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We've spent much of our time talking about public records.

Much of that conversation has centered on emails and requests by the media.

In some ways, we got a bit off track by concentrating so much on emails. They are but one type of public record that should be easily accessible but aren't.

We should also be clear that reporters have no special standing when it comes to seeking public records. They are simply members of the public, and all members of the public should have access to what their government is doing.

We've heard members of this administration say they are following the

law when it comes to releasing public records.

As I said at the last meeting, the administration may be following the letter of the law but certainly not the spirit of the law.

Once a member of the public has requested a record that is then deemed public, there is no reason that the mayor's chief administrative officer, chief of staff and communications director should have to sign off before that public record is released.

The administration argues that its protocol meets the "reasonable" time frame included in Chapter 119. I would argue that it does not.

Certainly, the statute allows for reasonable time to find the requested document, to determine it is public and to reproduce it.

But not included in that time frame is extra time to alert political appointees that it is being released.

At our last meeting, Brian Hughes and Marsha Oliver answered questions about the availability of department heads to talk to the media.

Both of them said any requests for information would have to come through them.

Ms. Oliver assured us that her goal is to make sure reporters talk to the correct people and get the right information. She also said she will work with

reporters to set up interviews with department heads.

Let me share a personal story.

Before I retired I was assigned to do a story for J Magazine on McCoys Creek and the Emerald Necklace.

The creation of the Emerald Necklace had been recommended by a group that met more than a decade ago to develop a vision for Downtown.

Sam Mousa was a member of that group. He would be a logical person to interview. He helped develop the strategic plan. He has plenty of government experience. And he's an engineer who can explain some of the technical difficulties involved in restoring McCoys Creek.

I've known Sam for more than 20 years. We share a bond of both being from Corpus Christi, Texas, and having attended rival high schools there.

I've worked with Sam through several administrations and always found him to be a good source of honest information. When I asked Sam for an interview, the request was kicked to Ms. Oliver.

There it died despite several attempts by me to set up an interview.

When I asked Sam, whom I still consider to be a friend, what was going on, he replied he had to abide by his boss's wishes.

I don't think that is "working with the media" as Ms. Oliver claims, and I'm

certain I'm not the only reporter that has encountered such a road block.

The story for J Magazine was not a negative article and it was never intended to be.

Without Sam's perspective in it, the public was deprived of valuable information.

I would like to make one other point before closing.

Earlier in our meetings, we talked about the fact that emails for members of the City Council are not put on the city's website like those of the mayor's.

We've been given a copy of a memorandum written by Steve Rohan, then a deputy general counsel, in 2011.

To be clear, it was a memorandum from Rohan and not an official decision by the general counsel.

Rohan said that automatically putting the council emails on the city website without screening them for material that should not be released to the public could result in the city and the council members being liable for damages.

The council members at the time, who never liked the public reading their emails, used the Rohan opinion to stop the practice.

We have received a copy of that memorandum.

I want to emphasize the memorandum's conclusion:

“The Office of General Counsel recommends that the policy of automatic mirroring and posting of council member email communications be, at a minimum, modified to develop and provide for an alternative disclosure plan that might involve ECA screening of incoming and outgoing email. Such action would not violate Florida’s public records law as such law does not mandate automatic posting of communications under any circumstance. Rather, it would afford the council the opportunity to integrate new technology in a manner that is more in keeping with the spirit of the disclosure

and confidentiality provisions of the public records law.”

That was written seven years ago.

And that should have been more than sufficient time to solve this problem.

I would like to thank the chair for giving me this time.