CITY OF OCEANSIDE

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS MEMBER HANDBOOK

2020

City Clerk Office
300 North Coast Highway
Oceanside, CA. 92054
760-435-3001
CityClerk@oceansideca.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3
WELCOME
OCEANSIDE VISION STATEMENT
OCEANSIDE MISSION STATEMENT
OCEANSIDE CORE VALUES
ABOUT THE CITY OF OCEANSIDE

ABOUT CITY ADVISORY GROUPS 5
BACKGROUND
WHO ARE ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS
SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY
COMMUNICATION
RELATIONSHIPS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AND STAFF
ROLE OF THE CITY COUNCIL LIAISONS
RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS
REPRESENTING THE CITY AS AN ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER

APPOINTMENTS TO ADVISORY GROUPS 8
APPOINTMENT LIST
THE APPLICATION/APPOINTMENT PROCESS
TERMS OF OFFICE

PUBLIC SERVICE ETHICS 10
PUBLIC INTEREST
DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP
ACCOUNTABILITY
OBJECTIVE JUDGEMENT

THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT 11
CALIFORNIA'S OPEN MEETINGS LAW

CONFLICT OF INTEREST / STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTEREST 13

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES 14
BYLAWS, AND/OR RESOLUTIONS, AND/OR ORDINANCES
PRESIDING OFFICER
OBTAINING THE FLOOR
QUORUM
ORDER OF BUSINESS
MAIN MOTION
SUBSIDIARY MOTION
SUBSTITUTE MOTION

CITY ADVISORY GROUP PROCEDURAL AND DECORUM GUIDELINES 17
IN GENERAL
DECORUM AND ORDER AT ADVISORY GROUP MEETINGS BY CITY STAFF
DECORUM AND ORDER AT ADVISORY GROUP MEETINGS BY THE AUDIENCE
ENFORCEMENT OF DECORUM
CALLING THE QUESTION
VOTING PROCEDURE
REQUEST FOR DETERMINATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST
FAILURE TO VOTE
TIE VOTES
CHANGING VOTES
ROLE OF ALTERNATES
RECONSIDERATION OF ADVISORY GROUP ACTIONS
ADVERTISED PUBLIC HEARING – WHEN HELD
PROCEDURE FOR CONDUCTING HEARINGS
EVIDENCE AT HEARINGS

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS 23
EXCERPT OF ORDINANCE NO. O94-10

CITY DEPARTMENTS: AN OVERVIEW. 26
CITY DEPARTMENTS: AN OVERVIEW
CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE
CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
CITY CLERK'S OFFICE
CITY TREASURER'S OFFICE
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT
BUILDING
ENGINEERING
PLANNING
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
FINANCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
FIRE DEPARTMENT
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
LIBRARY DEPARTMENT
NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES
CODE ENFORCEMENT AND HOUSING
PARKS AND RECREATION
POLICE DEPARTMENT/HARBOR POLICE
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
WATER UTILITIES DEPARTMENT

APPENDICES 30
APPENDIX A: A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act
APPENDIX B: Oceanside Conflict of Interest Code
APPENDIX C: Electronic Campaign and SEI Filing Ordinance

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME

Thank you for contributing to your community by serving on a Board or Commission. Advisory bodies play an important role in City governance and serve as a primary conduit between the citizens, City staff, and the City Council.

This handbook is designed to provide the basic protocols that apply generally to all City boards and commissions, such as the open meeting laws commonly known as the "Brown Act."

The City Council appreciates your willingness to work in this capacity and hopes your experience will be inspiring, enjoyable, and satisfying. For more information about the City of Oceanside and the numerous programs, events and services it offers, please visit the City's website at www.ci.oceanside.ca.us .

OCEANSIDE VISION STATEMENT

The City of Oceanside will be a safe, culturally diverse community that empowers its citizens to provide an environment that promotes economic development, supports quality education, fosters the cultural arts and preserves its natural resources.

OCEANSIDE MISSION STATEMENT

The City of Oceanside's mission is to enhance the quality of life through outstanding service to its diverse community.

OCEANSIDE CORE VALUES

The City of Oceanside values… Integrity… Diversity… Excellent customer service Quality of life… Teamwork… Leadership… Innovation

ABOUT THE CITY OF OCEANSIDE

The City of Oceanside, incorporated in 1888, is a municipal corporation and has a five-member elected City Council that serves as the legislative body of the corporation. As elected officials, the Mayor and City Councilmembers serve at the pleasure of the voters and make decisions on issues and policies relating to general City operations. The City Council also serves as the Small Craft Harbor District Board of Directors, the Community Development Commission (CDC), and the Oceanside Public Financing Authority.

As an elected official, the City Clerk provides legislative services to the City Council, and serves as the Secretary to the Harbor District, the Community Development Commission, and Public Financing Authority. The City Treasurer, also an elected official, serves as the treasurer for all of the legislative bodies. Both elected officials serve at the pleasure of the voters.

The City of Oceanside follows the Council/Manager form of government in which the City Council sets laws and policies, and the City Manager performs administrative duties established by ordinances and City policies.

The City Manager is appointed by the City Council to serve as the City's chief executive officer and is responsible for the management of all municipal programs and services. The City Manager also serves as the Administrative Officer for the Harbor District, and as the Executive Director of the CDC and Public Financing Authority. As part of the duties, the City Manager oversees operations of City departments through the Department Directors.

The City Attorney is appointed by the City Council to serve as legal counsel to the City, Harbor District, CDC, and Public Financing Authority.

The City of Oceanside is a Charter City as of June 8, 2010. A City governed on the basis of a Charter establishes its powers and authorities, as contrasted with a General Law City that enjoys only those powers specifically granted to it by the State.

As a full-service City, Oceanside provides the community with such services as police, fire, library, water and sewer. In addition, the City has an airport, a small craft harbor, a municipal pier, golf courses, swimming pools and numerous parks, and community center facilities.

ABOUT CITY ADVISORY GROUPS

Background

The City of Oceanside has a long tradition of citizens volunteering to serve their community. At the turn of the century, the Board of Trustees (the City Council at that time) relied on citizen volunteers to support a wide range of activities. Examples of early volunteer efforts include assisting with surveying work for a new coast road, providing fire protection services, and making recommendations regarding the City wharf.

Today over 125 volunteers serve on over thirteen advisory groups offering advice and recommendations on policies and programs relating to different areas (e.g., housing, public safety, historic preservation, etc.). Citizens serving on these bodies devote hours attending meetings and reviewing materials in order to make sound recommendations to the City's elected officials and staff. These citizens perform an invaluable service, contributing their time and expertise and giving input regarding policies and programs affecting the City, the Downtown Area, and the Small Craft Harbor District.

Who are Advisory Group Members?

Members of Oceanside advisory groups are persons of all ages who represent a variety of interests and backgrounds. While education and expertise in a particular area of interest may be considered for some appointments, they are not mandatory. The mayor l appoints members of the committees, boards and commissions from the applications submitted to the City Clerk's office. Mayoral appointments are subject to confirmation by a majority of the City Council.

Scope of Responsibility

The primary responsibility of all members of advisory groups is to serve in an advisory capacity to the elected officials and staff on policies pertaining to services and programs. Members of these bodies serve at the pleasure of the City Council, Community Development Commission or Harbor District Board of Directors. They do not make political decisions or act in any capacity reserved for elected City officials. Members are charged to act on the work plan and specific tasks as defined by the City Council. They are appointed to represent the entire community and not exclusively the viewpoint of a particular group or interest. In more specific terms, advisory groups may:

- review technical data pertaining to specific areas of concern
- analyze and recommend alternatives for addressing particular courses of action for the City to pursue
- conduct public meetings to encourage citizen participation and input pertaining to areas of concern
- propose specific programs, projects and/or special events
- periodically report to the City Council, Community Development Commission or Small Craft Harbor District Board of Directors to provide information about their activities and accomplishments

- serve as a communication link between the community and elected officials, providing information about programs and services, as well as creating opportunities for citizen input and expression.

Communication

An advisory group serves as an intermediary between elected officials and the public, helping to inform and reconcile opposing viewpoints and build a consensus around common goals and objectives. When an advisory group is unable to reconcile a position, the advisory body should forward its recommendation to the appropriate legislative body (City Council, Community Development Commission or Harbor District Board). The legislative body can then make decisions, being fully aware of all the facts of an issue.

Relationships with Elected Officials and Staff

The City Council, Community Development Commission and Harbor District Board of Directors create all City advisory groups and appoint their members. Through the normal course of business, advisory group members typically request materials from staff in order to get the background information needed to review issues and make their recommendations.

While advisory group members can request information from staff, they do not have the authority to direct the City Manager and staff to alter City policies and/or administrative practices. Such authority is empowered with the City Council, Community Development Commission, and the Harbor District Board of Directors. Likewise, members cannot alter or establish formal City policies of any legislative body or change practices. They may make recommendations to elected officials and staff as necessary for the successful operation of their advisory group. Good relations include following the proper channels of communication within the administration.

Role of the City Council Liaisons

The City Council has adopted the following policy regarding the role of City Council liaisons to the City's advisory groups:

Annually in the month of December, the Mayor, with the concurrence of the City Council, assigns Councilmembers to most of the City's advisory groups to serve as a Council liaison. The Liaison is expected to attend all advisory group meetings. The primary role of the Liaison is to serve as a communication link between the City Council and the assigned advisory group. Liaisons inform the City Council of the activities of their assigned advisory group(s) via a standardized section on the City Council agenda where the Liaison reports out on the advisory group activities. Liaisons may, from time to time, carry forward recommendations to the City Council from their assigned advisory group(s) on the advisory group's behalf. However, a commission representative(s) should always be present at the time a recommendation is made to the full Council to ensure that the advisory group's opinions are accurately communicated and to provide an opportunity for dialogue between the City Council and advisory group members. Liaisons also provide information to their assigned advisory group(s) regarding pertinent activities of the City and the City Council. There is a scheduled item entitled "Council

Liaison Report" on all of the assigned advisory group agendas." Bear in mind, the Liaisons are **not** members of the advisory groups. They are non-voting adjunct participants of the advisory groups and should not lobby or otherwise influence the decision-making process or orientation of the advisory groups.

Relationships between Advisory Group Members

The success or failure of an advisory group is dependent upon the degree of cooperation among the individual members of the body. In order to build a consensus around common goals and objectives, members have to reconcile opposing viewpoints and show a willingness to objectively define and consider all views when evaluating different issues.

An important way to develop this cooperation is for each advisory group member to ensure that meetings proceed in an orderly manner. The chairperson is primarily responsible for maintaining proper decorum and seeing that consideration of agenda items moves along expeditiously with reasonable time allocated to each item. Each member can assist the chairperson by knowing the basic rules of parliamentary procedure and by adequately preparing for presentations made to the group. A later section of this handbook includes a brief overview of some basic parliamentary terms to give members a better understanding of procedures generally followed by advisory groups in conducting business.

Representing the City as an Advisory Group Member

An individual member of an advisory group must not represent his/her own views on issues before the advisory group to which they belong unless, by majority vote, the group has officially approved such action. A member making a recommendation or expressing a view not approved by a majority vote should indicate he/she is expressing his/her views as a private citizen. Public statements should contain no promises to the public that purport to be binding on an advisory group, staff, City Council, Community Development Commission or Harbor District Board. When making statements to the press, a member should generally indicate that advisory group actions are "recommendations" and that final action will be taken by the City's elected officials. Comments to the press and public should be factual. Individual opinions must be identified as such.

While an advisory group member may disagree with decisions of the City's elected officials, once a decision has been made and a position is taken, a member should do nothing contrary to the adopted policies and programs. If problems arise because of differences between official City policy and personal views that would interfere with continued service, resignation from the advisory group is the appropriate course of action.

Advisory group members are strictly prohibited from taking any actions, or making any representations, agreements, proposals or engaging in any other actions without specific authority from the City of Oceanside. Any such unauthorized actions taken shall not constitute governmental actions under color of authority on behalf of the City of Oceanside. Furthermore, no such actions by advisory group members shall be deemed governmental policy, practice, custom or action attributable to the City of Oceanside, and are therefore not binding on the City or its operations.

APPOINTMENTS TO ADVISORY GROUPS

Appointment List

In accordance with Government Code Section 54972, on or before December 31 of each year, the City Clerk prepares a Local Appointment List of all ongoing advisory groups which serve at the pleasure of the City Council, Community Development Commission, or the Harbor District Board of Directors. The names of all appointees whose terms will expire during the next calendar year are provided with the dates of their appointments, the dates their terms will expire and the necessary qualifications for each position coming open. This Local Appointment List is available from the City Clerk's Office and the Oceanside Public Libraries. It is also posted on the City's website.

During the year announcements about scheduled and unscheduled vacancies on City Advisory Groups are posted in the Office of the City Clerk and the Oceanside Public Library, posted on the City's Website and published in the *San Diego Union Tribune* newspaper.

The Application/Appointment Process

Citizens wishing to apply for a position on an advisory group may obtain an application from the City Clerk's Office or on the City's Website. The City Clerk's Office accepts applications all year round. However, applicants need to complete their forms and return them to the City Clerk's Office by any deadline established for the date scheduled to fill the specific positions for which they are applying. Citizens currently serving on an advisory group and whose terms are about to expire need to complete new applications to receive consideration for reappointment. Applications are kept on file in the City Clerk's Office for one year, at which time the applications are considered expired, and a new application will need to be submitted. Basically, a citizen interested in serving on an advisory group may come in at any time during the year and complete an application for openings that are or may be coming up.

The specific qualifications for the different advisory groups are outlined in the section of this handbook describing each of the advisory groups. The standard requirement for most of these groups is that their members be City residents. Applicants are required to pass a background check by the Police Department before receiving consideration for an appointment. It is the policy of the City of Oceanside that no qualified disabled person will be denied the opportunity to participate as a member of an advisory group. In addition, the City Council strives to seek diversity while making appointments to advisory groups.

All qualified applicants for appointments to the City's advisory groups are submitted by the City Clerk's Office to the Mayor and Council for consideration. Councilmembers may forward their recommendations to the Mayor. The Mayor makes all appointments to advisory groups with the concurrence of the City Council, with the exception of the Planning Commission. In the event the Mayor is unable to make appointments in a timely manner due to an extended absence or if the office of Mayor is vacant, the Deputy Mayor shall make appointments with the concurrence of the legislative body at

an appropriate meeting. The City Council makes Planning Commission appointments after interviewing all of the applicants at a non-televised Council workshop.

Regarding prospective appointments, it is a City policy that no formal recommendation by an advisory group shall be solicited, accepted or considered. However, individual members of these advisory groups may informally suggest appointments to individual Councilmembers. Once appointments have been made, the City Clerk's Office will notify the applicant in writing.

Terms of Office

The terms of office for advisory group members vary from one group to the next. Most members serve two-, three- or four-year terms depending upon the advisory group to which they are appointed. It is a City practice that appointments, to the greatest extent possible, other than reappointments, shall be limited to those individuals not currently serving on an advisory group in order to provide every opportunity possible for those interested in participating.

Advisory group members, including alternates, are expected to be prepared and attend all scheduled meetings of their advisory group. This includes all regular, adjourned or special meetings, which may be called. These schedules are established by the different groups at times most convenient for their members through their by-laws or other official documents. Time commitment varies from one advisory group to the next but can be extensive for some groups. Advisory group members may be required to attend an initial orientation and training workshop to receive pertinent information regarding the Brown Act, meeting management, agenda preparation, etc.

If a member has three (3) unexcused absences per year from regular commission meetings without cause and/or without notifying the chairperson or City staff, he/she may be removed from office. It is mandatory for a member to attend at least 60% of the meetings each fiscal year (includes excused and unexcused absences). [Some advisory groups have amended their bylaws. Check your advisory group's bylaws for more details.] A member may be removed from office if he/she no longer meets the membership requirements for the advisory group to which he/she belongs. A member may be removed for failure to complete and file a Statement of Economic Interests as required by the City's Local Conflict of Interest Code. An advisory group member can also be removed from office, with or without cause, by the legislative body that appointed them--the City Council, Community Development Commission or Harbor District Board. If a member is recommended for removal by the chair or staff, proper notification will be submitted to the City Clerk for processing. The chair/advisory group is not responsible for the removal of a member on their own authority.

PUBLIC SERVICE ETHICS

Since advisory group members are appointed to serve in the best interests of the City and Oceanside residents, special attention should be paid to the fundamentals of ethical conduct for public officials and volunteers.

Public Interest

Advisory group members should use their appointments to advance public interests and not to attain personal benefit or pursue any other private interest incompatible with the public good.

Democratic Leadership

Advisory group members should honor and respect the principles and spirit of representative democracy and set a positive example of good citizenship by observing the letter and spirit of laws and rules.

Accountability

Advisory group members should assure that government is conducted openly, efficiently, equitably and honorably in a manner that permits the citizenry to make informed conclusions and hold government officials accountable.

Objective Judgment

Advisory group members should employ independent objective judgment in performing their duties, deciding all matters on the merit of an issue free from avoidable conflicts of interest and both real and perceived improper influences.

- Advisory group members should safeguard their ability to make independent, fair and impartial judgments by scrupulously avoiding financial, social and political relationships that might compromise or give the appearance of compromising their objectivity, independence or honesty. (See section on Conflict of Interest for additional information.)

- Advisory group members should not take any public actions under circumstances where they are not certain that they can do so fairly and objectively. If unsure if the action is appropriate contact the City Clerk or City Attorney's Office for clarification.

- Advisory group members should exercise the power and prerogatives of the office fairly and without prejudice or favoritism, as it is improper to use public authority to reward relatives, friends or supporters or to hinder or punish enemies and opponents.

THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT

"In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and the other public agencies in this state exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly."

California's Open Meetings Law

Political accountability is essential to responsible government. In order to help ensure political accountability, State law (Ralph M. Brown Act) requires that the meetings of the City Council and other local legislative bodies, including all commission, board and committee meetings, be open to the public. It is the intent of this law that these legislative bodies conduct their deliberations and take their actions openly. With a few notable exceptions, the meetings of all legislative bodies are open to the public and all interested persons must be permitted to attend.

