

# Skykomish Town Council retreats from transparency – overturning original petition of voters

By [Glen Morgan](#) - November 1, 2017



The final legal step to achieve zero financial disclosure for the Skykomish Town Council was achieved at thursday's Public Disclosure Commission Meeting in [Olympia](#). The Skykomish Town Council and Mayor's personal financial disclosures (filed by most elected officials in Washington State) are now secret, once again. Thus ended a decade long public transparency saga in this small town.

It all began in 2006. Under Washington State law, all elected officials and certain other government employees are required to file personal financial disclosure documents (called an [F-form](#)) with the [Public Disclosure Commission](#) (PDC). There are few exemptions to this statute. However, state law allows elected officials from jurisdictions with fewer than 1000 voters to be exempted from public disclosure rules. The [City of Skykomish](#) has 126 registered voters (146 in 2006) , so the elected officials were not required to file these F-1 forms.



There is a little known and rarely utilized part of the statute (RCW 42.17A.135(2)) which allows citizens to pursue a "Petition for Disclosure" with valid signatures of fifteen percent of the number of registered voters, as of the date of the most recent general election in the city and submit it to the PDC. The citizens



can then require their local elected officials to comply with the same financial disclosure rules as their elected peers in larger municipalities. This is what happened in the City of Skykomish in 2006. The local citizens successfully collected the signatures (24 at the time), had them validated, submitted to the PDC and the elected officials began to file personal financial disclosure documents. According to [this document filed with the PDC](#), the reason for this request at the time was the City's use of \$100 million railroad cleanup fund.



*It might seem like the Town of Skykomish hasn't changed much over the years.*

## Overturing the will of the people

All good things must come to an end, of course, and the elected officials were annoyed with this transparency requirement (it certainly can be annoying). In the same statute (RCW 42.17A.135(3)), there is a provision which allows the Town Council to opt back out of the transparency disclosure requirements after at least 4 years of compliance (this council had been forced to comply for the last 10 years).





*The Bridge to the Town of Skykomish from Highway 2 is one of the most notable features in this town.*

The Council could either have the citizens of their fair city turn in signatures to remove this burden from their elected officials, or they could pass an ordinance exempting themselves. The burden of collecting 20 or more signatures from their voters was a mountain too high to climb, so the council, of course, [opted to vote themselves out of this transparency requirement](#). The final step was to have this vote recognized by the PDC, which is what happened on Thursday. The PDC was simply following the law as it is written.

## How to restore financial transparency in Skykomish



This might be viewed as just another sad descent into more secrecy by elected officials and this could be discouraging to proponents of greater government transparency and accountability. There could even be a good case to be made for some of the transparency requirements in the law. However, it always grating to see elected officials overturn the will of the voters without engagement from the voters themselves. Fortunately, the good citizens of Skykomish still have options, and they can restore this element of transparency once again if they desire.

Another signature gathering effort by the local voters (with the collection of about 20 valid

signatures) would lead to the restoration of the requirement of these elected officials to fully disclose their financial affairs once again. Collecting signatures can be fun, and it is a great opportunity to meet your neighbors and fellow voters.

Perhaps next time these elected officials decide they want to opt out of transparency, they will make the effort to convince the people in their community to agree first.



*It might be worth unlocking the door to transparency*

## **Activist Bonus:**

In addition to Skykomish, here is a [short list of other cities](#) and elected bodies where local citizens can help encourage greater disclosure and transparency. All you need to do is to collect valid signatures from registered voters equal to 15% of the voters who live in the City or other political subdivision.

LaConner – 936

Kahlotus – 191

Spangle – 288  
Prescott – 309  
Harrington – 400  
Sprague – 423  
Mesa – 491  
George – 505  
Vader – 614  
Pateros – 656  
Oakville – 663  
Bingen – 719  
Toledo – 721  
Ruston – 791  
Mossyrock – 745  
Tekoa – 784  
Rock Island – 792  
Roy – 805  
Roslyn – 896  
Ilwaco – 905  
North Bonneville – 971

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*OUR CONSTITUTION BEGINS WITH THE PHRASE “WE THE PEOPLE.” IT WAS THE FOUNDER’S INTENT THAT GOVERNMENT BE CREATED BY THE PEOPLE, TO SERVE THE PEOPLE. IT WASN’T THEIR INTENTION FOR THE PEOPLE TO SERVE THE GOVERNMENT. IT WAS ALWAYS INTENDED THAT GOVERNMENT WHICH FAILED TO SERVE THE PEOPLE SHOULD BE “ALTERED OR ABOLISHED.” UNTIL WE RETURN TO THE FOUNDER’S INTENT, WE REMAIN WE THE GOVERNED...*

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[Skykomish Municipal Code](#)

[PDC: Resolution from Town of Skykomish to void 2006 order](#)

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