

## Letter to the Westford Eagle

As Westford's Town Manager, I am committed to transparency. I take seriously our responsibility to operate in compliance with public records and open meeting laws. I am disappointed in the destructive tone and the inaccurate reporting in recent Lowell Sun coverage. The Sun continues to criticize the integrity of our organization related to the releases of documents regarding a settlement agreement with a former employee and redacted parts of a personnel evaluation. The Supervisor of Public Records reviewed the agreement and the personnel evaluation and ordered the town to redact personal information from the evaluation prior to making these documents public. Anyone involved with management understands the purpose of performance evaluations, and I expect would also understand the importance of keeping them between the employee and his or her supervisor. I believe that public employees should be accountable for the service they provide, but public scrutiny of performance evaluations does little to serve the public interest, and in fact causes much distress to the employee involved.

The Sun also requested "all town emails between officials related to Chief Rochon's separation agreement and settlement payout". To be responsive to this broad request, hours would have to be spent searching email archives, and then more time reviewing the records prior to releasing them. The estimate of 62 hours is for the amount of time that may be required to locate, review, redact if necessary, and then produce these emails. If this process took less time, the Sun would only be charged for the actual hours spent. The purpose of charging for records requests is not to obstruct access to public records, but rather to account for the resources required to search and assemble records requested by private parties.

The Sun should clarify their records request to make the search a less time consuming and therefore a less costly effort, or follow Massachusetts General Laws and compensate the Westford taxpayers for the resources that will be expended to satisfy their curiosity. Although we have an obligation to produce public records, our primary responsibility is to work for the residents of Westford, and the Sun's repeated requests are taking valuable time away from more important issues facing our community.

Jodi Ross  
Westford Town Manager