In the preamble to the Brown Act (California Government Code, Section 54950), the intent of the California open meeting law is clearly stated as follows: "The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants their right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created."

Additionally, the Brown Act (CGC Sec. 54950 et. seq.), as it applies to advisory groups, requires these groups to establish regular meeting schedules through their bylaws or other official documents setting the time and place of their meetings. At least 72 hours prior to their regular meetings, advisory groups are required to have agendas prepared and posted, describing each item scheduled for consideration at their meetings. These agendas must contain sufficient descriptions to provide the general public with enough information to determine the subject matter of each agenda item. Once agendas, staff reports and other accompanying documents are distributed to advisory group members, these materials are public records and must be available to the general public.

For an item not on the agenda, i.e., oral communications, an advisory group may not discuss or take action until it can be properly agendized. A member may ask questions of a speaker or staff to gain a better understanding of the issue being raised, but the only action an advisory group can take is to direct staff to place the issue on a future agenda for their consideration.

The Brown Act does not apply to meetings where less than a majority of an advisory group's members are in attendance or to gatherings where official business does not occur. The Brown Act requirements generally do not apply to conferences, seminars, social and ceremonial occasions, where a majority of an advisory group may be in attendance, as long as official business is not conducted.

Over the years the Brown Act requirements have become increasingly complex and subject to extensive judicial interpretation. If there is a question about the State's open meeting law, the City Attorney is available to provide assistance. Any violation of the Brown Act committed with wrongful intent is a misdemeanor.

In light of how widespread social media is, we provide the following cautions and recommendations:

- Avoid sending emails to the whole legislative body. If it is necessary, provide information only and do not solicit a response.
- When replying to emails, do not communicate your position or make a commitment on a pending matter. Do not reply all to a majority of the legislative body.
- Think carefully before sending any email. Remember, your email can be forwarded by others to a majority of the legislative body and be subject to a Public Records Act request.
- The same cautions regarding emailing apply to texting.
- Be cautious – texting can be easily used to hold a serial meeting before or during a meeting.
- Avoid sending or receiving texts or emails to/from the public or members of the legislative body during a meeting.
- Avoid sending or receiving texts or emails if you have declared a conflict of interest.

"Open & Public - A User's Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act"
is provided as Appendix A

CONFLICT OF INTEREST / STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTEREST

In 1974 the people of California passed Proposition 9 and enacted a Political Reform Act to prevent financial conflicts of interest on the part of public officials. This Act requires public officials to disqualify themselves from participating in certain decisions and to disclose financial interests, such as investments, interest in real property, and sources of income, which they may influence or affect during the performance of their official duties. Disclosure is made through filing a form called a "Statement of Economic Interests." This Act further requires that public officials disqualify themselves from making, participating, or exercising any influence in a government decision which may have a reasonably foreseeable impact on the official, a member of the official's immediate family or on a financial interest held by the official.

The Political Reform Act requires local government agencies to adopt conflict of interest codes identifying disclosure requirements and listing designated positions and employees subject to reporting financial interests. The Oceanside Local Conflict of Interest Code (Resolution No. 16-R0682-1 and Oceanside City Code Sections 2.61-2.69) complies with this requirement. A copy of the most recent Oceanside Conflict of Interest Code is provided as Appendix B. As provided for in the Local Conflict of Interest Code, every two years the City Council adopts a resolution identifying those City employees and advisory group members who must file Statements of Economic Interests. Members file these statements with the City Clerk (see Ordinance No. 14-OR0050-1 for the online or electronic filing requirements provided as Appendix C), who is responsible locally for the administration of the Conflict of Interest Code. If an advisory group member has a question about a potential conflict of interest, the City Attorney is available to review the issue and provide direction.

The City Clerk will notify members who are required to file the statements. If an advisory group member is subject to filing requirements, his/her initial statement - Assuming Office Statement - is due within 30 days after taking office. Thereafter, annual Statements of Economic Interests are due each calendar year. When an advisory group member with reporting obligations leaves office, he/she must file a Leaving Office Statement within 30 days after his/her departure.

An advisory group member filing these statements is generally required to report his/her financial interests covering the last 12 months. Leaving Office Statements cover the previous 12 months or the period since a member's last filing. If a person fails to meet these filing deadlines, he/she may be charged a late filing fee. Violations of the Local Conflict of Interest Code are subject to administrative, civil, and criminal sanctions of the Political Reform Act. Statements of Economic Interests are public records and available for public review in the City Clerk's Office or on the City’s website. It is a City Council policy that, if an advisory group member fails to file a Statement of Economic Interests, that member will be removed from office.

For your convenience, Statements of Economic Interests are filed on-line. If you are appointed to a Commission or Board listed in the Local Conflict of Interest Code, you will receive correspondence from the City Clerk’s Office with directions on how to e-file.

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

"*Parliamentary law rests on certain principles. Perhaps the most important is the principle of rights:* ***the right of the majority ultimately to rule, the right of the minority to be heard, and the right of the individual to participate in the decision-making process.****"*

When holding an advisory group meeting, members should follow the parliamentary system to ensure order, guarantee the rights of individuals, and effectively conduct business. It should be remembered that parliamentary procedures should be used to facilitate meetings and not over-used so as to become an obstacle to their proceedings. Described below are some basic terms and concepts to give members a general understanding of parliamentary procedures as they apply to advisory groups when they conduct their business. The chairperson for each of the advisory groups has been given a current copy of the City Code (Article 1, Sections 2.1–2.69) relating to the conduct of City Council meetings and Robert's Rules of Order to resolve issues that may come up. The City Code should be consulted first, followed by Robert's Rules of Order.

Bylaws, and/or Resolutions, and/or Ordinances

All advisory groups have adopted Bylaws, and/or resolutions and/or ordinances to govern their procedures for conducting business. These documents describe the rules of the organization, defining how the group is organized and how it will function.

Presiding Officer

The chairperson is elected by the membership and is responsible for conducting the meetings. Duties generally assigned to the presiding officer are:

- Reviews the agenda and supporting material prior to the meeting and communicates with staff on issues of clarification and potential outcomes
- Opens the meetings at the scheduled time
- Announces in proper sequence the order of business to come before the group
- Recognizes members to speak
- Puts to a vote all motions properly brought before the group
- Enforces rules relating to decorum and order
- Decides all questions of order subject to appeal of the group
- Expedites business in every way possible compatible with the rights of the members
- Responds to questions from members regarding parliamentary procedures
- Adjourns the meeting when business is concluded

Obtaining the Floor

Before a member may speak, address the group or make a motion during the meeting of a legislative body or advisory group, he/she must first be recognized by the

chairperson as having the right to be heard at that time. The process of being recognized is referred to as obtaining the floor.

Quorum

A quorum is the requirement that a minimum of 51% of the members be present at a meeting for business to be properly transacted. A quorum can be constituted by the inclusion of alternates filling in for regular members. When an alternate is seated, he/she becomes a voting member, but must have been present for all discussions pertaining to the items being voted on. The requirement for a quorum protects against unrepresented actions by a small number of members in the name of the entire group. The only action an advisory group should take when a majority of the members are not in attendance is to adjourn the meeting to a time when a quorum can be present.

Order of Business

The sequence in which certain general types or classes of business are brought up or introduced at a meeting for action by the membership is referred to as the order of business. Items of business are usually listed on the agenda for the meeting under these general classes of business. An item of business can be taken out of order with the consent of a two-thirds vote of the membership. Orders of the day are items of business scheduled in advance to be taken up at the meeting at a specific time (time certain) to allow sufficient time for discussion and full consideration of a subject of important interest.

Main Motion

The main motion is the means by which business is brought before a legislative body or group, i.e. a formal proposal by a member that action be taken. To introduce a main motion, a member must obtain the floor when no other question is pending and when business addressed by the motion is in order. As a general rule, a member introduces his/her motion with the words "I move that…" and then states the motion being offered. Only one main motion should be considered at any given time. After a motion has been made, another member must second the motion before the group can consider the proposal. By seconding a motion, a member supports consideration of the proposal by the group. Once a motion is introduced and seconded, consideration of the proposal is handled through three basic steps: members' debate (discuss) the motion, the chair puts the question to a vote, and the results of the vote are announced. It should be remembered that an affirmative majority vote of the entire membership is necessary for action to be taken.

Subsidiary Motions

In addition to the original main motion, there are several motions called subsidiary motions that may be made while an original main motion is pending. Subsidiary motions are motions that may be applied to an original main motion and must be acted upon ahead of an original main motion. By their use, an original main motion may be rejected, amended, referred to a committee, postponed to a certain time, postponed indefinitely, debate may be limited or closed, or the original main motion may be tabled (postponed indefinitely). Thus, subsidiary motions are motions that may be applied to, or have reference to, an original main motion.

Substitute Motion

A substitute motion serves the same purpose as an amendment but with a greater impact. A substitute motion will change an entire paragraph or perhaps the entire motion, resolution, or ordinance it deals with. The use of a substitute motion quite often prevents a split vote. It provides an alternative to a vote that will probably fail. A substitute motion is subject to debate and amendment.

CITY ADVISORY GROUP PROCEDURAL AND DECORUM GUIDELINES

In General

- The provisions of these guidelines are intended to supplement Advisory Group Bylaws and the provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act with respect to matters not covered by the Act or which are the subjects of local regulation under the Act. To the extent of any conflict between the provisions of these guidelines and the Act, the provisions of the Act shall prevail.

- If a matter arises at an advisory group meeting that is not covered by these guidelines or applicable provisions of federal or state law or the Oceanside City Code, the latest revised edition of Robert's Rules of Order may be used as a guide for resolution of the particular procedural issue raised to the extent that such rules are applicable to a advisory group body.

- The City Clerk and/or the Staff Liaison shall provide a copy of the guidelines and of the Ralph M. Brown Act to each member of a City advisory group and to each person selected to serve as a member of an advisory group who has not assumed the duties as a member.

Decorum and Order at Advisory Group Meetings by City Staff

While an advisory group is in session, the advisory group members and city staff shall observe good order and decorum. A member of an advisory group or city staff shall neither, by conversation or otherwise, delay or interrupt the proceedings or the peace of the group, nor disturb any member while speaking.

Decorum and Order at Advisory Group Meetings by the Audience

Members of the public attending advisory group meetings shall observe the same rules of order and decorum applicable to city advisory groups and staff and shall comply with the provisions of these guidelines.

Enforcement of Decorum

- Unauthorized remarks from the audience or members thereof, stamping of feet, unruly applause, whistles, yells, and raucous demonstrations shall not be permitted by the presiding officer. If such conduct continues after directions by the presiding officer to cease, the presiding officer may order such offenders to leave the meeting room. If a person fails to leave as ordered, the person shall be removed from the meeting room by the sergeant-at-arms upon direction by the presiding officer.

- Any person willfully disrupting the proceedings of an advisory group, and who continues to do so after being directed by the presiding officer to cease, or

being ruled out of order by the presiding officer, or who otherwise refuses to carry out directions or instructions given by the presiding officer for the purpose of maintaining order and decorum at the advisory group, may be ordered by the presiding officer to leave the meeting room. If the person fails to leave as ordered, the person shall be removed from the meeting room by the sergeant-at-arms upon direction by the presiding officer.

- The presiding officer shall not find a person in violation of the above two subsections solely because the statements made by the person criticize the policies, procedures, programs or services of the city, or the acts or omission of a city advisory group.

- The Chief of Police or such member of the Police Department as the Chief may designate shall be sergeant-at-arms of a city advisory group and shall attend meetings at the request of the presiding officer, City Manager, or City Council. The sergeant-at-arms shall be available to respond to all meetings immediately upon call. The sergeant-at-arms shall carry out all instructions given by the presiding officer for the purpose of maintaining order and decorum at the advisory group meetings. The performance of the duties of the sergeant-at-arms pursuant to this section shall be official duties for the purposes of Penal Code Section 148.

Calling the Question

A member of an advisory group who wishes to terminate discussion of a motion or item may call for the question. If the call is seconded, the presiding officer shall ask for a vote. It the vote carries, the advisory group shall then vote on the pending motion without further discussion.

Voting Procedure

- Voting shall be conducted by the use of the voting light system installed in the council chambers or by verbal communication in the following manner. A green light designates a “Yes or Affirmative” vote. A red light designates a “No or Negative” vote, and a white light designates a vote to “Abstain.” Where the light system is not available or used, members shall vote by answering “Yes” for an affirmative vote, “No” for a negative vote, or “Abstain” where a member declines to vote at all.

- When an advisory group is voting a voice vote, an affirmative vote shall be registered by the oral statement of “Yes” or “Aye” by the member voting. A negative vote shall be registered by the oral statement of “No” or “Nay” by the member voting. An abstention shall be registered by the oral statement of “Abstain” by the member.

Request for Determination of Conflict of Interest

If an advisory group member has reason to believe he or she has a conflict of interest with respect to a governmental decision, he or she may give the full facts of the matter to the City Attorney and request advice thereon. The request for advice should be submitted to the City Attorney sufficiently in advance of the meeting to allow the City Attorney a reasonable opportunity to analyze the facts stated and the applicable law. Any response by the City Attorney shall be delivered to each member of the advisory group before the meeting in question. Oral responses shall be stated on the public record. If a determination whether it is reasonably foreseeable that a financial interest would be affected by a governmental decision depends on the advice of an appraiser or similar professional, except an attorney, the City Attorney may retain such professional at city expense. Nothing in this section shall be deemed to preclude the member or the City Attorney from seeking assistance or advice on a conflict of interest matter from the Fair Political Practices Commission.

Failure to Vote

Every advisory group member should vote unless disqualified by reason of conflict of interest. An advisory group member who abstains from voting acknowledges that a majority of the quorum may decide the question voted upon.

Tie Votes

- Tie votes or a vote lacking the required number of affirmative votes shall constitute “no action,” and the matter voted upon remains before an advisory group and is subject to further consideration. If an advisory group is unable to take action on a matter before it because of a tie vote or the lack of the required number of votes, the City Clerk, secretary or other designated staff representative shall place the item on the next regular meeting of the advisory group for further consideration. If after subsequent consideration, the vote remains tied or the requisite number of affirmative votes is not obtained, the vote shall be deemed to result in a failure of the pending motion or a denial of the requested action.

- The above subsection shall not apply to votes in which all members of an advisory group participate, unless a member abstains for reasons other than a conflict of interest, or to vote on matters from which an advisory group member is disqualified from participation by operation of state law, in which event a tie vote or vote lacking the requisite number of affirmative vote shall be deemed to result in a failure of the pending motion or a denial of the requested action.

Changing Votes

An advisory group member may change his or her vote only if a timely request to do so is made immediately following the announcement of the vote by the City Clerk, secretary or other designated staff representative and prior to the time the next item in the order of business is taken up. An advisory group member who publicly announces that he or she is abstaining from voting on a particular matter shall not subsequently be allowed to withdraw the abstention.

Role of Alternates

Alternate members of the City's advisory groups may provide input on issues brought before the advisory group for action. An alternate member is permitted to vote on an issue only if a regular member is absent. If a regular member of the advisory group arrives at the meeting after discussion of an item has begun and an alternate is serving in his/her absence, the alternate is the voting member of the advisory group for that item. At the conclusion of the item and after the vote is taken, the regular member of the advisory group resumes his/her seat as a voting member. An advisory group member must be present for all discussion on an agenda item to be allowed to vote. If the absent member has an opportunity prior to the vote to listen to a recording of the oral testimony, examine all the evidence presented and can represent that he or she has a full understanding of the matter, the member may vote on the item.

Reconsideration of Advisory Group Actions

- A motion to reconsider any action taken by an advisory group may be made either immediately during the same session or at the adjourned or subsequent meeting at which the subject item has been placed on the agenda. Such motion may be made only by one of the advisory group members who voted with the prevailing side.

- A motion to rescind, repeal, cancel or otherwise nullify prior advisory group action shall be in order at any subsequent meeting of the advisory group and may be made by any advisory group member. The effect of such action shall operate prospectively and not retroactively and shall not operate to adversely affect rights which may have been vested in the interim without notice and an opportunity to be heard having been given to the affected party or parties.

Advertised Public Hearing – When Held

- Wherever an advisory group is required to hold a public hearing on any matter before it, such hearing will be held in accordance with the rules and procedures set forth in these guidelines. Nothing in this chapter shall prohibit or limit the advisory group from holding a public hearing on any matter before it, whether required by law or not, and nothing in this chapter shall prohibit or limit any member of the public from addressing an advisory group in accordance with the procedures provided for in this section, irrespective of whether or not a public hearing is being held.

- Public hearings shall be scheduled to begin at a time certain, which shall be the hour the advisory group convenes or such other time as may be stated on the agenda. An advisory group shall hold public hearings in the order scheduled on the agenda at the time stated, or as soon thereafter as practicable. The presiding officer, with the consent of the advisory group and for good cause, may alter the scheduled order of public hearings. Time certain public hearing items shall have priority over other matters set for consideration at a time certain. If the hearing is continued to a time less than twenty-four (24) hours after the time specified in the notice of such hearing, a notice of continuance shall be posted immediately after the meeting. It is important to note that, if an advisory group is holding a required public hearing, all notification requirements must be strictly adhered to as set forth in the Government Code Section 65090, Public Hearing Notices.

Procedure for Conducting Hearings

- The presiding officer shall announce that it is the time and place for a public hearing scheduled on the agenda.

- Prior to advisory group public hearings, copies of the advisory group agenda with attachments, including the staff reports, if any, shall be available on the City's Website at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to commencement of the hearings; provided, however, advisory groups may allow in their discretion the filing of supplemental reports that shall be made public at the commencement of the hearing. Advisory group agendas are also posted in the kiosk at City Hall.

- The order of a hearing shall be as follows unless otherwise required by law:

    - Presentation by the City Clerk, secretary or other designated staff representative of previously filed written correspondence or petitions.
    - Presentation of staff and/or advisory staff report.
    - Questions from the advisory group.
    - Presentation by the applicant, if any (20 minutes).
    - Public testimony or input.
    - Rebuttal by applicant of facts presented during other testimony (remainder of unused minutes from presentation).
    - Further questions from commission.

After rebuttal by the applicant, no further public testimony shall be permitted, except direct responses to questions by a commission member if permitted by the presiding officer. The presiding officer may order the testimony of persons in favor or in opposition in any manner deemed appropriate by the presiding officer.

