**Original Question:**

Hi all,

How does your library store and make publicly available board meeting records that are retained permanently? We’ve had a request from a patron for ‘all minutes from the time the library was established’…

This is proving to be a bit cumbersome, as it’s all over the place with regard to how things were stored in the past. We have a good system from ~2000 on, but before then, it’s a bit spotty. Just curious how you make these older documents available.

Or do you utilize storage and only bring them out upon request??

Thanks all!

Andrea

**Response Summary:**

Current minutes are on our web site. But we also have current minutes & minutes going back decades on archival paper & in our safe.

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When I worked at Bayliss, older copies were stored in the archival area of the Steere Room.  As binders filled up we would move them in that area.  Here at Presque Isle, they have kept them back as far back to early beginnings.  They only ones we are missing are the first 6 months or so but that was a county library then, and beyond our control, as we are a district now.  They are stored in a staff area but are available upon request by any patron.  We treat them like an archival material due history and permanency.  It would be a great project for an intern or someone with a historical background to get into order and archived.

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I would love to know the responses you get.  Almost all of our minutes are available only in hard copy except for the last 10 years which are stored on the computer.  I would love to get the minutes digitized in case our building burns down.  They are a public record so I suppose anyone can request to see them.

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Our really old minutes are not digitized. They are in binders on a shelf. If someone asked for copies of everything, we’d make them submit a FOIA and charge them for staff time.

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Did you receive a FOIA request?  In our case, I would refer it to our City Clerk's office.  I realize that's probably not helpful for you.  We have a digital record of meetings from the time I came on, but otherwise it is printed copies stored with the Clerk.  I wouldn't spend a ton of time on it without a FOIA request.  It is a big ask!

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We use Documents on Demand (DOD) which is the same service our Township uses for their board records (even though we’re not a department of the Township anymore). We selected it because the pricing is reasonable and our community already knows how it works. Here’s the link to our posting page which is linked to our library board’s webpage.

<https://cidlib.documents-on-demand.com/>

We re-established as a District library in 2012, so this is the current library’s complete documentation. The library records prior to re-establishment (going back to 1965) are housed on the Township’s DOD site because we were a township department back then, and those records belong to the township (they invested in a retroactive digitization about 5 years ago). When we get a FOIA request like you describe, we just send them the link above and refer them to the township for anything pre 2012.

We have also digitized all our financial records using the State’s records retention schedule. We only keep paper documentation in the building for current year plus one. The digitized financials are kept on a password protected portion of the DOD site for staff use only, but they’re searchable to make it easier to retrieve material for FOIA requests. It’s all backed up and we also have a portable hard-drive of all of the digitized files in a secure location. It has really helped us reduce the amount of physical storage space we need!

~

Whoa. This is a great question! At some point before I got here all the old minutes were scanned. But now I’m wondering if I have the hard copies and where.

I feel for you with this request. That’s a lot of work.

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We bring them out upon request. There might be a point at which FOIA charges can kick in if the task becomes too onerous and most public bodies are not reasonably expected to have in publication/published beyond a certain number of years (3, 5 or 7 comes to mind). I honestly don't know beyond a certain point in time where the minutes are. My assumption was always our archived minutes were stored at City Hall, but I've discovered files of them I never knew existed within the past year and they're in a format that I would not assume they were created in duplicate (some are long hand, some are typed on a type writer).

~

We utilize storage for records from previous years. The current year records are in a notebook available to the public. If this is a FOIA request (which it probably should be) the work needed to search through all records can be charged for at an hourly rate. Even if the requestor doesn't need it printed, you can charge for the work. As I am sure you know. We just had to deal with several FOIA requests so it's on my mind. :)

~

I'm having the same issue where older board meeting minutes are concerned. They're just kind of all over the place in different folders. I'm slowly working to put them all in order and together. Right now I'm using 3 inch ring binders and sheet protectors and labeling the binders' spines with the corresponding years. I'd love to eventually scan them into the computer and created a file for them that could be put on a thumb drive for easy access and safekeeping...literally, because I would put the thumb drive in our safe.

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I am working on electronic scanning and will hope not to get such a request until it’s done!

If the person is simply making a nuisance request, don’t forget you can charge a reasonable fee for your time and effort.

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First, this is long. Sorry.

Second, I had an active TEA party hardcore board member for years who gave us all sorts of anti-government nonsense and grief continually over specifically things like this. So I have some experience with this. I'll answer two questions here:

1) From our lawyer (Anne), once upon a time for an indefinite FOIA request (did I mention this was the said board member's son? Yes, I've had a lot of fun over the years and yes you should buy me a drink at the next MLA). This was in our response letter once, written by Anne (emphasis mine):

Pursuant to the FOIA, a requester has an obligation to describe a public record sufficiently to enable the public body to find the public record.  MCL 15.233(1).  You are asking for “all written documents” from, to or by library staff and the Library Director.  That request is too vague and overbroad and does not meet the requirement to sufficiently describe the public record.  **Further, there is no date restriction, so it is unclear regarding how far back the Library must look in its records for any issue any documents involving any “library staff” and the named individuals.**  As a result, the Library is denying the request.

So this made him give us a timeline for his snooping. In his subsequent request he narrowed a timeline.

2) I would put good money I have the worst "organized" minutes in libraryland. A lot of AR0012 and MZ2121 and crap that was my predecessor's personal naming schema we all have to live with. I've done my best to sort everything in to folders based on years and at least get it close if I ever needed to track stuff down. If you ever had to give these over as a FOIA, you are under no obligation to rename or organize. You can just copy/paste and dump it all on a harddrive or whatever they provide (or print if they want $$) and let them figure it out. Again, you dont have to create anything new, which includes a folder to organize things for them.

To more specifically answer your question, I put mine on my website for one fiscal year at a time: <https://www.vassarlibrary.org/library-board> (you'll note I've had very few actual meetings this year...). I post the corresponding minutes/agenda married together once they become approve (so my last meeting, in May, will come up at my July meeting). While you have to be able to provide a draft copy...10 days(?) after the meeting, there is nothing requiring me to post minutes online immediately (or ever). I also only give minutes and agenda because that's what 99% will actually care about besides casual curiosity. Time/energy wasted.

Aforementioned board member wanted all these permanently available online indefinitely, which I thought was cumbersome and impractical. In reality, rarely does anyone look at these online (I have stats), and noone has requested to see them all. Transparency for transparencies sake is great and all but again, if noone cares you're making more work for yourself, making your website possibly harder to use and possibly wasting online storage/money. So I pull them off at the end of the year and start over again. This has been sufficient for anyone who was looking for a recent minutes. And because everything (since I was here) was online at one time, it's already organized and easy to send out if requested.