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**To:** [Public Records Task Force](#)  
**Subject:** obtaining public records from a small sanitary district  
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Dear Task Force members:

Please do not take this as an insult, but the Public Records laws are a joke and a cruel teaser. I live in Gardiner, a small community South of Florence. We have a Special District for our waste, Gardiner Sanitary District, which sends the waste for treatment to Reedsport for treatment.

Costs, timeliness and transparency are areas which existing Public Records laws do not provide protection.

I was VP of the board until December 17, 2015. I left after two members convinced another board member to not have any more Special Meetings. The district is so small that there is no manager. We had at that time two grants totaling \$2,500,000. Plus, there are things that must be taken care of that cannot wait until the regular meeting. I left, and it was plain to see that the ban on conducting business by email had been abandoned, as confirmed by Esther Siderman, volunteer minute taker.

Within days the Treasurer, Noordhoff, was demanding that Esther add to the minutes claims that the President had ordered actions which he had not made in the meeting. Noordhoff wanted it recorded as true, but did not want it to be talked at in the next meeting, where a reporter might attend. Then more and more business was done, voting on Change Orders for \$38,000 out of a meeting, closing down a grant, and so much more. By the beginning of February the President had quit, then the Secretary quit at the February meeting after two replacements had been selected.

At the February meeting I hand delivered a letter asking for the emails from Noordhoff and Nored, an at-large member of the board. A full month passed before I received an email from Noordhoff demanding I pay for their time extracting the emails from their personal files. I must pay them as individuals, then they would "donate" the money to the district. I objected, and that is when she reprimanded me. She had the other board members attached to her email, and I was told I must write to all as a group- I refused, it was illegal to hold a quorum by email and hold a meeting.

At the March meeting the board decided to increase the cost of getting information to \$25 per hour from \$10 per half hour, specifically because it was me asking for the info. Two months after asking, I got a letter stating that because Noordhoff had over 130 emails and Nored even more for district business over a period of two months, I must pay \$100 to the district. I paid, and finally got the info by the beginning of May, 10 weeks later. The emails show that virtually all business is being conducted by email, four member quorums. A fifth member joined, but quit after a month when he determined that since he refused to do business by email, he was out of the process completely.

The board fired the volunteer minute taker, claiming that there was bias against the Secretary, who established new policy that minutes must be given to board members two weeks in advance of the next meeting, so that they might be rewritten outside of the public. Noordhoff was incensed that Esther had not changed the minutes as instructed outside of the public meetings, and Noordhoff had almost entirely rewritten the minutes, as she did again for the March minutes, with help from other board members. The board voted on the termination in April, but what is interesting is that Noordhoff went to find a replacement with no advertisement, no notices, and the person was hired before the April meeting. Same thing with the bookkeeper, who quit because the treasurer was losing checks going out or coming in, losing records, making the bookkeeper's job impossible. The bookkeeper asked for a raise from \$25 to \$40 per hour, begging to be fired, but was given the raise, not on the agenda, even as new expenses show up off the agenda and are just approved. The bookkeeper quit, but it was not until the April meeting that a new bookkeeper was presented to the board, hand selected by the treasurer with no ads or notices soliciting applications.

Esther asked for emails for the month prior to her being fired, she was sent a letter demanding \$150 for

those emails. At the April meeting they voted to hold on to their email records in their private files for 3 months before putting them in the district "to make it legal". As it stands, if you want emails from the board for the past three months it comes to about \$100 per member, for a total of \$500, and you will wait for more than a month to get them.

I realize a Special District cannot rely on assistance from the State or County. But this is an extreme example of how the Public Meeting laws are toothless and a joke. Noordhoff and Nored live outside the district, 30 miles away in Coos Bay and North Bend, where they conduct the district business and store their files to be as expensive and difficult to obtain as possible. And Gardiner is a town where when they did an income study for grants found that over 70% of the population is under the poverty level. We are simply priced out of knowing what our local government is doing. Even while the average rate is \$130 per month for sewer alone, and the rate is most deceiving. 25% of the houses are empty, I am the only business, and with a base rate of \$60 based upon water consumption, families are paying \$200-300 a month for the sewer. And we are being told revenue is down, expenses up, so we wait until the next increase, but will never know why.

Public Records laws leave a sour taste in my mouth. I sincerely hope you can do something, anything, to give teeth to the laws. And if this all sounds incredible, I do have extensive records, including but not limited to the email records of Noordhoff and Nored.

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