- The presiding officer may set longer or shorter time limits than otherwise allowed with the consent of the advisory group dependent upon the necessity of ensuring adequate presentation of testimony and evidence to provide a fair hearing.

- If a public hearing cannot be reasonably concluded in light of other business to be conducted and the number of persons desiring to present testimony, the hearing may be continued to another date or dates by the presiding officer.

Evidence at Hearings

- If there is a staff report, it shall be considered as evidence and shall become part of the record of a public hearing. Such report need not be read in full as part of the staff presentation. A synopsis of such report may be presented orally by staff members to an advisory group. In addition, any of the following may be presented to the advisory group and, if presented, shall also become part of the record:

    - Exhibits and documents used by the city staff and any persons participating in the hearing;
    - Maps and displays presented for use at the hearing; provided that, whenever practicable, they shall be displayed in full view of the participants and the audience;
    - All communications and petitions concerning the subject matter of the hearing; provided that a reading of such matters only shall be had at the request of an advisory group member;
    - Information obtained outside the advisory group meeting, such as a view of the site, provided that such information, to the extent it forms the basis for findings in a quasi-adjudicative matter, shall be disclosed for the record;
    - All exhibits, reports, maps and other physical evidence placed before an advisory group shall be retained by the City Clerk, secretary or other designated staff representative. Such exhibits may be released by the clerk with the approval of the City Attorney. Items that are large, perishable, bulky or otherwise difficult to store may be returned to the persons submitting the item provided that a photographic or some other type of electronic record of the item is retained by the City Clerk, secretary or other designated staff representative.

CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Public input received during meetings can sometimes result in heated debates and even conflict. Participants at advisory group meetings are usually highly motivated and often nervous. When a group of adversaries are in one room, the possibility of uncontrolled conflict is high. In these cases, the advisory group's role is to guide conflict to positive results.

The following suggestions should help manage public input, conflict and confrontation effectively:

- Anticipate problems by preparing for meetings in order to allow maximum concentration on the dynamics of the meetings rather than spending time learning about the issue while others are giving input

- Set public input rules and make sure the audience understands what the advisory group expects

- Explain carefully the purpose of the meeting and what action is expected at the conclusion of the public input

- All speakers should clearly identify themselves, not only for the record, but also so members of the advisory group can address them by name

- Set time limits on hearing the public input, a recommendation is that each speaker be limited to 3 minutes to avoid speakers dominating the meeting with unnecessary questions or repetitive comments

- Make decisions as promptly as possible and try not to delay actions as to cause the public to attend additional unnecessary meetings

- Don't over-react to inflammatory comments; instead try to turn these expressions of frustration into constructive comments by asking questions to clarify the speaker's intentions

- Avoid speaker-to-audience conversations and debate

- Treat all sides fairly, with respect and courtesy, and allow all speakers the same opportunity to provide input

- Understand that the democratic process is founded on the opportunity for the public to have an open debate on issues of public policy. Commissioners should welcome the free expression of opinions, and should not criticize or berate any citizens who express a view contrary to their own

- After hearing all public comments, each advisory group member should be allowed an opportunity to express his or her comments regarding the issue at hand

- Use the meeting to gather information that will help the group to make an objective judgement and decision pertaining to the issue at hand

The City Council has adopted a code that establishes rules and procedures (Ordinance No**.** 094-10 - see Section 2.1.63) making it unlawful for a member of an advisory group to willfully delay or disrupt the proceedings of a meeting. Unauthorized remarks from the audience or a member shall neither by conversation or other raucous actions interrupt the peace of a meeting. Members of the public are also required to observe the same rules of order and decorum applicable to advisory group members. The ordinance provides the chairperson with the authority to enforce these rules and to maintain order at a meeting.

Excerpt of
Ordinance No. O94-10

2.1.28 Decorum and order—Council and City Staff.

While the council is in session, the council members and city staff shall observe good order and decorum. A member of the city council or city staff shall neither, by conversation or otherwise, delay or interrupt the proceedings or the peace of the council, nor disturb any member while speaking.

2.1.29 Decorum and order—Audience.

Members of the public attending council meetings shall observe the same rules of order and decorum applicable to the city council and staff and shall comply with the provisions of sections 2.1.30.

2.1.30 Enforcement of decorum.

(a) Unauthorized remarks from the audience or members thereof, stamping of feet, unruly applause, whistles, yells, and raucous demonstrations shall not be permitted by the presiding officer. If such conduct continues after directions by the presiding officer to cease, the presiding officer may order such offenders to leave the meeting room. If a person fails to leave as ordered, the person shall be removed from the meeting room by the sergeant-at-arms upon direction by the presiding officer.

(b) Any person willfully disrupting the proceedings of the council, and who continues to do so after being directed by the presiding officer to cease or being ruled out of order by the presiding officer, or who otherwise refuses to carry out directions or instructions given by the presiding officer for the purpose of maintaining order and decorum at the council meeting, may be ordered by the presiding officer to leave the meeting room. If the person fails to leave as ordered, the person shall be removed from the meeting room by the sergeant-at-arms upon direction by the presiding officer.

(c) It is an infraction punishable pursuant to Section 1.07 of this code for any person who once has been ordered removed from the meeting room, thereafter to disrupt the same or any subsequent meeting in the manner described in subsection (a) or (b) above.

(d) The presiding officer shall not find a person in violation of subsection (a) or (b) solely because the statements made by the person criticize the policies, procedures, programs or services of the city, or the acts or omissions of the city council.

(e) The chief of police or such member of the police department as the chief may designate shall be sergeant-at-arms of the city council and shall attend meetings at the request of the presiding officer, city manager, or city council. The sergeant-at-arms shall be available to respond to all meetings immediately upon call. The sergeant-at-arms shall carry out all instructions given by the presiding officer or city council for the purpose of maintaining order and decorum at the council meetings. The performance of the duties of the sergeant-at-arms pursuant to this section shall be official duties for the purposes of Penal Code Section 148.

(f) In addition to the provisions of this section, the presiding officer, with the consent of the city council, may invoke the remedies and procedures established by Government Code Section 54957.9.

CITY DEPARTMENTS: AN OVERVIEW

City Manager's Office

The City Manager's Office is responsible for the implementation of decisions established by the Oceanside City Council and the coordination of those efforts through various City departments. The City Manager's Office includes policy implementation, budget development, legislative support, strategic planning, information technologies and economic development. In addition, the Office provides leadership and oversight for all of the operational departments.

The City Manager's Office assists the City Council in the development and formulation of policies, goals and objectives and keeps the Council informed of important community issues. It provides administrative direction to the City's executive directors and is responsible for managing the activities and operations of the City, ensuring the provision of quality services in a cost effective manner.

City Attorney's Office

The City Attorney's office provides a full range of legal services to the City Council, City Manager, department directors and City advisory groups. These services include providing legal advice and counseling related to proposed actions as well as the defense of the City and its employees in state and federal courts and administrative proceedings.

The City Attorney's office prepares and/or reviews City Council reports, legal opinions, ordinances, resolutions, contracts, agreements and leases. The department also prosecutes City Code violations and serves as the legal counsel to the Harbor District and the Community Development Commission.

City Clerk's Office

The mission of the City Clerk Department is to serve as the City's source for informational, historical, legislative, and election services for the community, the public and City agencies and to provide these services in an efficient, effective and friendly manner.

The City Clerk and staff are unbiased public servants who promote open government and transparency of information by providing a link between citizens and government. The Office of the City Clerk serves as the compliance officer for federal, state, and local statutes, including the Political Reform Act, the Brown Act, and the Public Records Act. This is achieved by coordinating the legislative process, administering city elections, and managing city records with integrity, accuracy and independence.

City Treasurer's Office

The Treasurer's Office manages the City's investment portfolio in order to protect principal and earn the highest rate of return. The Office also manages the special assessments of the City, performs daily cash management of City funds, and provides banking services for the City.

Development Services Department

The Development Services Department is comprised of the Planning, Engineering, and Building Divisions. With the City's General Plan as a blueprint, the department oversees all aspects of land use, natural resource and transportation planning, design of public projects, and construction oversight on both public and private properties.

Building: The Building Division enforces State building codes, mobile home regulation, and various City codes. The department handles building plan check services, issuance of building permits, and record keeping for all building projects within the City, both public and private. It also ensures that all building in the City is conducted in compliance with City-issued building permits.

Engineering: The Engineering Division enforces federal, state, and local requirements for grading activities, the design and construction of public and private infrastructure, floodplain administration, land development, storm water pollution prevention measures, and final mapping related to the subdivision of land. Capital improvement projects (CIP) and transportation matters are also administered within the Engineering Division. The Engineering Division's goal is to provide Oceanside citizens, businesses, and visitors the essential public infrastructure to enhance safety, health, mobility, and quality of life.

Planning: The Planning Division is responsible for land use planning under the auspices of federal, state, regional, and local laws, ordinances, and City policies, and serves the community by providing balanced, professional recommendations to the public and City decision makers as they define, shape, and implement Oceanside's vision.

Economic Development Division

Economic Development's mission is to ensure the financial stability of the City by assisting users, developers, and brokers with business relocation, business expansion and improvements that create new employment opportunities and increased investment in the City and market Oceanside as a regional visitor's destination.

Economic Development encourages a business-friendly environment by acting as a liaison, assisting projects through the City process, hosting and attending broker events, and developing marketing materials that create economic growth opportunities for Oceanside through private capital investment.

Economic Development also seeks appropriate new businesses that will bring quality shopping and dining opportunities to the area and lucrative employment opportunities to community members. Additionally, staff works with local established businesses to address regional market demands and helps them to sustain their competitiveness and viability.

Financial Services Department

The Financial Services Department is an internal service agency for the City organization. The department's mission is to provide financial and budgetary support to all departments of the City.

Fire Department

The Oceanside Fire Department's eight firehouses provide a presence in every neighborhood throughout the 41 square miles of the City of Oceanside. The department's goal is to efficiently and effectively serve the community.

The Oceanside Fire Department's (OFD) mission is to meet and exceed community needs and expectations through the preservation and protection of life, property, and the environment. We will work collaboratively, with our citizens and other agencies to provide constant service with an all-risk approach.

The OFD decision-making culture will be based on the needs of the community, the city, the fire department, and the personnel who serve the city.

The OFD is committed to providing the community with the resources necessary to meet their needs at the highest level of proficiency and quality possible. Our dedicated personnel will always remain mindful of the best interests of our citizens.

Human Resources Department

The Human Resources Department strives to provide the highest quality of service to City departments, employees and the citizens of Oceanside.

The Department's most important objective is to hire and retain excellent employees throughout the organization. To do this, the Department reviews the City's salary and benefits plan for competitiveness, provides a variety of opportunities to encourage professional growth, conducts on-the-job training, develops supervisory and other management training programs, and provides employment-related services to the City's over 900 full-time employees.

Library Department

The Oceanside Public Library is the cultural heart of Oceanside, empowering the community by promoting literacy, information access, civic engagement, cultural inclusiveness, and openness to new ideas. The Mission of the Library is to engage, inform, connect and inspire. The Library accomplishes its mission by providing books, electronic resources, and programs for all ages and abilities. It has a downtown Civic Center Library and an eastern Mission Branch Library. The Library is committed to creating strong ties in the community through outreach with a Bookmobile, a Spanish language Adelante Bookmobile and participation in community events throughout the year. Library staff provides support to the Library Board of Trustees and the City of Oceanside's Arts Commission.

Neighborhood Services

The Neighborhood Services Department's Mission is to promote healthy neighborhoods by providing services to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Oceanside and serve as a change agent in building strong families and safe communities through people, parks, and programs. The Neighborhood Services Department is organized into two Divisions: the Housing and Code Enforcement Division and the Parks and Recreation Services Division.

The Housing and Code Enforcement Division implements the City's housing assistance programs for low and moderate-income households. The Division works with a variety of non-profit agencies, governmental agencies, and businesses in providing housing assistance to the community. The Division also enforces City Code regulations that address conditions on private property such as substandard dwelling units, inoperable or abandoned vehicles, accumulations of trash and debris, noise, dust, offensive odors, and abandoned buildings.

The Parks and Recreation Division offers a wide variety of programs and services for people of all ages through in the following areas: Youth Development, Sports and Athletics, Recreation Classes, Aquatics, Senior Services, and Special Events.

Police Department/Harbor Police

The Oceanside Police Department is here to ensure the safety and security of all people in the City of Oceanside by providing responsive and professional police service with compassion and concern. Our purpose is to work with the community to build trust and provide quality service that actively prevents crime, reduces the fear of crime and promotes safety.

Public Works Department

In partnership with our community, the Public Works Department is committed to providing the Highest level of service to construct, maintain and enhance public facilities, programs and infrastructure in a cost-effective manner. The Department maintains the City's transportation system, street lights, traffic signals, fleet, streets, flood control systems, trees, parks, harbor, beaches and pier. Special emphasis is placed on services to neighborhoods including solid waste cleanup, street sweeping and graffiti control.

Water Utilities Department

The Water Utilities Department is responsible for purchasing water from the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) and delivering it throughout the City for domestic, commercial, irrigation, and fire protection purposes. The City has a direct water filtration plant that treats up to 25 million gallons per day of water received from the SDCWA and a reverse osmosis plant that treats up 6 million gallons per day of local brackish groundwater from the Mission Basin. Reservoirs are maintained at levels to prevent any interruption of service to the public, and waterline repairs are made at all hours of the day or night. The department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the City's wastewater collection and treatment facilities. This system includes over 450 miles of pipelines, two wastewater treatment plants, 34 sewer lift stations, and an industrial waste inspection program. The City's sewage is presently treated at full secondary treatment level according to EPA standards. The City has a goal of zero sewer spills. The City also coordinates implementation of the Clean Water (storm water) program, recycling programs and implementation of the Waste Management contract.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act
APPENDIX B: Oceanside Conflict of Interest Code
APPENDIX C: Electronic Campaign and SEI Filing Ordinance

APPENDIX - A

A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act

OPEN & PUBLIC IV:

A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act

—2ND EDITION, REVISED JULY 2010—

LEAGUE OF CALIFORNIA CITIES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The League thanks the following individuals for their work on this update to the original publication:

EDITORIAL BOARD FOR OPEN & PUBLIC IV

Michael Jenkins, *Chair*
Jenkins & Hogin LLP
City Attorney
Cities of Diamond Bar, Hermosa Beach, Rolling Hills and West Hollywood

Sonia Rubio Carvalho
Best, Best & Krieger
City Attorney
Cities of Azusa, Claremont, and Yorba Linda

Debra E. Corbett
City Attorney
City of Tracy

Theresa E. Fuentes
Deputy City Attorney
City of Pasadena

Daniel S. Hentschke
General Counsel
San Diego County Water Authority

Gerald L. Hobrecht
City Attorney
City of Vacaville

Hilda Cantú Montoy
Montoy Law Office
City Attorney
City of San Joaquin

Eileen M. Teichert
City Attorney
City of Sacramento

EDITORIAL BOARD FOR OPEN & PUBLIC IV, 2ND EDITION

Michael Jenkins, *Chair*
Jenkins & Hogin LLP
City Attorney
Cities of Diamond Bar, Hermosa Beach, Rolling Hills and West Hollywood

Lori Barker
City Attorney
City of Chico

Theresa E. Fuentes
Assistant City Attorney
City of Pasadena

Thomas D. Jex
Burke, Williams & Sorensen
Assistant City Attorney
City of Hemet

Martin Koczanowicz
Cota Cole & Associates
City Attorney
City of Grover Beach

Yana Welinder
Colantuono & Levin, PC
Assistant City Attorney
City of Auburn

Paul Zarefsky
Deputy City Attorney
City and County of San Francisco

League staff:

Patrick Whitnell, General Counsel

Kourtney Burdick, Deputy General Counsel

Janet Reynolds, Legal Secretary/Office Manager

The editors thank Manuela Albuquerque, Retired City Attorney, Berkeley; Steven L. Dorsey, Richards, Watson & Gershon; Whitnie Henderson, Association of California Water Agencies; Craig Labadie, City Attorney, Concord; Tom Newton, California Newspaper Publishers Association; Ted Prim, Attorney General's Office; Cindra J. Smith, Community College League of California; and JoAnne Speers, Institute for Local Government, for their invaluable assistance.

CHAPTER 1:
IT IS THE PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

THE RIGHT OF ACCESS

BROAD COVERAGE

NARROW EXEMPTIONS

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS

CONTROVERSY

BEYOND THE LAW—GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICES

ACHIEVING BALANCE

HISTORICAL NOTE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD

CHAPTER 1: IT IS THE PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

The right of access 2
Broad coverage 3
Narrow exemptions....3
Public participation in meetings 4
Controversy 4
Beyond the law—good business practices....4
Achieving balance 5
Historical note....5

CHAPTER 2: LEGISLATIVE BODIES

What is a "legislative body" of a local agency? 8
What is not a "legislative body" for purposes of the Brown Act? 10

CHAPTER 3: MEETINGS

Brown Act meetings....14
Six exceptions to the meeting definition 14
Collective briefings 17
Retreats or workshops of legislative bodies 17
Serial meetings 17
Informal gatherings 19
Technological conferencing 19
Location of meetings....20

CHAPTER 4: AGENDAS, NOTICES, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Agendas for regular meetings 24
Mailed agenda upon written request 25
Notice requirements for special meetings....25
Notices and agendas for adjourned and continued meetings and hearings 25
Notice requirements for emergency meetings....26
Educational agency meetings 26
Notice requirements for tax or assessment meetings and hearings....26
Non-agenda items 26
Responding to the public 27
The right to attend and observe meetings....28
Records and recordings 29
The public's place on the agenda 30

CHAPTER 5: CLOSED SESSIONS

Agendas and reports....35
Litigation....36
Real estate negotiations....37
Public employment....38
Labor negotiations....40
Labor negotiations—school and community college districts....40
Other Education Code exceptions....41
Grand jury testimony 41
License applicants with criminal records 41
Public security 41
Multijurisdictional drug law enforcement agency 41
Hospital peer review and trade secrets 42
The confidentiality of closed session discussions 42

CHAPTER 6: REMEDIES

Invalidation....46
Civil action to prevent future violations....47
Costs and attorney's fees 47
Criminal complaints....47
Voluntary resolution 48

OPEN & PUBLIC IV

A GUIDE TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT

CH. 1: IT IS THE PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

CH. 2: LEGISLATIVE BODIES

CH. 3: MEETINGS

CH. 4: AGENDAS, NOTICES, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

CH. 5: CLOSED SESSIONS

CH. 6: REMEDIES

OPEN & PUBLIC IV:

A GUIDE TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT, 2ND EDITION

Revised July 2010

Copyright © 2000, 2007, 2010
League of California Cities

All rights reserved. This publication, or parts thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without the permission of the League of California Cities.

