

Letter to the Editor

May 21, 2024

How Ten Days Turned into Two Months — Is There a Double Standard?

On March 18, I filed a Public Records Request (PRR); finally, more than two months later — on May 21 — I received the first responsive document even though State Law requires fulfillment within 10 business days. In this case, **fulfillment stretched to 45 business days, until after voting has begun.**

This delayed result, certainly frustrating to me given the rather exhausting efforts required for appeals (including my most recent appeal to the Commonwealth's Supervisor of Records on May 20) and other correspondence, should also be of great concern to every Truro citizen since my request was for documents related to two candidates running for Select Board: Kevin Grunwald and Nancy Medoff. Did our Town Manager protect Chair Reed's chosen successors?

By contrast, **five (5) completed PRRs requested by Raphael Richter in the last two quarters were turned around on average in one (1) business day.**

The Town's clear effort, over and over again, to mount obstacles to the production of select information — including making false statements to a State Agency — creates the impression that something is being hidden from the public deliberately. This is unfair to these candidates. Now that Kristen Reed has officially endorsed Mr. Grunwald and Ms. Medoff, any special treatment they received to shield their official actions from us is also unfair to voters. We deserve full transparency. We all — voters and the candidates — **deserved to have the facts out in the open before voting began.**

As members of numerous important Town committees, I believe that these two candidates' public records are relevant for me to have an opportunity to review before I cast my vote in what I consider will be the most consequential Truro election in my memory. There is no substitute for being able to review an official's public record directly rather than relying only on what their campaigns tell you they will do or their appearances at public meetings will show.

I was particularly interested in having the chance to do so with respect to Mr. Grunwald. As we learned from a public comment at a Select Board meeting, Kevin Grunwald, Bob Panessiti and Raphael Richter were blind copied by Chair Kristen Reed on scores of emails that appeared to have little to do with their official duties. That raised a flag with me — what's going on here? Why is Ms. Reed, in her official capacity, secretly sharing information? So, I thought I would put in a Public Records Request of my own to understand more about it. How did Mr. Grunwald respond to the blind copies he received? Maybe he questioned or objected to being secretly copied.

And, since I knew little of Ms. Medoff's record as a member of several Select Board-appointed committees, I thought this would be a valuable opportunity to learn more about her policies and practices beyond what is available to the public on Truro TV.

That the Town Manager apparently enabled the complication/obstruction of this simple act of voter inquiry is as clear as it is unacceptable. On Friday, May 17, in an after-hours notification to me, the Town's original "Good Faith Estimate" of \$525 was dropped to \$75, and the number of responsive documents changed from 2,310 to 119. How could their original estimate be so far off? Was the initial search done improperly? The material hasn't changed. I was also told that the same work that required 22 hours in March now only needed 3 hours of staff time to complete. What changed? The only difference seems to be that it required appeals to get to this more realistic – fair – estimate.

Perhaps the actual work really didn't require the number of people the Town chose to involve in this simple PRR request. In addition to Noelle Scoullar who was the polite lead in all Town correspondence to me, Darrin Tangeman, Elisabeth Verde and Nicole Tudor were copied. Together with David Wennerberg in IT, at least 5 members of the Truro staff — including, for some unknown reason, its most senior official — were engaged in responding to my straightforward PRR. And yet, still nothing was produced until today.

Yesterday, May 20, I delivered a personal check for \$75 to Town Hall. A day later – now after voting has begun and just 4 business days before the polls close on May 29 -- I received word that the search was complete, yielding 1,234 documents. The Town has given me 4 business days to read the same number of documents that required five officials and a computer to generate in 45 business days. There is no longer sufficient time for me to thoroughly examine over a thousand documents.

Clearly, a full investigation is needed into how and by whom PRRs are handled, and certainly before we consider hiring another employee as requested by Mr. Tangeman. I'm not the first one to ask for this but I hope to be the last. Understanding what's going on here would save the Town and engaged citizens like me much time, money, and wasted effort.

But of more serious concern to me — and should be of concern to every Truro voter — is that this matter involves two current Select Board candidates. **Early voting has already begun.** Because Town management successfully ran out the clock — and effectively protected two candidates from full public scrutiny — voters have been deprived of what may be valuable information about two public officials.

Thank you.

Jack Riemer
Truro voter