

Information and Privacy Commissioner,
Ontario, Canada



Commissaire à l'information et à la protection de la vie privée,
Ontario, Canada

ORDER PO-4425

Appeal PA23-00093

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

August 9, 2023

Summary: On November 18, 2022, the requester submitted a request under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (the *Act*) to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (the ministry) for access to general records. The requester appealed to this office on the basis that the ministry failed to provide an access decision within the prescribed time limit under the *Act*. This order finds the ministry to be in a deemed refusal situation pursuant to section 29(4) of the *Act*. The ministry is ordered to issue a final decision regarding access by August 31, 2023, without any recourse to a time extension.

Statutes Considered: Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, ss. 26, 27, 28 and 29.

BACKGROUND:

[1] On November 18, 2022, the requester submitted an access request to the ministry for the following records for the time period of September 1, 2022 to November 18, 2022:

Records in relation to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing's (MMAH) consideration of proposed official plans for Niagara, Hamilton, Halton, Waterloo, Peel, York, and Durham Regions, including: All draft/redlined official plan policies; All draft/redlined official plan mapping; All staff reports providing risks/analysis and justifications for modifications or changes to the above official plans; All decision packages, including modification analysis, analysis of statement of environmental values, and

decision summaries; All memoranda, emails or minute notes from Premier's Office, Minister's Office and Ministry officials regarding modifications and changes in all formats; and Information and data on the quantum of expansion lands and employment conversions. This request includes documentation of any kind in all formats including emails, USB drives and SharePoint or another file sharing service. The start date is September 1, 2022 to present. This request does not include information submitted to the MMAH by Niagara, Hamilton, Halton, Waterloo, Peel, York, or Durham Regions, communications materials, publicly available documentation or purely scheduling correspondence.

[2] On December 19, 2022, the ministry issued a time extension under section 27 of the *Act*, extending the issuance of the final access decision to January 18, 2023.

[3] On January 25, 2023, the requestor contacted the ministry to request an update and the anticipated date for the issuance of the final decision.

[4] On January 27, 2023, the ministry responded to the requester stating that they were "experiencing higher than usual volume of FOI requests" and "still processing your request". The response did not provide a timeline for the final decision.

[5] On February 7, 2023, the Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario (this office) received a deemed refusal appeal from the requester (now the appellant) indicating that since January 27, 2023, there has been no response from the ministry. As a result, file PA23-00093 was opened and assigned to me as the Acting Adjudicator.

[6] On February 13, 2023, I sent a Notice of Inquiry (the notice) to the appellant and the ministry. The notice indicated that the appellant had filed a deemed refusal appeal against the ministry, on the basis that the ministry had not issued a decision letter within the time period set out in section 26 of the *Act*.

[7] The notice advised the ministry to issue a final access decision letter to the appellant as soon as possible. The notice also indicated that should a resolution not be reached by February 28, 2023, an order requiring the ministry to issue a decision letter to the appellant could be issued.

[8] On February 17, 2023, I spoke to the ministry and was advised that they were experiencing several challenges which included work overload, backlogs and staffing issues. The ministry indicated that it continues to work on this file but could not provide a timeline for when the final decision would be issued.

[9] On April 5, 2023, the ministry provided an update and stated that the records review was underway and that third-party consultations would be required.

[10] On May 10, 2023, I requested an update from the ministry. In response, the ministry advised that they were aiming to issue a final decision by the end of July. This

information was provided to the appellant.

[11] The appellant expressed frustration with the ongoing delays. However, they agreed to wait if the ministry were to provide firm commitments and timelines on the issuance of third-party notifications and the final access decision.

[12] As a result, I requested that the ministry provide firm dates as to when the third-party notification(s) would be sent, and when the final access decision would be made.

[13] On June 5, 2023, the ministry wrote to me and advised that it was aiming to issue third-party notices the week of July 2, 2023 and that the final access decision would be issued by the end of August. This update was provided to the appellant.

[14] On July 26, 2023, the ministry advised this office that they now expected to issue a final access decision by mid-September.

[15] In light of the above, and to ensure there are no further delays in processing this request, I am ordering the ministry to issue a final access decision to the appellant.

DISCUSSION:

[16] Section 26 of the *Act* states that the head of an institution shall, subject to sections 27 (time extension), 28 (third party notice) and 57 (payment of fees), give written notice of its decision on an access request within 30 days after the request is received.

[17] Where a head fails to issue a decision on access within the legislated framework, section 29(4) of the *Act* applies. This section states:

A head who fails to give the notice required under section 26 or subsection 28(7) concerning a record shall be deemed to have given notice of refusal to give access to the record on the last day of the period during which notice should have been given.

[18] The ministry received the appellant's request on or about November 18, 2022, and extended the time to issue its decision to January 18, 2023, pursuant to section 27 of the *Act*.

[19] As of today's date, the ministry has not issued its final access decision.

[20] Therefore, I find the ministry to be in a deemed refusal situation pursuant to section 29(4) of the *Act*.

[21] To ensure that there are no further delays, I will order the ministry to issue a final access decision to the appellant no later than August 31, 2023, without recourse to any further time extensions under section 27 of the *Act*.

ORDER:

1. I order the ministry to issue a **final** access decision to the appellant regarding access to the records in accordance with the *Act* without recourse to a time extension, no later than **August 31, 2023**.
2. In order to verify compliance, the ministry shall provide me with a copy of the response referred to in provision 1 by **August 31, 2023**. This copy should be forwarded to my attention c/o Information and Privacy Commissioner/Ontario, 2 Bloor Street East, Suite 1400, Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A8.

Original Signed by: _____
Soha Khan
Acting Adjudicator

August 9, 2023 _____