FOREWORD

The goal of this publication is to explain the requirements of the Ralph M. Brown Act, California's open meeting law, in lay language so that it can be readily understood by local government officials and employees, the public and the news media. We offer practical advice—especially in areas where the Brown Act is unclear or has been the subject of controversy—to assist local agencies in complying with the requirements of the law.

A number of organizations representing diverse views and constituencies have contributed to this publication in an effort to make it reflect as broad a consensus as possible among those who daily interpret and implement the Brown Act. The League thanks the following organizations for their contributions:

Association of California Healthcare Districts
Association of California Water Agencies
California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA)
California Attorney General—Department of Justice
City Clerks Association of California
California Municipal Utilities Association
California Redevelopment Association
California School Boards Association
California Special Districts Association
California State Association of Counties
Community College League of California
California First Amendment Project
California Newspaper Publishers Association
Common Cause
League of Women Voters of California

This publication is current as of June 2010. Updates to the publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment.

This publication is not intended to provide legal advice. A public agency's legal counsel is responsible for advising its governing body and staff and should always be consulted when legal issues arise.

To improve the readability of this publication:

- Most text will look like this;
- Practice tips are in the margins;
- Hypothetical examples are printed in blue; and
- Frequently asked questions, along with our answers, are in shaded text.

Additional copies of this publication may be purchased by visiting CityBooks online at www.cacities.org/store.

CHAPTER 1:
IT IS THE PEOPLE'S BUSINESS

THE RIGHT OF ACCESS

Two key parts of the Brown Act have not changed since its adoption in 1953. One is the Brown Act's initial section, declaring the Legislature's intent:

> *"In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards, and councils and the other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly."*
>
> *"The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created."*[1]

The people reconfirmed that intent 50 years later in the November 2004 election by adopting Proposition 59, amending the California Constitution to include a public right of access to government information:

> *"The people have the right of access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business, and, therefore, the meetings of public bodies and the writings of public officials and agencies shall be open to public scrutiny."*[2]

The Brown Act's other unchanged provision is a single sentence:

> *"All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, except as otherwise provided in this chapter."*[3]

That one sentence is by far the most important of the entire Brown Act. If the opening is the soul, that sentence is the heart of the Brown Act.

Practice Tip:

The key to the Brown Act is a single sentence. In summary, all meetings shall be **open and public** except when the Brown Act authorizes otherwise.

BROAD COVERAGE

The Brown Act covers members of virtually every type of local government body, elected or appointed, decision-making or advisory. Some types of private organizations are covered, as are newly-elected members of a legislative body, even before they take office.

Similarly, meetings subject to the Brown Act are not limited to face-to-face gatherings. They also include any communication medium or device through which a majority of a legislative body discusses, deliberates or takes action on an item of business outside of a noticed meeting. They include meetings held from remote locations by teleconference.

New communication technologies present new Brown Act challenges. For example, common e-mail practices of forwarding or replying to messages can easily lead to a serial meeting prohibited by the Brown Act, as can participation by members of a legislative body in an Internet chatroom or blog dialogue. Communicating during meetings using electronic technology (such as laptop computers, personal digital assistants, or cellular telephones) may create the perception that private communications are influencing the outcome of decisions; some state legislatures have banned the practice. On the other hand, widespread cablecasting and web streaming of meetings has greatly expanded public access to the decision-making process.

Practice Tip:

Think of the government's house as being made of glass. The curtains may be drawn only to further the public's interest.

NARROW EXEMPTIONS

The express purpose of the Brown Act is to assure that local government agencies conduct the public's business openly and publicly. Courts and the California Attorney General usually broadly construe the Brown Act in favor of greater public access and narrowly construe exemptions to its general rules.[4]

Generally, public officials should think of themselves as living in glass houses, and that they may only draw the curtains when it is in the public interest to preserve confidentiality. Closed sessions may be held only as specifically authorized by the provisions of the Brown Act itself.

The Brown Act, however, is limited to meetings among a majority of the members of multi-member government bodies when the subject relates to local agency business. It does not apply to independent conduct of individual decision-makers. It does not apply to social, ceremonial, educational, and other gatherings as long as a majority of the members of a body don't discuss issues related to their local agency's business. Meetings of temporary advisory committees—as distinguished from standing committees—made up solely of less than a quorum of a legislative body are not subject to the Brown Act.

The law does not apply to local agency staff or employees, but they may facilitate a violation by acting as a conduit for discussion, deliberation, or action by the legislative body.[5]

The law, on the one hand, recognizes the need of individual local officials to meet and discuss matters with their constituents. On the other hand, it requires—with certain specific exceptions to protect the community and preserve individual rights—that the decision-making process be public. Sometimes the boundary between the two is not easy to draw.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS

In addition to requiring the public's business to be conducted in open, noticed meetings, the Brown Act also extends to the public the right to participate in meetings. Individuals, lobbyists, and members of the news media possess the right to attend, record, broadcast, and participate in public meetings. The public's participation is further enhanced by the Brown Act's requirement that a meaningful agenda be posted in advance of meetings, by limiting discussion and action to matters listed on the agenda, and by requiring that meeting materials be made available.

Legislative bodies may, however, adopt reasonable regulations on public testimony and the conduct of public meetings, including measures to address disruptive conduct and irrelevant speech.

CONTROVERSY

Not surprisingly, the Brown Act has been a source of confusion and controversy since its inception. News media and government watchdogs often argue the law is toothless, pointing out that there has never been a single criminal conviction for a violation. They often suspect that closed sessions are being misused.

Public officials complain that the Brown Act makes it difficult to respond to constituents and requires public discussions of items better discussed privately—such as why a particular person should not be appointed to a board or commission. Many elected officials find the Brown Act inconsistent with their private business experiences. Closed meetings can be more efficient; they eliminate grandstanding and promote candor. The techniques that serve well in business—the working lunch, the sharing of information through a series of phone calls or emails, the backroom conversations and compromises—are often not possible under the Brown Act.

As a matter of public policy, California (along with many other states) has concluded that there is more to be gained than lost by conducting public business in the open. Government behind closed doors may well be efficient and business-like, but it may be perceived as unresponsive and untrustworthy.

Practice Tip:

Transparency is a foundational value for ethical government practices. The Brown Act is a floor, not a ceiling, for conduct.

BEYOND THE LAW—GOOD BUSINESS PRACTICES

Violations of the Brown Act can lead to invalidation of an agency's action, payment of a challenger's attorney's fees, public embarrassment, even criminal prosecution. But the Brown Act is a floor, not a ceiling for conduct of public officials. This guide is focused not only on the Brown Act as a minimum standard, but also on meeting practices or activities that, legal or not, are likely to create controversy. Problems may crop up, for example, when agenda descriptions are too brief or vague, when an informal get-together takes on the appearance of a meeting, when an agency conducts too much of its business in closed session or discusses matters in closed session that are beyond the authorized scope, or when controversial issues arise that are not on the agenda.

The Brown Act allows a legislative body to adopt practices and requirements for greater access to meetings for itself and its subordinate committees and bodies that are more stringent than the law itself requires.[6] Rather than simply restate the basic requirements of the Brown Act, local open meeting policies should strive to anticipate and prevent problems in areas where the Brown Act doesn't provide full guidance. As with the adoption of any other significant policy, public comment should be solicited.

A local policy could build on these basic Brown Act goals:

- A legislative body's need to get its business done smoothly;
- The public's right to participate meaningfully in meetings, and to review documents used in decision-making at a relevant point in time;
- A local agency's right to confidentially address certain negotiations, personnel matters, claims and litigation; and
- The right of the press to fully understand and communicate public agency decision-making.

An explicit and comprehensive public meeting and information policy, especially if reviewed periodically, can be an important element in maintaining or improving public relations. Such a policy exceeds the absolute requirements of the law—but if the law were enough this guide would be unnecessary. A narrow legalistic approach will not avoid or resolve potential controversies. An agency should consider going beyond the law, and look at its unique circumstances and determine if there is a better way to prevent potential problems and promote public trust. At the very least, local agencies need to think about how their agendas are structured in order to make Brown Act compliance easier. They need to plan carefully to make sure public participation fits smoothly into the process.

Practice Tip:

The Brown Act should be viewed as a tool to facilitate the business of local government agencies. Local policies that go beyond the minimum requirements of law may help instill public confidence and avoid problems.

■ ACHIEVING BALANCE

The Brown Act should be neither an excuse for hiding the ball nor a mechanism for hindering efficient and orderly meetings. The Brown Act represents a balance among the interests of constituencies whose interests do not always coincide. It calls for openness in local government, yet should allow government to function responsively and productively.

There must be both adequate notice of what discussion and action is to occur during a meeting as well as a normal degree of spontaneity in the dialogue between elected officials and their constituents.

The ability of an elected official to confer with constituents or colleagues must be balanced against the important public policy prohibiting decision-making outside of public meetings.

In the end, implementation of the Brown Act must ensure full participation of the public and preserve the integrity of the decision-making process, yet not stifle government officials and impede the effective and natural operation of government.

■ HISTORICAL NOTE

In late 1951, *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Mike Harris spent six weeks looking into the way local agencies conducted meetings. State law had long required that business be done in public, but Harris discovered secret meetings or caucuses were common. He wrote a 10-part series on "Your Secret Government" that ran in May and June 1952.

Out of the series came a decision to push for a new state open meeting law. Harris and Richard (Bud) Carpenter, legal counsel for the League of California Cities, drafted such a bill and Assembly Member Ralph M. Brown agreed to carry it. The Legislature passed the bill and Gov. Earl Warren signed it into law in 1953.

The Ralph M. Brown Act, known as the "Brown Act", has evolved under a series of amendments and court decisions, and has been the model for other open meeting laws—such as the Bagley-Keene Act, enacted in 1967 to cover state agencies.

Assembly Member Brown is best known for the open meeting law that carries his name. He was elected to the Legislature in 1942 and served 19 years, including the last three years as Speaker. He then became an appellate court justice.

Endnotes

1 California Government Code section 54950

2 California Constitution, Art. 1, section 3 (b)(1)

3 California Government Code section 54953 (a)

4 This principle of broad construction when it furthers public access and narrow construction if a provision limits public access is also stated in the amendment to the state's Constitution adopted by Proposition 59 in 2004. California Constitution, Art. 1, section 3(b)(2)

5 California Government Code section 54952.2 (c); *Wolfe v. City of Fremont* (2006) 144 Cal.App.4th 533

6 California Government Code section 54953.7

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

CHAPTER 2:
LEGISLATIVE BODIES

WHAT IS A "LEGISLATIVE BODY" OF A LOCAL AGENCY?

WHAT IS NOT A "LEGISLATIVE BODY" FOR PURPOSES OF THE BROWN ACT?

CHAPTER 2:
LEGISLATIVE BODIES

The Brown Act applies to the legislative bodies of local agencies. It defines "legislative body" broadly to include just about every type of decision-making body of a local agency.[1]

WHAT IS A "LEGISLATIVE BODY" OF A LOCAL AGENCY?

A "legislative body" includes:

- **The "governing body** of a local agency or any other local body created by state or federal statute."[2] This includes city councils, boards of supervisors, school boards and boards of trustees of special districts. A "local agency" is any city, county, school district, municipal corporation, redevelopment agency, district, political subdivision, or other public agency.[3] A housing authority is a local agency under the Brown Act even though it is created by and is an agent of the state.[4] The California Attorney General has opined that air pollution control districts and regional open space districts are also covered.[5] Entities created pursuant to joint powers agreements are local agencies within the meaning of the Brown Act.[6]
- **Newly-elected members** of a legislative body who have not yet assumed office must conform to the requirements of the Brown Act as if already in office.[7] Thus, meetings between incumbents and newly-elected members of a legislative body, such as a meeting between two outgoing members and a member-elect of a five-member body, could violate the Brown Act.

Q. On the morning following the election to a five-member legislative body of a local agency, two successful candidates, neither an incumbent, meet with an incumbent member of the legislative body for a celebratory breakfast. Does this violate the Brown Act?

A. *It might, and absolutely would if the conversation turns to agency business. Even though the candidates-elect have not officially been sworn in, the Brown Act applies. If purely a social event, there is no violation but it would be preferable if others were invited to attend to avoid the appearance of impropriety.*

Practice Tip:

The prudent presumption is that an advisory committee or task force is subject to the Brown Act. Even if one clearly is not, it may want to comply with the Brown Act. Public meetings may reduce the possibility of misunderstandings and controversy.

- **Appointed bodies**—whether permanent or temporary, decision-making or advisory—including planning commissions, civil service commissions and other subsidiary committees, boards, and bodies. Volunteer groups, executive search committees, task forces, and "blue ribbon committees" created by formal action of the governing body are legislative bodies. When the members of two or more legislative bodies are appointed to serve on an entirely separate advisory group, the resulting body may be subject to the Brown Act. In one reported case, a city council created a committee of two members of the city council and two members of the city planning commission to review qualifications of prospective planning commissioners and make recommendations to the council. The court held that their joint mission made them a legislative body subject to the Brown Act. Had the two committees remained separate and met only to exchange information, they would have been exempt from the Brown Act.[8]
- **Standing committees** of a legislative body, irrespective of their composition, which have either: (1) a continuing subject matter jurisdiction, or (2) a meeting schedule fixed by charter, ordinance, resolution, or formal action of a legislative body.[9] Even if comprised of less than a quorum of the governing body, a standing committee is subject to the Brown Act. For example, if a governing body creates long-term committees on budget and finance or on public safety, those are standing committees subject to the Brown Act. Further, function over form controls. For example, a statement by the legislative body that "the advisory committee shall not exercise continuing subject matter jurisdiction" or the fact that the committee does not have a fixed meeting schedule is not determinative.[10] "Formal action" by a legislative body includes authorization given to the agency's executive officer to appoint an advisory committee pursuant to agency-adopted policy.[11]
- The governing body of any **private organization** either: (1) created by the legislative body in order to exercise authority that may lawfully be delegated by such body to a private corporation, limited liability company or other entity or (2) that receives agency funding and whose governing board includes a member of the legislative body of the local agency appointed by the legislative body as a full voting member of the private entity's governing board.[12] These include some nonprofit corporations created by local agencies.[13] If a local agency contracts with a private firm for a service (for example, payroll, janitorial, or food services), the private firm is not covered by the Brown Act.[14] When a member of a legislative body sits on a board of a private organization as a private person and is not appointed by the legislative body, the board will not be subject to the Brown Act. Similarly, when the legislative body appoints someone other than one of its own members to such boards, the Brown Act does not apply. Nor does it apply when a private organization merely receives agency funding.[15]

Q: The local chamber of commerce is funded in part by the city. The mayor sits on the chamber's board of directors. Is the chamber board a legislative body subject to the Brown Act?

A: *Maybe. If the chamber's governing documents require the mayor to be on the board and the city council appoints the mayor to that position, the board is a legislative body. If, however, the chamber board independently appoints the mayor to its board, or the mayor attends chamber board meetings in a purely advisory capacity, it is not.*

Q: If a community college district board creates an auxiliary organization to operate a campus bookstore or cafeteria, is the board of the organization a legislative body?

A: *Yes. But, if the district instead contracts with a private firm to operate the bookstore or cafeteria, the Brown Act would not apply to the private firm.*

Practice Tip:

It can be difficult to determine whether a subcommittee of a body falls into the category of a standing committee or an exempt temporary committee. Suppose a committee is created to explore the renewal of a franchise or a topic of similarly limited scope and duration. Is it an exempt temporary committee or a non-exempt standing committee? The answer may depend on factors such as how meeting schedules are determined, the scope of the committee's charge, or whether the committee exists long enough to have "continuing jurisdiction."

- **Certain kinds of hospital operators**. A lessee of a hospital (or portion of a hospital) first leased under Health and Safety Code subsection 32121(p) after Jan. 1, 1994, which exercises "material authority" delegated to it by a local agency, whether or not such lessee is organized and operated by the agency or by a delegated authority.[16]

WHAT IS NOT A "LEGISLATIVE BODY" FOR PURPOSES OF THE BROWN ACT?

- A temporary advisory committee **composed solely of less than a quorum** of the legislative body that serves a limited or single purpose, that is not perpetual, and that will be dissolved once its specific task is completed is not subject to the Brown Act.[17] Temporary committees are sometimes called *ad hoc* committees, a term not used in the Brown Act. Examples include an advisory committee composed of less than a quorum created to interview candidates for a vacant position or to meet with representatives of other entities to exchange information on a matter of concern to the agency, such as traffic congestion.[18]
- Groups advisory to a single decision-maker or appointed by staff are not covered. The Brown Act applies only to committees created by formal action of the legislative body and not to committees created by others. A committee advising a superintendent of schools would not be covered by the Brown Act. However, the same committee, if created by formal action of the school board, would be covered.[19]

Q. A member of the legislative body of a local agency informally establishes an advisory committee of five residents to advise her on issues as they arise. Does the Brown Act apply to this committee?

A. *No, because the committee has not been established by formal action of the legislative body.*

Q. During a meeting of the city council, the council directs the city manager to form an advisory committee of residents to develop recommendations for a new ordinance. The city manager forms the committee and appoints its members; the committee is instructed to direct its recommendations to the city manager. Does the Brown Act apply to this committee?

