lack of quorum.