



F09-08-MS Councillor Buries Narrow Objective in Broad Request

The common complaint we hear that public bodies are overzealous in their severing of requested records has a flip side—requesters all too frequently ask for far more information than they really want. Considerable time and effort (on the part of both public bodies and our office) could be saved if requesters consistently narrowed the focus of their access requests to their true objective. Sometimes requesters cast their net broadly in the belief that they are more likely to get what they want if they aren't specific about their target. Requesters are far more likely to get a timely response with a narrow focus.

A city councillor was concerned about how a ski resort proposed to supply water to residential units constructed during expansion of the resort. As the resort was outside city limits, it fell within the jurisdiction of the local regional district. The city councillor asked the regional district and Ministry of Community Development, which had commissioned a study of water supplies for the resort, for all records related to the ski resort's water supply.

The ministry responded with records from which considerable amounts of information had been severed under sections 13 (advice to a public body), 16 (disclosure harmful to intergovernmental affairs), 17 (disclosure harmful to the financial or economic interests of a public body) and 22 (disclosure harmful to personal privacy) of FIPPA.

Suspecting that the ministry had been overzealous in its severing, the councillor asked us to review the matter. When it became apparent during mediation that all the councillor really wanted was a copy of the report of the consultant hired by the ministry to study the water supply issue, the ministry agreed to give the applicant a complete copy of that report, which had initially been withheld, if he would drop his request for the remaining documents. He agreed.