A. *Possibly, because the direction from the city council might be regarded as a formal action of the body notwithstanding that the city manager controls the committee.*

- Individual decision makers who are not elected or appointed members of a legislative body are not covered by the Brown Act. For example, a disciplinary hearing presided over by a department head or a meeting of agency department heads are not subject to the Brown Act since such assemblies are not those of a legislative body.[20]
- County central committees of political parties are also not Brown Act bodies.[21]

Endnotes

1 *Taxpayers for Livable Communities v. City of Malibu* (2005) 126 Cal.App.4th 1123

2 California Government Code section 54952(a)

3 California Government Code section 54951. *But see:* Education Code section 35147, which exempts certain school councils and school site advisory committees from the Brown Act and imposes upon them a separate set of rules.

4 *Torres v. Board of Commissioners* (1979) 89 Cal.App.3d 545

5 71 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 96 (1988); 73 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 1 (1990)

6 *McKee v. Los Angeles Interagency Metropolitan Police Apprehension Crime Task Force* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 354

7 California Government Code section 54952.1

8 *Joiner v. City of Sebastopol* (1981) 125 Cal.App.3d 799

9 California Government Code section 54952(b)

10 79 Ops. Cal.Atty.Gen. 69 (1996)

11 *Frazer v. Dixon Unified School District* (1993) 18 Cal.App.4th 781

12 California Government Code section 54952(c)(1)(B). The same rule applies to a full voting member appointed prior to February 9, 1996 who, after that date, is made a non-voting board member by the legislative body. California Government Code section 54952(c)(2)

13 California Government Code section 54952(c)(1)(A); *International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union v. Los Angeles Export Terminal* (1999) 69 Cal.App.4th 287; *Epstein v. Hollywood Entertainment Dist. II Business Improvement District* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 862; *see also:* 81 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 281 (1998); 85 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 55

14 *International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union v. Los Angeles Export Terminal* (1999) 69 Cal.App.4th 287, 300 fn. 5

15 "The Brown Act," California Attorney General (2003), p. 7

16 California Government Code section 54952(d)

17 California Government Code section 54952(b); *see also: Freedom Newspapers, Inc. v. Orange County Employees Retirement System Board of Directors* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 821

18 *Taxpayers for Livable Communities v. City of Malibu* (2005) 126 Cal.App.4th 1123

19 56 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 14 (1973)

20 *Wilson v. San Francisco Municipal Railway* (1973) 29 Cal.App.3d 870

21 59 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 162 (1976)

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

CHAPTER 3:
MEETINGS

BROWN ACT MEETINGS

SIX EXCEPTIONS TO THE MEETING DEFINITION

COLLECTIVE BRIEFINGS

RETREATS OR WORKSHOPS OF LEGISLATIVE BODIES

SERIAL MEETINGS

INFORMAL GATHERINGS

TECHNOLOGICAL CONFERENCING

LOCATION OF MEETINGS

CHAPTER 3:
MEETINGS

The Brown Act only applies to meetings of local legislative bodies. The Brown Act defines a meeting as: "… any congregation of a majority of the members of a legislative body at the same time and place to hear, discuss, or deliberate upon any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body or the local agency to which it pertains."[1] Under the Brown Act, the term "meeting" is not limited to gatherings at which action is taken but includes deliberative gatherings as well.

BROWN ACT MEETINGS

Brown Act gatherings include a legislative body's regular meetings, special meetings, emergency meetings and adjourned meetings.

- "Regular meetings" are meetings occurring at the dates, times, and location set by resolution, ordinance, or other formal action by the legislative body and are subject to 72-hour posting requirements.[2]
- "Special meetings" are meetings called by the presiding officer or majority of the legislative body to discuss only discrete items on the agenda under the Brown Act's notice requirements for special meetings.[3]
- "Emergency meetings" are a limited class of meetings held when prompt action is needed due to actual or threatened disruption of public facilities and are held on little notice.[4]
- "Adjourned meetings" are regular or special meetings that have been adjourned or re-adjourned to a time and place specified in the order of adjournment, with no agenda required for regular meetings adjourned for less than five calendar days as long as no additional business is transacted.[5]

SIX EXCEPTIONS TO THE MEETING DEFINITION

The Brown Act creates six exceptions to the meeting definition: [6]

Individual Contacts

The first exception involves individual contacts between a member of the legislative body and any other person. The Brown Act does not limit a legislative body member acting on his or her own. This exception recognizes the right to confer with constituents, advocates, consultants, news reporters, local agency staff or a colleague.

Individual contacts, however, cannot be used to do in stages what would be prohibited in one step. For example, a series of individual contacts that leads to discussion, deliberation or action among a majority of the members of a legislative body is prohibited. Such serial meetings are discussed below.

Conferences

The second exception allows a legislative body majority to attend a conference or similar gathering open to the public that addresses issues of general interest to the public or to public agencies of the type represented by the legislative body.

Among other things, this exception permits legislative body members to attend annual association conferences of city, county, school, community college, and other local agency officials, so long as those meetings are open to the public. However, a majority of members cannot discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled program, business of a specific nature that is within their local agency's subject matter jurisdiction.

Community Meetings

The third exception allows a legislative body majority to attend an open and publicized meeting held by another organization to address a topic of local community concern. Again, a majority cannot discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled program, business of a specific nature that is within their local agency's subject matter jurisdiction. Under this exception, a legislative body majority may attend a local service club meeting or a local candidates' night if the meetings are open to the public.

> "I see we have four distinguished members of the city council at our meeting tonight," said the chair of the Environmental Action Coalition.
>
> "I wonder if they have anything to say about the controversy over enacting a slow growth ordinance?"
>
> *The Brown Act permits a majority of a legislative body to attend and speak at an open and publicized meeting conducted by another organization. The Brown Act may nevertheless be violated if a majority discusses, deliberates, or takes action on an item during the meeting of the other organization. There is a fine line between what is permitted and what is not; hence, members should exercise caution when participating in these types of events.*

Q. The local chamber of commerce sponsors an open and public candidate debate during an election campaign. Three of the five agency members are up for re-election and all three participate. All of the candidates are asked their views of a controversial project scheduled for a meeting to occur just after the election. May the three incumbents answer the question?

A. *Yes, because the Brown Act does not constrain the incumbents from expressing their views regarding important matters facing the local agency as part of the political process the same as any other candidates.*

Other Legislative Bodies

The fourth exception allows a majority of a legislative body to attend an open and publicized meeting of: (1) another body of the local agency and (2) a legislative body of another local agency.[7] Again, the majority cannot discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled meeting, business of a specific nature that is within their local agency's subject matter jurisdiction. This exception allows, for example, a city council or a majority of a board of supervisors to attend a controversial meeting of the planning commission.

Nothing in the Brown Act prevents the majority of a legislative body from sitting together at such a meeting. They may choose not to, however, to preclude any possibility of improperly discussing local agency business and to avoid the appearance of a Brown Act violation. Further, aside from the Brown Act, there may be other reasons, such as due process considerations, why the members should avoid giving public testimony or trying to influence the outcome of proceedings before a subordinate body.

Q. The entire legislative body intends to testify against a bill before the Senate Local Government Committee in Sacramento. Must this activity be noticed as a meeting of the body?

A. *No, because the members are attending and participating in an open meeting of another governmental body which the public may attend.*

Q. The members then proceed upstairs to the office of their local Assembly member to discuss issues of local interest. Must this session be noticed as a meeting and be open to the public?

A. *Yes, because the entire body may not meet behind closed doors except for proper closed sessions. The same answer applies to a private lunch or dinner with the Assembly member.*

Standing Committees

The fifth exception authorizes the attendance of a majority at an open and noticed meeting of a standing committee of the legislative body, provided that the legislative body members who are not members of the standing committee attend only as observers (meaning that they cannot speak or otherwise participate in the meeting).[8]

Q. The legislative body establishes a standing committee of two of its five members, which meets monthly. A third member of the legislative body wants to attend these meetings and participate. May she?

A. *She may attend, but only as an observer; she may not participate.*

Social or Ceremonial Events

The sixth and final exception permits a majority of a legislative body to attend a purely social or ceremonial occasion. Once again, a majority cannot discuss business among themselves of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency.

Nothing in the Brown Act prevents a majority of members from attending the same football game, party, wedding, funeral, reception, or farewell. The test is not whether a majority of a legislative body attends the function, but whether business of a specific nature within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency is discussed. So long as no local agency business is discussed, there is no violation of the Brown Act.

COLLECTIVE BRIEFINGS

None of these six exceptions permits a majority of a legislative body to meet together with staff in advance of a meeting for a collective briefing. Any such briefings that involve a majority of the body in the same place and time must be open to the public and satisfy Brown Act meeting notice and agenda requirements.

RETREATS OR WORKSHOPS OF LEGISLATIVE BODIES

There is consensus among local agency attorneys that gatherings by a majority of legislative body members at the legislative body's retreats, study sessions, or workshops are covered under the Brown Act. This is the case whether the retreat, study session, or workshop focuses on long-range agency planning, discussion of critical local issues, or on team building and group dynamics.[9]

Q. The legislative body wants to hold a team-building session to improve relations among its members. May such a session be conducted behind closed doors?

A. *No, this is not a proper subject for a closed session, and there is no other basis to exclude the public. Council relations are a matter of public business.*

SERIAL MEETINGS

One of the most frequently asked questions about the Brown Act involves serial meetings. At any one time, such meetings involve only a portion of a legislative body, but eventually involve a majority.

The problem with serial meetings is the process, which deprives the public of an opportunity for meaningful participation in legislative body decision-making. The Brown Act provides that "[a] majority of the members of a legislative body shall not, outside a meeting…use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body."[10]

The serial meeting may occur by either a "daisy-chain" or a "hub-and-spoke" sequence. In the daisy-chain scenario, Member A contacts Member B, Member B contacts Member C, Member C contacts Member D and so on, until a quorum has discussed, deliberated or taken action on an item within the legislative body's subject matter jurisdiction. The hub-and-spoke process involves, for example, a staff member (the hub) communicating with members of a legislative body (the spokes) one-by-one for a decision on a proposed action,[11] or a chief executive officer briefing a majority of redevelopment agency members prior to a formal meeting and, in the process, information about the members' respective views is revealed. Each of these scenarios violates the Brown Act.

A legislative body member has the right, if not the duty, to meet with constituents to address their concerns. That member also has the right to confer with a colleague or appropriate staff about local agency business. An employee or official of a local agency may engage in separate conversations or communications outside of an open and noticed meeting "with members of a legislative body in order to answer questions or provide information regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency if that person does not communicate to members of the legislative body the comments or position of any other member or members of the legislative body."[12]

The Brown Act has been violated however, if several one-on-one meetings or conferences leads to a discussion, deliberation or action by a majority. In one case, a violation occurred when a quorum of a city council directed staff by letter on an eminent domain action.[13]

A unilateral written communication to the legislative body, such as an informational or advisory memorandum, does not violate the Brown Act.[14] Such a memo, however, may be a public record.[15]

The phone call was from a lobbyist. "Say, I need your vote for that project in the south area. How about it?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Board Member Aletto. "That's kind of a sticky proposition. You sure you need my vote?"

"Well, I've got Bradley and Cohen lined up and another vote leaning. With you I'd be over the top."

Moments later, the phone rings again. "Hey, I've been hearing some rumbles on that south area project," said the newspaper reporter. "I'm counting noses. How are you voting on it?"

Neither the lobbyist nor the reporter has violated the Brown Act, but they are facilitating a violation. The board member may have violated the Brown Act by hearing about the positions of other board members and indeed coaxing the lobbyist to reveal the other board members' positions by asking "You sure you need my vote?" The prudent course is to avoid such leading conversations and to caution lobbyists, staff and news media against revealing such positions of others.

Practice Tip:
When briefing legislative body members, staff must exercise care not to disclose other members' views and positions.

The mayor sat down across from the city manager. "From now on," he declared, "I want you to provide individual briefings on upcoming agenda items. Some of this material is very technical, and the council members don't want to sound like idiots asking about it in public. Besides that, briefings will speed up the meeting."

Agency employees or officials may have separate conversations or communications outside of an open and noticed meeting "with members of a legislative body in order to answer questions or provide information regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency if that person does not communicate to members of the legislative body the comments or position of any other member or members of the legislative body."[16] Members should always be vigilant when discussing local agency business with anyone to avoid conversations that could lead to a discussion, deliberation or action taken among the majority of the legislative body.

"Thanks for the information," said Council Member Kim. "These zoning changes can be tricky, and now I think I'm better equipped to make the right decision."

"Glad to be of assistance," replied the planning director. "Any idea what the other council members think of the problem?"

The planning director should not ask, and the member should not answer. A one-on-one meeting that involves communicating the comments or position of other members violates the Brown Act.

Q. The agency's Web site includes a chat room where agency employees and officials participate anonymously and often discuss issues of local agency business. Members of the legislative body participate regularly. Does this scenario present a potential for violation of the Brown Act?

A. *Yes, because it is a technological device that may serve to allow for a majority of members to discuss, deliberate or take action on matters of agency business.*

Q. A member of a legislative body contacts two other members on a five-member body relative to scheduling a special meeting. Is this an illegal serial meeting?

A. *No, the Brown Act expressly allows this kind of communication, though the members should avoid discussing the merits of what is to be taken up at the meeting.*

Particular care should be exercised when staff briefings of legislative body members occur by email because of the ease of using the "reply to all" button that may inadvertently result in a Brown Act violation.

INFORMAL GATHERINGS

Often members are tempted to mix business with pleasure—for example, by holding a post meeting gathering. Informal gatherings at which local agency business is discussed or transacted violate the law if they are not conducted in conformance with the Brown Act.[17] A luncheon gathering in a crowded dining room violates the Brown Act if the public does not have an adequate opportunity to hear or participate in the deliberations of members.

> Thursday at 11:30 a.m., as they did every week, the board of directors of the Dry Gulch Irrigation District trooped into Pop's Donut Shoppe for an hour of talk and fellowship. They sat at the corner window, fronting on Main and Broadway, to show they had nothing to hide. Whenever he could, the managing editor of the weekly newspaper down the street hurried over to join the board.
>
> *A gathering like this would not violate the Brown Act if board members scrupulously avoided talking about irrigation district issues. But it is the kind of situation that should be avoided. The public is unlikely to believe the board members could meet regularly without discussing public business. A newspaper executive's presence in no way lessens the potential for a violation of the Brown Act.*

Q. The agency has won a major victory in the Supreme Court on an issue of importance. The presiding officer decides to hold an impromptu press conference in order to make a statement to the print and broadcast media. All the other members show up in order to make statements of their own and be seen by the media. Is this gathering illegal?

A. *Technically there is no exception for this sort of gathering, but as long as members do not state their intentions as to future action to be taken and the press conference is open to the public, it seems harmless.*

TECHNOLOGICAL CONFERENCING

In an effort to keep up with information age technologies, the Brown Act now specifically allows a legislative body to use any type of teleconferencing to meet, receive public comment and testimony, deliberate, or conduct a closed session.[18] While the Brown Act contains specific requirements for conducting a teleconference, the decision to use teleconferencing is entirely discretionary within the body.

"Teleconference" is defined as "a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or video, or both."[19] In addition to the specific requirements relating to teleconferencing, the meeting must comply with all provisions of the Brown Act otherwise applicable. The Brown Act contains the following specific requirements:[20]

- Teleconferencing may be used for all purposes during any meeting;
- At least a quorum of the legislative body must participate from locations within the local agency's jurisdiction;
- Additional teleconference locations may be made available for the public;

Practice Tip:
Legal counsel for the local agency should be consulted before teleconferencing a meeting.

- Each teleconference location must be specifically identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting, including a full address and room number, as may be applicable;
- Agendas must be posted at each teleconference location, even if a hotel room or a residence;
- Each teleconference location must be accessible to the public and have technology, such as a speakerphone, to enable the public to participate;
- The agenda must provide the opportunity for the public to address the legislative body directly at each teleconference location; and
- All votes must be by roll call.

Q. A member on vacation wants to participate in a meeting of the legislative body and vote by cellular phone from her car while driving from Washington, D.C. to New York. May she?

A. *She may not participate or vote because she is not in a noticed and posted teleconference location.*

The use of teleconferencing to conduct a legislative body meeting presents a variety of new issues beyond the scope of this guide to discuss in detail. Therefore, before teleconferencing a meeting, legal counsel for the local agency should be consulted.

LOCATION OF MEETINGS

The Brown Act generally requires all regular and special meetings of a legislative body, including retreats and workshops, to be held within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction.[21]

An open and publicized meeting of a legislative body may be held outside of agency boundaries if the purpose of the meeting is one of the following:

- Comply with state or federal law or a court order, or for a judicial conference or administrative proceeding in which the local agency is a party;
- Inspect real or personal property, which cannot be conveniently brought into the local agency's territory, provided the meeting is limited to items relating to that real or personal property;

Q. The agency is considering approving a major retail mall. The developer has built other similar malls, and invites the entire legislative body to visit a mall outside the jurisdiction. May the entire body go?

A. *Yes, the Brown Act permits meetings outside the boundaries of the agency for specified reasons and inspection of property is one such reason. The field trip must be treated as a meeting and the public must be able to attend.*

- Participate in multiagency meetings or discussions, however, such meetings must be held within the boundaries of one of the participating agencies, and all involved agencies must give proper notice;
- Meet in the closest meeting facility if the local agency has no meeting facility within its boundaries or at its principal office if that office is located outside the territory over which the agency has jurisdiction;

- Meet with elected or appointed federal or California officials when a local meeting would be impractical, solely to discuss a legislative or regulatory issue affecting the local agency and over which the federal or state officials have jurisdiction;
- Meet in or nearby a facility owned by the agency, provided that the topic of the meeting is limited to items directly related to the facility; or
- Visit the office of its legal counsel for a closed session on pending litigation, when to do so would reduce legal fees or costs.[22]

In addition, the governing board of a school or community college district may hold meetings outside of its boundaries to attend a conference on nonadversarial collective bargaining techniques, interview candidates for school district superintendent, or interview a potential employee from another district.[23] A school board may also interview members of the public residing in another district if the board is considering employing that district's superintendent.

