

# Citizen Awareness

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**Ombudsman**

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**ombudsman**

Dear Citizen:

Several issues and questions have come to my attention that I feel deserve clarification and/or explanation. These include the role of the Office of Ombudsman, the powers and authority of the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction, and the timeliness of Ombudsman reports.

**What is the role of the Ombudsman?** An Ombudsman investigates citizen complaints against City services to determine if departmental policies and procedures have been adhered to. If a problem with a policy or procedure is identified, recommendations are made for improvement. If a complaint is the result of a lack of a policy or procedure, recommendations are made for implementation of a policy or procedure to avoid recurrence of the problem. The Ombudsman attempts to reconcile a complaint in a way that is equitable to both the citizen and the City. In this way, an Ombudsman provides a means of ‘checks and balances’. Many in City government are uncomfortable with checks and balances and have voiced a desire for the Office of Ombudsman to be disbanded. Several times since 1974 the citizens of Flint have, by popular vote, approved the continuance of the office.

**What are the powers and authority of the Ombudsman?** Section 3-505 of the City Charter gives the Ombudsman wide-ranging investigatory power and states that each agency must give the Ombudsman necessary assistance and information. The Ombudsman may subpoena witnesses, administer oaths, take testimony, require the production of evidence, and enter and inspect City premises. The Ombudsman may make her findings public, however can only make recommendations. Under the present City Charter, the recommendations do not have to be implemented.

**What is the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction?** Section 3-504 of the City Charter gives the Ombudsman authority to investigate official acts of any City of Flint agency which aggrieve any person. Such authority extends equally to all agencies; however the Ombudsman may not investigate matters under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Commission.

**Why do some Ombudsman reports take longer than others?** Some investigations take longer than others due to the nature of the complaint. For example, a complaint of police excessive force requires more time to investigate than a complaint regarding a lack of trash pickup. Additionally, some City agencies are more cooperative and forthcoming than others in regard to Ombudsman investigations. A case in point are Flint Police Department officers who refuse to give testimony, citing labor laws or exercising their Fifth Amendment ‘right to remain silent.’ While such positions may rest on legal principles, they violate the language of the City Charter and efforts are underway to receive legal clarification.

In summary, the Ombudsman is an advocate to ensure the citizens of Flint are treated equally and fairly, investigates complaints where alleged impropriety has taken place, researches solutions, makes recommendations, and sounds the alarm when serious issues arise.

**Brenda L. Purifoy, Ombudsman**

**City of Flint**  
**Department Listings**

Assessor	766-7255
Attorney	766-7146
Bulk Trash Pickup	766-7076
Clerk	766-7413
Community Development	766-7436
City Council	766-7418
Emergency	911
Finance	766-7266
Fire Department	762-7336
Fire Emergency	232-2222
Flint NIPP	766-7212
Housing Commission	736-3050
Human Relations	766-7430
Hurley Medical Center	257-9000
<b>Impound Lot</b>	<b>424-9538</b>
Income Tax Division	766-7015
Leaf Pickup	766-7435
Licensing	766-7416
Mayor	766-7346
Neighborhood Patrol	237-6800
Parks and Recreation	766-7463
Personnel	766-7280
Police Department	237-6866
Public Works	766-7135
68 <sup>th</sup> District Court	766-8969
Snow Removal	766-7343
Street Maintenance	766-7343
Street Signs/Signals	766-7350
Waste Collection	766-7076
Water Bills	766-7470
Water Department	766-7225
Zoning Board of appeals	766-7335

**FYI**

The Office of Ombudsman must have the following 3 elements present in a complaint in order for an investigation to be considered:

1. The investigation must be of an “official act”
2. The official act must be the act of an “agency”
3. The official act must aggrieve any person.

**F Y I**

**City Ordinance : 28-31**

**Abandoned Vehicle**, means a vehicle which has remained on public property or private property for a period of 48 hours, after a police agency or other governmental agency designated by the police agency has affixed the written notice to the vehicle.