Similarly, meetings of a joint powers authority can occur within the territory of at least one of its member agencies, and a joint powers authority with members throughout the state may meet anywhere in the state.[24]

Finally, if a fire, flood, earthquake, or other emergency makes the usual meeting place unsafe, the presiding officer can designate another meeting place for the duration of the emergency. News media that have requested notice of meetings must be notified of the designation by the most rapid means of communication available.[25]

Endnotes:

1 California Government Code section 54952.2(a)
2 California Government Code section 54954(a)
3 California Government Code section 54956
4 California Government Code section 54956.5
5 California Government Code section 54955
6 California Government Code section 54952.2(c)
7 California Government Code section 54952.2(c)(4)
8 California Government Code section 54952.2(c)(6)
9 "The Brown Act," California Attorney General (2003), p. 10
10 California Government Code section 54952.2(b)(1)
11 *Stockton Newspaper Inc. v. Redevelopment Agency* (1985) 171 Cal.App.3d 95
12 California Government Code section 54952.2(b)(2)
13 *Common Cause v. Stirling* (1983) 147 Cal.App.3d 518
14 *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363
15 California Government Code section 54957.5(a)
16 California Government Code section 54952.2(b)(2)
17 California Government Code section 54952.2; 43 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 36 (1964)
18 California Government Code section 54953(b)(1)
19 California Government Code section 54953(b)(4)
20 California Government Code section 54953
21 California Government Code section 54954(b)
22 California Government Code section 54954(b)(1)-(7)
23 California Government Code section 54954(c)
24 California Government Code section 54954(d)
25 California Government Code section 54954(e)

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

CHAPTER 4:
AGENDAS, NOTICES, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

AGENDAS FOR REGULAR MEETINGS

MAILED AGENDA UPON WRITTEN REQUEST

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL MEETINGS

NOTICES AND AGENDAS FOR ADJOURNED AND CONTINUED MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR EMERGENCY MEETINGS

EDUCATIONAL AGENCY MEETINGS

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR TAX OR ASSESSMENT MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

NON-AGENDA ITEMS

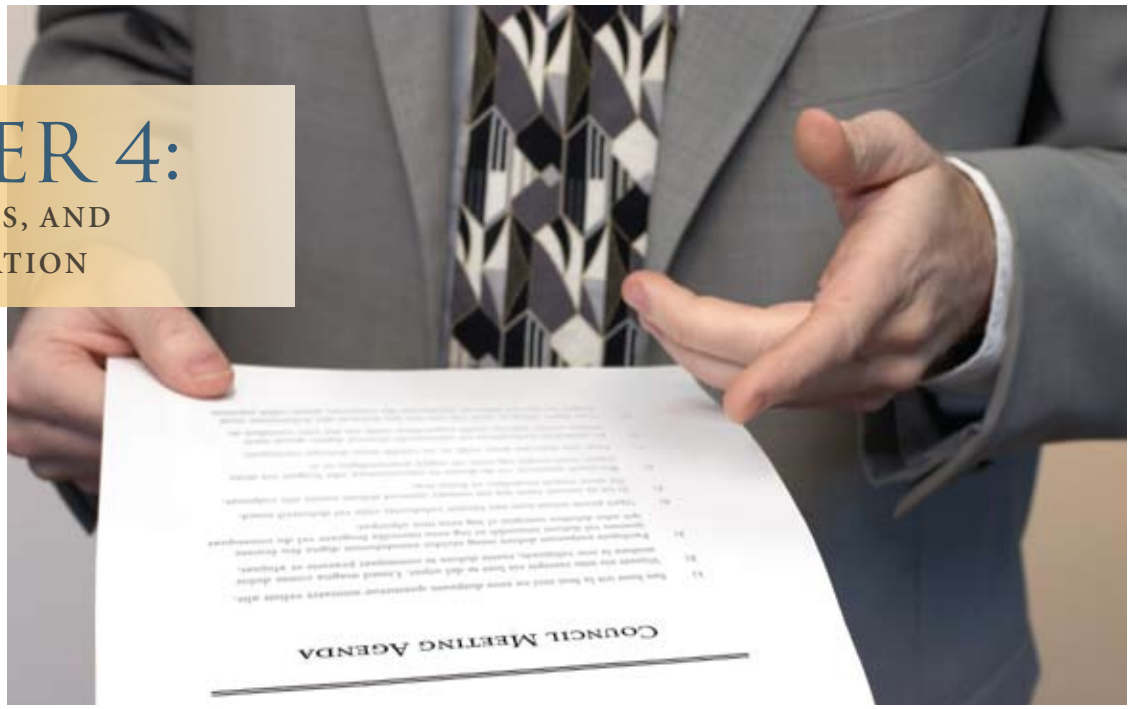
RESPONDING TO THE PUBLIC

THE RIGHT TO ATTEND MEETINGS

RECORDS AND RECORDINGS

THE PUBLIC'S PLACE ON THE AGENDA

CHAPTER 4:
AGENDAS, NOTICES, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION



Effective notice is essential for an open and public meeting. Whether a meeting is open or how the public may participate in that meeting is academic if nobody knows about the meeting.

AGENDAS FOR REGULAR MEETINGS

Every regular meeting of a legislative body of a local agency—including advisory committees, commissions, or boards, as well as standing committees of legislative bodies—must be preceded by a posted agenda that advises the public of the meeting and the matters to be transacted or discussed.

Practice Tip:
Putting together a meeting agenda requires careful thought.

The agenda must be posted at least 72 hours before the regular meeting in a location "freely accessible to members of the public."[1] The courts have not definitively interpreted the "freely accessible" requirement. The California Attorney General has interpreted this provision to require posting in locations accessible to the public 24 hours a day during the 72-hour period, but any of the 72 hours may fall on a weekend.[2] Posting may also be made on a touch screen electronic kiosk accessible without charge to the public 24 hours a day during the 72-hour period.[3] However, only posting an agenda on an agency's Web site is inadequate since there is no universal access to the internet. The agenda must state the meeting time and place and must contain "a brief general description of each item of business to be transacted or discussed at the meeting, including items to be discussed in closed session."[4]

Q. The agenda for a regular meeting contains the following items of business:

- "Consideration of a report regarding traffic on Eighth Street"
- "Consideration of contract with ABC Consulting"

Are these descriptions adequate?

A. *If the first is, it is barely adequate. A better description would provide the reader with some idea of what the report is about and what is being recommended. The second is not adequate. A better description might read "consideration of a contract with ABC Consulting in the amount of $50,000 for traffic engineering services regarding traffic on Eighth Street."*

Q. The agenda includes an item entitled "City Manager's Report," during which time the city manager provides a brief report on notable topics of interest, none of which are listed on the agenda.

Is this permissible?

A. *Yes, so long as it does not result in extended discussion or action by the body.*

A brief general description may not be sufficient for closed session agenda items. The Brown Act provides safe harbor language for the various types of permissible closed sessions. Substantial compliance with the safe harbor language is recommended to protect legislative bodies and elected officials from legal challenges.

MAILED AGENDA UPON WRITTEN REQUEST

The legislative body, or its designee, must mail a copy of the agenda or, if requested, the entire agenda packet, to any person who has filed a written request for such materials. These copies shall be mailed at the time the agenda is posted. If requested, these materials must be made available in appropriate alternative formats to persons with disabilities.

A request for notice is valid for one calendar year and renewal requests must be filed Jan. 1 of each year. The legislative body may establish a fee to recover the cost of providing the service. Failure of the requesting person to receive the agenda does not constitute grounds for invalidation of actions taken at the meeting.[5]

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR SPECIAL MEETINGS

There is no express agenda requirement for special meetings, but the notice of the special meeting effectively serves as the agenda and limits the business that may be transacted or discussed. Written notice must be sent to each member of the legislative body (unless waived in writing by that member) and to each local newspaper of general circulation, and radio or television station that has requested such notice in writing. This notice must be delivered by personal delivery or any other means that ensures receipt, at least 24 hours before the time of the meeting.

The notice must state the time and place of the meeting, as well as all business to be transacted or discussed. It is recommended that the business to be transacted or discussed be described in the same manner that an item for a regular meeting would be described on the agenda—with a brief general description. As noted above, closed session items should be described in accordance with the Brown Act's safe harbor provisions to protect legislative bodies and elected officials from challenges of noncompliance with notice requirements. The special meeting notice must also be posted at least 24 hours prior to the special meeting in a site freely accessible to the public. The body cannot consider business not in the notice.[6]

NOTICES AND AGENDAS FOR ADJOURNED AND CONTINUED MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

A regular or special meeting can be adjourned and re-adjourned to a time and place specified in the order of adjournment.[7] If no time is stated, the meeting is continued to the hour for regular meetings. Whoever is present (even if they are less than a quorum) may so adjourn a meeting; if no member of the legislative body is present, the clerk or secretary may adjourn the meeting. If a meeting is adjourned for less than five calendar days, no new agenda need be posted so long as a new item of business is not introduced.[8] A copy of the order of adjournment must be posted within 24 hours after the adjournment, at or near the door of the place where the meeting was held.

A hearing can be continued to a subsequent meeting. The process is the same as for continuing adjourned meetings, except that if the hearing is continued to a time less than 24 hours away, a copy of the order or notice of continuance must be posted immediately following the meeting.[9]

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR EMERGENCY MEETINGS

The special meeting notice provisions apply to emergency meetings, except for the 24-hour notice.[10] News media that have requested written notice of special meetings must be notified by telephone at least one hour in advance of an emergency meeting, and all telephone numbers provided in that written request must be tried. If telephones are not working, the notice requirements are deemed waived. However, the news media must be notified as soon as possible of the meeting and any action taken.

News media may make a practice of having written requests on file for notification of special or emergency meetings. Absent such a request, a local agency has no legal obligation to notify news media of special or emergency meetings—although notification may be advisable in any event to avoid controversy.

EDUCATIONAL AGENCY MEETINGS

The Education Code contains some special agenda and special meeting provisions,[11] however, they are generally consistent with the Brown Act. An item is probably void if not posted.[12] A school district board must also adopt regulations to make sure the public can place matters affecting district's business on meeting agendas and to address the board on those items.[13]

NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR TAX OR ASSESSMENT MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

The Brown Act prescribes specific procedures for adoption by a city, county, special district, or joint powers authority of any new or increased general tax or assessment.[14] At least one public meeting must be held to allow public testimony on the tax or assessment. In addition, there must also be at least 45 days notice of a public hearing at which public testimony may be given before the legislative body proposes to act on the tax or assessment. The agency may recover the reasonable costs of the public meetings, hearings, and notice.[15]

The Brown Act exempts certain fees, standby or availability charges, recurring assessments, and new or increased assessments that are subject to the notice and hearing requirements of the Constitution.[16] As a practical matter, the Constitution's notice requirements have preempted this section of the Brown Act.

NON-AGENDA ITEMS

The Brown Act generally prohibits any action or discussion of items not on the posted agenda. However, there are three specific situations in which a legislative body can act on an item not on the agenda:[17]

- When a majority decides there is an "emergency situation" (as defined for emergency meetings);
- When two-thirds of the members present (or all members if less than two-thirds are present) determine there is a need for immediate action and the need to take action "came to the attention of the local agency subsequent to the agenda being posted." This exception requires a degree of urgency. Further, an item cannot be considered under this provision if the legislative body or the staff knew about the need to take immediate action before the agenda was posted. A new need does not arise because staff forgot to put an item on the agenda or because an applicant missed a deadline; or
- When an item appeared on the agenda of, and was continued from, a meeting held not more than five days earlier.

Practice Tip:

Subject to very limited exceptions, the Brown Act prohibits any action or discussion of an item not on the posted agenda.

The exceptions are narrow, as indicated by this list. The first two require a specific determination by the legislative body. That determination can be challenged in court and, if unsubstantiated, can lead to invalidation of an action.

"I'd like a two-thirds vote of the board, so we can go ahead and authorize commencement of phase two of the East Area Project," said Chair Lopez.

"It's not on the agenda. But we learned two days ago that we finished phase one ahead of schedule—believe it or not—and I'd like to keep it that way. Do I hear a motion?"

The desire to stay ahead of schedule generally would not satisfy "a need for immediate action." Too casual an action could invite a court challenge by a disgruntled resident. The prudent course is to place an item on the agenda for the next meeting and not risk invalidation.

"We learned this morning of an opportunity for a state grant," said the chief engineer at the regular board meeting, "but our application has to be submitted in two days. We'd like the board to give us the go ahead tonight, even though it's not on the agenda."

A legitimate immediate need can be acted upon even though not on the posted agenda by following a two-step process:

- First, make two determinations: (a) that there is an immediate need to take action and (b) that the need arose after the posting of the agenda. The matter is then placed on the agenda.
- Second, discuss and act on the added agenda item.

RESPONDING TO THE PUBLIC

The public can talk about anything within the jurisdiction of the legislative body, but the legislative body generally cannot act on or discuss an item not on the agenda. What happens when a member of the public raises a subject not on the agenda?

While the Brown Act does not allow discussion or action on items not on the agenda, it does allow members of the legislative body, or its staff, to "briefly respond" to comments or questions from members of the public, provide a reference to staff or other resources for factual information, or direct staff to place the issue on a future agenda. In addition, even without a comment from the public, a legislative body member or a staff member may ask for information, request a report back, request to place a matter on the agenda for a subsequent meeting (subject to the body's rules or procedures), ask a question for clarification, make a brief announcement, or briefly report on his or her own activities.[18] However, caution should be used to avoid any discussion or action on such items.

Council Member A: I would like staff to respond to Resident Joe's complaints during public comment about the repaving project on Elm Street—are there problems with this project?

City Manager: The public works director has prepared a 45-minute power point presentation for you on the status of this project and will give it right now.

Council Member B: Take all the time you need; we need to get to the bottom of this. Our residents are unhappy.

It is clear from this dialogue that the Elm Street project was not on the council's agenda, but was raised during the public comment period for items not on the agenda. Council Member A properly asked staff to respond; the city manager should have given at most a brief response. If a lengthy report from the public works director was warranted, the city manager should have stated that it would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. Otherwise, both the long report and the likely discussion afterward will improperly embroil the council in a matter that is not listed on the agenda.

THE RIGHT TO ATTEND AND OBSERVE MEETINGS

A number of other Brown Act provisions protect the public's right to attend, observe, and participate in meetings.

Members of the public cannot be required to register their names, provide other information, complete a questionnaire, or otherwise "fulfill any condition precedent" to attending a meeting. Any attendance list, questionnaire, or similar document posted at or near the entrance to the meeting room or circulated at a meeting must clearly state that its completion is voluntary and that all persons may attend whether or not they fill it out.[19]

No meeting can be held in a facility that prohibits attendance based on race, religion color, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, sex, sexual orientation, or disability, or that is inaccessible to the disabled. Nor can a meeting be held where the public must make a payment or purchase in order to be present.[20] This does not mean however that the public is entitled to free entry to a conference attended by a majority of the legislative body.[21]

While a legislative body may use teleconferencing in connection with a meeting, the public must be given notice of and access to the teleconference location. Members of the public must be able to address the legislative body from the teleconference location.[22]

Action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final, is flatly prohibited.[23]

Q: The agenda calls for election of the legislative body's officers. Members of the legislative body want to cast unsigned written ballots that would be tallied by the clerk, who would announce the results. Is this voting process permissible?

A: *No. The possibility that a public vote might cause hurt feelings among members of the legislative body or might be awkward—or even counterproductive—does not justify a secret ballot.*

There can be no semi-closed meetings, in which some members of the public are permitted to attend as spectators while others are not; meetings are either open or closed.[24]

The legislative body may remove persons from a meeting who willfully interrupt proceedings. If order still cannot be restored, the meeting room may be cleared. Members of the news media who have not participated in the disturbance must be allowed to continue to attend the meeting. The legislative body may establish a procedure to re-admit an individual or individuals not responsible for the disturbance.[25]

RECORDS AND RECORDINGS

The public has the right to review agendas and other writings distributed by any person to a majority of the legislative body in connection with a matter subject to discussion or consideration at a meeting. Except for privileged documents, those materials are public records and must be made available upon request without delay.[26] A fee or deposit as permitted by the California Public Records Act may be charged for a copy of a public record.[27]

Q: In connection with an upcoming hearing on a discretionary use permit, counsel for the legislative body transmits a memorandum to all members of the body outlining the litigation risks in granting or denying the permit. Must this memorandum be included in the packet of agenda materials available to the public?

A: *No. The memorandum is a privileged attorney-client communication.*

Q: In connection with an agenda item calling for the legislative body to approve a contract, staff submits to all members of the body a financial analysis explaining why the terms of the contract favor the local agency. Must this memorandum be included in the packet of agenda materials available to the public?

A. *Yes. The memorandum has been distributed to the majority of the legislative body, relates to the subject matter of a meeting, and is not a privileged communication.*

A legislative body may discuss or act on some matters without considering written materials. But if writings are distributed to a majority of a legislative body in connection with an agenda item, they must also be available to the public. A writing distributed to a majority of the legislative body less than 72 hours before the meeting must be made available for inspection at the time of distribution at a public office or location designated for that purpose; and the agendas for all meetings of the legislative body must include the address of this office or location.[28] A writing distributed during a meeting must be made public:

- At the meeting if prepared by the local agency or a member of its legislative body; or
- After the meeting if prepared by some other person.[29]

Any tape or film record of an open and public meeting made for whatever purpose by or at the direction of the local agency is subject to the Public Records Act; however, it may be erased or destroyed 30 days after the taping or recording. Any inspection of a video or tape recording is to be provided without charge on a video or tape player made available by the local agency.[30] The agency may impose its ordinary charge for copies.[31]

In addition, the public is specifically allowed to use audio or video tape recorders or still or motion picture cameras at a meeting to record the proceedings, absent a reasonable finding by the legislative body that noise, illumination, or obstruction of view caused by recorders or cameras would persistently disrupt the proceedings.[32]

Similarly, a legislative body cannot prohibit or restrict the public broadcast of its open and public meetings without making a reasonable finding that the noise, illumination, or obstruction of view would persistently disrupt the proceedings.[33]

THE PUBLIC'S PLACE ON THE AGENDA

Every agenda for a regular meeting must allow members of the public to speak on any item of interest, so long as the item is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. Further, the public must be allowed to speak on a specific item of business before or during the legislative body's consideration of it.[34]

Q. Must the legislative body allow members of the public to show videos or make a power point presentation during the public comment part of the agenda, as long as the subject matter is relevant to the agency and is within the established time limit?

A. *Probably, although the agency is under no obligation to provide equipment.*

Practice Tip:

Public speakers cannot be compelled to give their name or address as a condition of speaking. The clerk or presiding officer may request speakers to complete a speaker card or identify themselves for the record, but must respect a speaker's desire for anonymity.

Moreover, the legislative body cannot prohibit public criticism of policies, procedures, programs, or services of the agency or the acts or omissions of the legislative body itself. But, the Brown Act provides no immunity for defamatory statements.[35]

Q. May the presiding officer prohibit a member of the audience from publicly criticizing an agency employee by name during public comments?

A. *No, as long as the criticism pertains to job performance.*

Q. During the public comment period of a regular meeting of the legislative body, a resident urges the public to support and vote for a candidate vying for election to the body. May the presiding officer gavel the speaker out of order for engaging in political campaign speech?

A. *There is no case law on this subject. Some would argue that campaign issues are outside the subject matter jurisdiction of the body within the meaning of Section 54954.3(a). Others take the view that the speech must be allowed under paragraph (c) of that section because it is relevant to the governing of the agency and an implicit criticism of the incumbents.*

The legislative body may adopt reasonable regulations, including time limits, on public comments. Such regulations should be enforced fairly and without regard to speakers' viewpoints. The legislative body has discretion to modify its regulations regarding time limits on public comment if necessary. For example, the time limit could be shortened to accommodate a lengthy agenda or lengthened to allow additional time for discussion on a complicated matter.[36]

The public does not need to be given an opportunity to speak on an item that has already been considered by a committee made up exclusively of members of the legislative body at a public meeting, if all interested members of the public had the opportunity to speak on the item before or during its consideration, and if the item has not been substantially changed.[37]

Notices and agendas for special meetings must also give members of the public the opportunity to speak before or during consideration of an item on the agenda but need not allow members of the public an opportunity to speak on other matters within the jurisdiction of the legislative body.[38]

Endnotes

1 California Government Code section 54954.2(a)(1)
2 78 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 327 (1995)
3 88 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 218 (2005)
4 California Government Code section 54954.2(a)(1)
5 California Government Code section 54954.1
6 California Government Code section 54956
7 California Government Code section 54955
8 California Government Code section 54954.2(b)(3)
9 California Government Code section 54955.1
10 California Government Code section 54956.5
11 Education Code sections 35144, 35145 and 72129
12 *Carlson v. Paradise Unified School District* (1971) 18 Cal.App.3d 196
13 California Education Code section 35145.5
14 California Government Code section 54954.6
15 California Government Code section 54954.6(g)
16 See: Cal.Const.Art.XIIIC, XIIID and California Government Code section 54954.6(h)
17 California Government Code section 54954.2(b)
18 California Government Code section 54954.2(a)(2)
19 California Government Code section 54953.3
20 California Government Code section 54961(a); California Government Code section 11135(a)
21 California Government Code section 54952.2(c)(2)
22 California Government Code section 54953(b)
23 California Government Code section 54953(c)
24 46 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 34 (1965)
25 California Government Code section 54957.9
26 California Government Code section 54957.5
27 California Government Code section 54957.5(d)
28 California Government Code section 54957.5(b)
29 California Government Code section 54957.5(c)
30 California Government Code section 54953.5(b)
31 California Government Code section 54957.5(d)
32 California Government Code section 54953.5(a)
33 California Government Code section 54953.6
34 California Government Code section 54954.3(a)
35 California Government Code section 54954.3(c)
36 California Government Code section 54954.3(b); *Chaffee v. San Francisco Public Library Com.* (2005) 134 Cal. App.4th 109; 75 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 89 (1992)
37 California Government Code section 54954.3(a)
38 California Government Code section 54954.3(a)

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

CHAPTER 5:
CLOSED SESSIONS

AGENDAS AND REPORTS

LITIGATION

REAL ESTATE NEGOTIATIONS

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

LABOR NEGOTIATIONS

LABOR NEGOTIATIONS—SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICTS

OTHER EDUCATION CODE EXCEPTIONS

GRAND JURY TESTIMONY

LICENSE APPLICANTS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS

PUBLIC SECURITY

MULTIJURISDICTIONAL DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

HOSPITAL PEER REVIEW AND TRADE SECRETS

THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLOSED SESSION DISCUSSIONS

CHAPTER 5:
CLOSED SESSIONS

The Brown Act begins with a strong statement in favor of open meetings; private discussions among a majority of a legislative body are prohibited, unless expressly authorized under the Brown Act. It is not enough that a subject is sensitive, embarrassing, or controversial. Without specific authority in the Brown Act for a closed session, a matter must be discussed in public. As an example, a board of police commissioners cannot generally meet in closed session, even though some matters are sensitive and the commission considers their disclosure contrary to the public interest.[1]

Practice Tip:
Meetings are either open or closed. There is no "in between."

Meetings of a legislative body are either fully open or fully closed; there is nothing in between. Closed sessions may involve only the members of the legislative body and only agency counsel, management and support staff, and consultants necessary for consideration of the matter that is the subject of closed session. Individuals who do not have an official role in advising the legislative body on closed session subject matters must be excluded from closed session discussions.[2]

Q. May the lawyer for someone suing the agency attend a closed session in order to explain to the legislative body why it should accept a settlement offer?

A. *No, attendance in closed sessions is reserved exclusively for the agency's advisors.*

In general, the most common purpose of a closed session is to avoid revealing confidential information that may, in specified circumstances, prejudice the legal or negotiating position of the agency or compromise the privacy interests of employees. Closed sessions should be conducted keeping those narrow purposes in mind.

In this chapter, the grounds for convening a closed session are called "exceptions" because they are exceptions to the general rule that meetings must be conducted openly. In some circumstances, none of the closed session exceptions apply to an issue or information the legislative body wishes to discuss privately. In these cases, it is not proper to convene a closed session, even to protect confidential information. For example, the Brown Act does not authorize closed sessions for general contract negotiations.

AGENDAS AND REPORTS

Closed session items must be briefly described on the posted agenda and the description must state the specific statutory exemption. An item that appears on the open meeting portion of the agenda may not be taken into closed session until it has been properly agendized as a closed session or unless it is properly added as a closed session item by a two-thirds vote of the body after making the appropriate urgency findings.

The Brown Act supplies a series of fill-in-the-blank sample, agenda descriptions for various types of authorized closed sessions, which provide a "safe harbor" from legal attacks. These sample agenda descriptions cover license and permit determinations, real property negotiations, existing or anticipated litigation, liability claims, threats to security, public employee appointments, evaluations and discipline, labor negotiations, multi-jurisdictional drug cases, hospital boards of directors, and medical quality assurance committees.[3]

If the legislative body intends to convene in closed session, it must include the section of the Brown Act authorizing the closed session in advance on the agenda and it must make a public announcement prior to the closed session discussion. In most cases, the announcement may simply be a reference to the agenda item.[4]

Following a closed session the legislative body must provide an oral or written report on certain actions taken and the vote of every elected member present. The timing and content of the report varies according to the reason for the closed session.[5] The announcements may be made at the site of the closed session, so long as the public is allowed to be present to hear them.

If there is a standing or written request for documentation, any copies of contracts, settlement agreements, or other documents finally approved or adopted in closed session must be provided to the requestor(s) after the closed session, if final approval of such documents does not rest with any other party to the contract or settlement. If substantive amendments to a contract or settlement agreement approved by all parties requires retyping, such documents may be held until retyping is completed during normal business hours, but the substance of the changes must be summarized for any person inquiring about them.[6]

The Brown Act does not require minutes, including minutes of closed session. A confidential "minute book" may be kept to record actions taken at closed sessions.[7] If one is kept, it must be made available to members of the legislative body, provided that the member asking to review minutes of a particular meeting was not disqualified from attending the meeting due to a conflict of interest.[8] A court may order the disclosure of minute books for the court's review if a lawsuit makes sufficient claims of an open meeting violation.

Practice Tip:

Some problems over closed sessions arise because secrecy itself breeds distrust. The Brown Act does not require closed sessions and legislative bodies may do well to resist the tendency to call a closed session simply because it may be permitted. A better practice is to go into closed session only when necessary.

Practice Tip:

Pay close attention to closed session agenda descriptions. Using the wrong label can lead to invalidation of an action taken in closed session.

LITIGATION

There is an attorney/client relationship, and legal counsel may use it for privileged written and verbal communications—outside of meetings—to members of the legislative body. But protection of the attorney/client privilege cannot by itself be the reason for a closed session.[9]

The Brown Act expressly authorizes closed sessions to discuss what is considered litigation. The rules that apply to holding a litigation closed session involve complex, technical definitions and procedures. The essential thing to know is that a closed session can be held by the body to confer with, or receive advice from, its legal counsel when open discussion would prejudice the position of the local agency in litigation in which the agency is a party.[10] The litigation exception under the Brown Act is narrowly construed and does not permit activities beyond a legislative body's conferring with its own legal counsel. For example, it is not permissible to hold a closed session in which settlement negotiations take place between a legislative body and an adverse party or to hold a closed session for the purpose of participation in a mediation.[11]

The California Attorney General believes that if the agency's attorney is not a participant, a litigation closed session cannot be held.[12] In any event, local agency officials should always consult the agency's attorney before placing this type of closed session on the agenda, in order to be certain that it is being done properly.

Litigation that may be discussed in closed session includes the following three types of matters:

Existing litigation

Q. May the legislative body agree to settle a lawsuit in a properly-noticed closed session, without placing the settlement agreement on an open session agenda for public approval?

A. *Yes, but the settlement agreement is a public document and must be disclosed on request. Furthermore, a settlement agreement cannot commit the agency to matters that are required to have public hearings.*

In general, the most common purpose of a closed session is to avoid revealing confidential information that may, in specified circumstances, prejudice the legal or negotiating position of the agency or compromise the privacy interests of employees. Closed sessions should be conducted keeping those narrow purposes in mind.

Grounds for convening a closed session in this chapter are called "exceptions" because they are exceptions to the general rule that meetings must be conducted openly. In some circumstances, none of the closed session exceptions apply to an issue or information the legislative body wishes to discuss privately. It is improper in these cases, to convene a closed session, even to protect confidential information. For example, the Brown Act does not authorize closed sessions for general contract negotiations.

Existing litigation includes any adjudicatory proceedings before a court, administrative body exercising its adjudicatory authority, hearing officer, or arbitrator. The clearest situation in which a closed session is authorized is when the local agency meets with its legal counsel to discuss a pending matter that has been filed in a court or with an administrative agency and names the local agency as a party. The legislative body may meet under these circumstances to receive updates on the case from attorneys, participate in developing strategy as the case develops, or to consider alternatives for resolution of the case. Generally, an agreement to settle litigation may be approved in closed session. However, an agreement to settle litigation that requires actions that are subject to public hearings cannot be approved in closed session.[13]

Threatened litigation against the local agency

Closed sessions are authorized for legal counsel to inform the legislative body of specific facts and circumstances that suggest that the local agency has significant exposure to litigation. The Brown Act lists six separate categories of such facts and circumstances.[14] The legislative body may also meet under this exception to determine whether a closed session is authorized based on information provided by legal counsel or staff.

Initiation of litigation by the local agency

A closed session may be held under the pending litigation exception when the legislative body seeks legal advice on whether to protect the agency's rights and interests by initiating litigation.

In certain cases, the circumstances and facts justifying the closed session must be publicly noticed on the agenda or announced at an open meeting. Before holding a closed session under the pending litigation exception, the legislative body must publicly state which of the three basic situations apply. It may do so simply by making a reference to the posted agenda.

Certain actions must be reported in open session at the same meeting following the closed session. Other actions, as where final approval rests with another party or the court, may be announced when they become final and upon inquiry of any person. Each agency attorney should be aware of and should make other disclosures that may be required in specific instances.

■ REAL ESTATE NEGOTIATIONS

A legislative body may meet in closed session with its negotiator to discuss the purchase, sale, exchange, or lease of real property by or for the local agency. A "lease" includes a lease renewal or renegotiation. The purpose is to grant authority to the legislative body's negotiator on price and terms of payment.[15] Caution should be exercised to limit discussion to price and terms of payment without straying to other related issues such as site design, architecture, or other aspects of the project for which the transaction is contemplated.[16]

Q. May other terms of a real estate transaction, aside from price and terms of payment, be addressed in closed session?

A. *No. However, there are differing opinions over the scope of the phrase "price and terms of payment" in connection with real estate closed sessions. Many agency attorneys believe that any term that directly affects the economic value of the transaction falls within the ambit of "price and terms of payment." Others take a narrower, more literal view of the phrase.*

The agency's negotiator may be a member of the legislative body itself. Prior to the closed session, or on the agenda, the legislative body must identify its negotiator, the real property that the negotiations may concern and the names of the persons with whom its negotiator may negotiate.[17]

After real estate negotiations are concluded, the approval and substance of the agreement must be reported. If its own approval makes the agreement final, the body must report in open session at the public meeting during which the closed session is held. If final approval rests with another party, the local agency must report the approval as soon as informed of it. Once final, the substance of the agreement must be disclosed to anyone who inquires.

"Our population is exploding, and we have to think about new school sites," said Board Member Jefferson.

"Not only that," interjected Board Member Tanaka, "we need to get rid of a couple of our older facilities."

"Well, obviously the place to do that is in a closed session," said Board Member O'Reilly. "Otherwise we're going to set off land speculation. And if we even mention closing a school, parents are going to be in an uproar."

A closed session to discuss potential sites is not authorized by the Brown Act. The exception is limited to meeting with its negotiator over specific sites—which must be identified at an open and public meeting.

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

The Brown Act authorizes a closed session "to consider the appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, discipline, or dismissal of a public employee or to hear complaints or charges brought against the employee."[18] The purpose of this exception—commonly referred to as the "personnel exception"—is to avoid undue publicity or embarrassment for an employee or applicant for employment and to allow full and candid discussion by the legislative body; thus, it is restricted to discussing individuals, not general personnel policies.[19] The body must possess the power to appoint, evaluate, or dismiss the employee to hold a closed session under this exception.[20] That authority may be delegated to a subsidiary appointed body.[21]

An employee must be given at least 24 hours notice of any closed session convened to hear specific complaints or charges against him or her. This occurs when the legislative body is reviewing evidence, which could include live testimony, and adjudicating conflicting testimony offered as evidence. The employee has the right to have the specific complaints and charges discussed in a public session rather than closed session.[22] If the employee is not given notice, any disciplinary action is null and void.[23]

Practice Tip:

Discussions of who to appoint to an advisory body and whether or not to censure a fellow member of the legislative body must be held in the open.

Q. Must 24 hours notice be given to an employee whose negative performance evaluation is to be considered by the legislative body in closed session?

A. *No, the notice is reserved for situations where the body is to hear complaints and charges from witnesses.*

However, an employee is not entitled to notice and a hearing where the purpose of the closed session is to consider a performance evaluation. The Attorney General and the courts have determined that personnel performance evaluations do not constitute complaints and charges, which are more akin to accusations made against a person.[24]

Correct labeling of the closed session on the agenda is critical. A closed session agenda that identified discussion of an employment contract was not sufficient to allow dismissal of an employee.[25] An incorrect agenda description can result in invalidation of an action and much embarrassment.

For purposes of the personnel exception, "employee" specifically includes an officer or an independent contractor who functions as an officer or an employee. Examples of the former include a city manager, district general manager or superintendent. An example of the latter is a legal counsel or engineer hired on contract to act as local agency attorney or chief engineer.

Elected officials, appointees to the governing body or subsidiary bodies, and independent contractors other than those discussed above are not employees for purposes of the personnel exception.[26] Action on individuals who are not "employees" must also be public—including discussing and voting on appointees to committees, or debating the merits of independent contractors, or considering a complaint against a member of the legislative body itself.

The personnel exception specifically prohibits discussion or action on proposed compensation in closed session, except for a disciplinary reduction in pay. Among other things, that means there can be no personnel closed sessions on a salary change (other than a disciplinary reduction) between any unrepresented individual and the legislative body. However, a legislative body may address the compensation of an unrepresented individual, such as a city manager, in a closed session as part of a labor negotiation (discussed later in this chapter), yet another example of the importance of using correct agenda descriptions.

Practice Tip:

The personnel exception specifically prohibits discussion or action on proposed compensation in closed session except for a disciplinary reduction in pay.

Reclassification of a job must be public, but an employee's ability to fill that job may be considered in closed session. Any closed session action to appoint, employ, dismiss, accept the resignation of, or otherwise affect the employment status of a public employee must be reported at the public meeting during which the closed session is held. That report must identify the title of the position, but not the names of all persons considered for an employment position.[27] However, a report on a dismissal or non-renewal of an employment contract must be deferred until administrative remedies, if any, are exhausted.[28]

> "I have some important news to announce," said Mayor Garcia. "We've decided to terminate the contract of the city manager, effective immediately. The council has met in closed session and we've negotiated six months severance pay."
>
> "Unfortunately, that has some serious budget consequences, so we've had to delay phase two of the East Area Project."
>
> *This may be an improper use of the personnel closed session if the council agenda described the item as the city manager's evaluation. In addition, other than labor negotiations, any action on individual compensation must be taken in open session. Caution should be exercised to not discuss in closed session issues, such as budget impacts in this hypothetical, beyond the scope of the posted closed session notice.*

Q. The school board is meeting in closed session to evaluate the superintendent and to consider giving her a pay raise. May the superintendent attend the closed session?

A. *The superintendent may attend the portion of the closed session devoted to her evaluation, but may not be present during discussion of her pay raise. Discussion of the superintendent's compensation in closed session is limited to giving direction to the school board's negotiator. Also, the clerk should be careful to notice the closed session on the agenda as both an evaluation and a labor negotiation.*

LABOR NEGOTIATIONS

The Brown Act allows closed sessions for some aspects of labor negotiations. Different provisions (discussed below) apply to school and community college districts.

Practice Tip:

Prior to the closed session, the legislative body must hold an open and public session in which it identifies its designated representatives.

A legislative body may meet in closed session to instruct its bargaining representatives, which may be one or more of its members,[29] on employee salaries and fringe benefits for both union and non-union employees. For represented employees, it may also consider working conditions that by law require negotiation. These sessions may take place before or during negotiations with employee representatives. Prior to the closed session, the legislative body must hold an open and public session in which it identifies its designated representatives.

During its discussions with representatives on salaries and fringe benefits, the legislative body may also discuss available funds and funding priorities, but only to instruct its representative. The body may also meet in closed session with a conciliator who has intervened in negotiations.[30]

The approval of an agreement concluding labor negotiations with represented employees must be reported after the agreement is final and has been accepted or ratified by the other party. The report must identify the item approved and the other party or parties to the negotiation.[31] The labor sessions specifically cannot include final action on proposed compensation of one or more unrepresented employees. For purposes of this prohibition, an "employee" includes an officer or an independent contractor who functions as an officer or an employee. Independent contractors who do not serve in the capacity of an officer or employee are not covered by this closed session exception.

LABOR NEGOTIATIONS—SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICTS

Employee relations for school districts and community college districts are governed by the Rodda Act, where different meeting and special notice provisions apply. The entire board, for example, may negotiate in closed sessions.

Four types of meetings are exempted from compliance with the Rodda Act:

(1) A negotiating session with a recognized or certified employee organization;

(2) A meeting of a mediator with either side;

(3) A hearing or meeting held by a fact finder or arbitrator; and

(4) A session between the board and its bargaining agent, or the board alone, to discuss its position regarding employee working conditions and instruct its agent.[32]

Public participation under the Rodda Act also takes another form.[33] All initial proposals of both sides must be presented at public meetings and are public records. The public must be given reasonable time to inform itself and to express its views before the district may adopt its initial proposal. In addition, new topics of negotiations must be made public within 24 hours. Any votes on such a topic must be followed within 24 hours by public disclosure of the vote of each member.[34] The final vote must be in public.

OTHER EDUCATION CODE EXCEPTIONS

The Education Code governs student disciplinary meetings by boards of school districts and community college districts. District boards may hold a closed session to consider the suspension or discipline of a student, if a public hearing would reveal personal, disciplinary, or academic information about the student contrary to state and federal pupil privacy law. The student's parent or guardian may request an open meeting.[35]

Community college districts may also hold closed sessions to discuss some student disciplinary matters, awarding of honorary degrees, or gifts from donors who prefer to remain anonymous.[36] Kindergarten through 12th grade districts may also meet in closed session to review the contents of the statewide assessment instrument.[37]

GRAND JURY TESTIMONY

A legislative body, including its members as individuals, may testify in private before a grand jury, either individually or as a group.[38] Attendance by the entire legislative body before a grand jury would not constitute a closed session meeting under the Brown Act, since the body would not be meeting to make decisions or reach a consensus on issues within the body's subject matter jurisdiction.

Practice Tip:

Attendance by the entire legislative body before a grand jury would not constitute a closed session meeting under the Brown Act.

LICENSE APPLICANTS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS

A closed session is permitted when an applicant, who has a criminal record, applies for a license or license renewal and the legislative body wishes to discuss whether the applicant is sufficiently rehabilitated to receive the license. If the body decides to deny the license, the applicant may withdraw the application. If the applicant does not withdraw, the body must deny the license in public, immediately or at its next meeting. No information from the closed session can be revealed without consent of the applicant, unless the applicant takes action to challenge the denial.[39]

PUBLIC SECURITY

Legislative bodies may meet in closed session to discuss matters posing a threat to the security of public buildings, essential public services, including water, sewer, gas, or electric service, or to the public's right of access to public services or facilities over which the legislative body has jurisdiction. Closed session meetings for these purposes must be held with designated security or law enforcement officials including the Attorney General, district attorney, agency attorney, sheriff or chief of police, or their deputies or agency security consultant or security operations manager.[40] Action taken in closed session with respect to such public security issues is not reportable action.

MULTIJURISDICTIONAL DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

A joint powers agency formed to provide drug law enforcement services to multiple jurisdictions may hold closed sessions to discuss case records of an on-going criminal investigation, to hear testimony from persons involved in the investigation, and to discuss courses of action in particular cases.[41]

The exception applies to the legislative body of the joint powers agency and to any body advisory to it. The purpose is to prevent impairment of investigations, to protect witnesses and informants, and to permit discussion of effective courses of action.[42]

HOSPITAL PEER REVIEW AND TRADE SECRETS

Two specific kinds of closed sessions are allowed for district hospitals and municipal hospitals, under other provisions of law.[43]

1. A meeting to hear reports of hospital medical audit or quality assurance committees, or for related deliberations. However, an applicant or medical staff member whose staff privileges are the direct subject of a hearing may request a public hearing.
2. A meeting to discuss "reports involving trade secrets"—provided no action is taken.

A "trade secret" is defined as information which is not generally known to the public or competitors and which: (1) "derives independent economic value, actual or potential" by virtue of its restricted knowledge; (2) is necessary to initiate a new hospital service or program or facility; and (3) would, if prematurely disclosed, create a substantial probability of depriving the hospital of a substantial economic benefit.

The provision prohibits use of closed sessions to discuss transitions in ownership or management, or the district's dissolution.[44]

THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLOSED SESSION DISCUSSIONS

It is not uncommon for agency officials to complain that confidential information is being leaked from closed sessions. The Brown Act prohibits the disclosure of confidential information acquired in a closed session by any person present and offers various remedies to address willful breaches of confidentiality.[45] It is incumbent upon all those attending lawful closed sessions to protect the confidentiality of those discussions. One court has held that members of a legislative body cannot be compelled to divulge the content of closed session discussions through the discovery process.[46] Only the legislative body acting as a body may agree to divulge confidential closed session information; regarding attorney/client privileged communications, the entire body is the holder of the privilege and only the entire body can decide to waive the privilege.[47]

Practice Tip:

There is a strong interest in protecting the confidentiality of proper and lawful closed sessions.

Before adoption of the Brown Act provision specifically prohibiting disclosure of closed session communications, agency attorneys and the Attorney General long believed that officials have a fiduciary duty to protect the confidentiality of closed session discussions. The Attorney General issued an opinion that it is "improper" for officials to disclose information received during a closed session regarding pending litigation,[48] though the Attorney General has also concluded that a local agency may not go so far as to adopt an ordinance criminalizing public disclosure of closed session discussions.[49] In any event, the Brown Act now prescribes remedies for breaches of confidentiality. These include injunctive relief, disciplinary action against an employee, and referral of a member of the legislative body to the grand jury.[50]

The duty of maintaining confidentiality, of course, must give way to the obligation to disclose improper matters or discussions that may come up in closed sessions. In recognition of this public policy, the Brown Act exempts from its prohibition against disclosure of closed session communications disclosure of closed session information to the district attorney or the grand jury due to a perceived violation of law, expressions of opinion concerning the propriety or legality of actions taken in closed session, including disclosure of the nature and extent of the illegal action, and disclosing information that is not confidential.[51]

The interplay between these possible sanctions and an official's first amendment rights is complex and beyond the scope of this guide. Suffice it to say that this is a matter of great sensitivity and controversy.

> "I want the press to know that I voted in closed session against filing the eminent domain action," said Council Member Chang.
>
> "Don't settle too soon," reveals Council Member Watson to the property owner, over coffee. "The city's offer coming your way is not our bottom line."
>
> *The first comment to the press is appropriate—the Brown Act requires that certain final votes taken in closed session be reported publicly.[52] The second comment to the property owner is not—disclosure of confidential information acquired in closed session is expressly prohibited and harmful to the agency.*

Endnotes

1 61 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 220 (1978)
2 82 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 29 (1999)
3 California Government Code section 54954.5
4 California Government Code sections 54956.9 and 54957.7
5 California Government Code section 54957.1(a)
6 California Government Code section 54957.1(b)
7 California Government Code section 54957.2
8 *Hamilton v. Town of Los Gatos* (1989) 213 Cal.App.3d 1050; 2 Cal.Code Regs. section 18702.1(c)
9 *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363
10 California Government Code section 54956.9; *Shapiro v. Board of Directors of Center City Development Corp.* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 170 (agency must be a party to the litigation).
11 *Page v. Miracosta Community College District* (2009) 180 Cal.App.4th 471
12 "*The Brown Act*," California Attorney General (2003), p. 40
13 *Trancas Property Owners Association v. City of Malibu* (2006) 138 Cal.App.4th 172
14 Government Code section 54956.9(b)
15 California Government Code section 54956.8
16 *Shapiro v. San Diego City Council* (2002) 96 Cal.App.4th 172; see also __ Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen.__ (May 21, 2010) (2010 WL 2150433) (concluding it is impermissible for a redevelopment agency to meet in closed session to discuss the terms of a rehabilitation loan to a business that was leasing property from the agency when the terms and conditions of the lease itself were not also a matter of discussion.)
17 California Government Code section 54956.8
18 California Government Code section 54957(b)
19 63 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 215 (1980); but see: *Duvall v. Board of Trustees* (2000) 93 Cal.App.4th 902 (board may discuss personnel evaluation criteria, process and other preliminary matters in closed session).
20 *Gillespie v. San Francisco Public Library Commission* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 1165; 85 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 77 (2002)
21 *Gillespie v. San Francisco Public Library Commission* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 1165; 80 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 308 (1997). Interviews of candidates to fill a vacant staff position conducted by a temporary committee appointed by the governing body may be done in closed session.
22 *Morrison v. Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles* (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 860
23 California Government Code section 54957
24 78 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 218 (1995); Bell v. Vista Unified School District (2000) 82 Cal.App.4th 672; *Furtado v. Sierra Community College* (1998) 68 Cal.App.4th 876; *Fischer v. Los Angeles Unified School District* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 87
25 *Moreno v. City of King* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 17
26 California Government Code section 54957
27 *Gillespie v. San Francisco Public Library Commission* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 1165
28 California Government Code section 54957.1(a)(5)

29 California Government Code section 54957.6
30 57 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 209 (1974)
31 California Government Code section 54957.1(a)(6)
32 California Government Code section 3549.1
33 California Government Code section 3540
34 California Government Code section 3547
35 California Education Code section 48918, but see *Rim of the World Unified School District v. Superior Court* (2003) 104 Cal.App.4th 1393 (Section 48918 preempted by the Federal Family Educational Right and Privacy Act in regard to expulsion proceedings.)
36 California Education Code section 72122
37 California Education Code section 60617
38 California Government Code section 54953.1
39 California Government Code section 54956.7
40 California Government Code section 54957
41 *McKee v. Los Angeles Interagency Metropolitan Police Apprehension Crime Task Force* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 354
42 California Government Code section 54957.8
43 California Government Code section 54962
44 California Health and Safety Code section 32106
45 Government Code section 54963
46 *Kleitman v. Superior Court* (1999) 74 Cal.App.4th 324, 327; *see also:* California Government Code section 54963
47 *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363
48 80 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 231 (1997)
49 76 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 289 (1993)
50 California Government Code section 54963
51 California Government Code section 54963
52 California Government Code section 54957.1

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

CHAPTER 6:
REMEDIES

INVALIDATION

CIVIL ACTION TO PREVENT FUTURE VIOLATIONS

COSTS AND ATTORNEY'S FEES

CRIMINAL COMPLAINTS

VOLUNTARY RESOLUTION

CHAPTER 6:
REMEDIES

Certain violations of the Brown Act are designated as misdemeanors, although by far the most commonly used enforcement provisions are those that authorize civil actions to invalidate specified actions taken in violation of the Brown Act and to stop or prevent future violations. Still, despite all the safeguards and remedies to enforce them, it is ultimately impossible for the public to monitor every aspect of public officials' interactions. Compliance ultimately results from regular training and a good measure of self-regulation on the part of public officials. This chapter discusses the remedies available to the public when that self-regulation is ineffective.

INVALIDATION

Any interested person, including the district attorney, may seek to invalidate certain actions of a legislative body on the ground that they violate the BrownAct.[1] Violations of the Brown Act, however, cannot be invalidated if they involve the following types of actions:

- Those taken in substantial compliance with the law;
- Those involving the sale or issuance of notes, bonds or other indebtedness, or any related contracts or agreements;
- Those creating a contractual obligation, including a contract awarded by competitive bid for other than compensation for professional services, upon which a party has in good faith relied to its detriment;
- Those connected with the collection of any tax; or
- Those in which the complaining party had actual notice at least 72 hours prior to the meeting at which the action is taken.

Before filing a court action seeking invalidation, a person who believes that a violation has occurred must send a written "cure or correct" demand to the legislative body. This demand must clearly describe the challenged action, the nature of the claimed violation, and the "cure" sought. This demand must be sent within 90 days of the alleged violation or 30 days if the action was taken in open session but in violation of Section 54954.2, which requires (subject to specific exceptions) that only properly agendized items are acted on by the governing body during a meeting.[2] The legislative body then has up to 30 days to cure and correct its action. If it does not act, any lawsuit must be filed within the next 15 days.

The purpose of this requirement is to offer the body an opportunity to consider whether a violation has occurred and to weigh its options before litigation is filed. The Brown Act does not specify how to cure or correct a violation; the best method is to rescind the action being complained of and to start over.

Although just about anyone has standing to bring an action for invalidation,[3] the challenger must show prejudice as a result of the alleged violation.[4] An action to invalidate fails to state a cause of action against the agency if the body deliberated but did not take an action.[5]

Practice Tip:

A lawsuit to invalidate must be preceded by a demand to cure and correct the challenged action in order to give the legislative body an opportunity to consider its options.

CIVIL ACTION TO PREVENT FUTURE VIOLATIONS

The district attorney or any interested person can file a civil action asking the court to:

- Stop or prevent violations or threatened violations of the Brown Act by members of the legislative body of a local agency;
- Determine the applicability of the Brown Act to actions or threatened future action of the legislative body;
- Determine whether any rule or action by the legislative body to penalize or otherwise discourage the expression of one or more of its members is valid under state or federal law; or
- Compel the legislative body to tape record its closed sessions.

It is not necessary for a challenger to prove a past pattern or practice of violations by the local agency in order to obtain injunctive relief. A court may presume when issuing an injunction that a single violation will continue in the future where the public agency refuses to admit to the alleged violation or to renounce or curtail the practice.[6] Note, however, that a court may not compel elected officials to disclose their recollections of what transpired in a closed session.[7]

Upon finding a violation of the Brown Act pertaining to closed sessions, a court may compel the legislative body to tape record its future closed sessions. In a subsequent lawsuit to enforce the Brown Act alleging a violation occurring in closed session, a court may upon motion of the plaintiff review the tapes if there is good cause to think the Brown Act has been violated, and make public the relevant portion of the closed session recording.

COSTS AND ATTORNEY'S FEES

Someone who successfully invalidates an action taken in violation of the Brown Act or who successfully enforces one of the Brown Act's civil remedies may seek court costs and reasonable attorney's fees. Courts have held that attorney's fees must be awarded to a successful plaintiff unless special circumstances exist that would make a fee award against the public agency unjust.[8] When evaluating how to respond to assertions that the Brown Act has been violated, elected officials and their lawyers should assume that attorneys fees will be awarded against the agency if a violation of the Act is proven.

An attorney fee award may only be directed against the local agency and not the individual members of the legislative body. If the local agency prevails, it may be awarded court costs and attorney's fees if the court finds the lawsuit was clearly frivolous and lacking in merit.[9]

Practice Tip:

Attorney's fees will likely be awarded if a violation of the Brown Act is proven.

CRIMINAL COMPLAINTS

A violation of the Brown Act by a member of the legislative body who acts with the improper intent described below is punishable as a misdemeanor.[10]

A criminal violation has two components. The first is that there must be an overt act—a member of a legislative body must attend a meeting at which action is taken in violation of the Brown Act.[11]

"Action taken" is not only an actual vote, but also a collective decision, commitment or promise by a

majority of the legislative body to make a positive or negative decision.[12] If the meeting involves mere deliberation without the taking of action, there can be no misdemeanor penalty.

A violation occurs for a tentative as well as final decision.[13] In fact, criminal liability is triggered by a member's participation in a meeting in violation of the Brown Act—not whether that member has voted with the majority or minority, or has voted at all.

The second component of a criminal violation is that action is taken with the intent of a member "to deprive the public of information to which the member knows or has reason to know the public is entitled" by the Brown Act.[14]

As with other misdemeanors, the filing of a complaint is up to the district attorney. Although criminal prosecutions of the Brown Act are uncommon, district attorneys in some counties aggressively monitor public agencies' adherence to the requirements of the law.

Practice Tip:

Training and exercising good judgment can help avoid Brown Act conflicts. If an arguably meritorious procedural challenge is raised, it may be more prudent to voluntarily re-notice and reconsider the action subject to the challenge.

VOLUNTARY RESOLUTION

Arguments over Brown Act issues often become emotional on all sides. Newspapers trumpet relatively minor violations, unhappy residents fume over an action, and legislative bodies clam up about information better discussed in public. Hard lines are drawn and rational discussion breaks down. The district attorney or even the grand jury occasionally becomes involved. Publicity surrounding alleged violations of the Brown Act can result in a loss of confidence by constituents in the legislative body. There are times when it may be preferable to consider re-noticing and rehearing, rather than litigating, an item of significant public interest, particularly when there is any doubt about whether the open meeting requirements were satisfied.

At bottom, agencies that regularly train their officials and pay close attention to the requirements of the Brown Act will have little reason to worry about enforcement.

Endnotes

1 California Government Code section 54960.1. Invalidation is limited to actions that violate the following sections of the Brown Act: section 54953 (the basic open meeting provision); sections 54954.2 and 54954.5 (notice and agenda requirements for regular meetings and closed sessions); 54954.6 (tax hearings); and 54956 (special meetings). Violations of sections not listed above cannot give rise to invalidation actions, but are subject to the other remedies listed in section 5490.1.

2 California Government Code section 54960.1 (b) and (c)(1)

3 *McKee v. Orange Unified School District* (2003) 110 Cal.App.4th 1310

4 *Cohan v. City of Thousand Oaks* (1994) 30 Cal.App.4th 547, 556, 571

5 *Boyle v. City of Redondo Beach* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 1109, 1117-18

6 *California Alliance for Utility Safety and Education (CAUSE) v. City of San Diego* (1997) 56 Cal.App.4th 1024; *Common Cause v. Stirling* (1983) 147 Cal.App.3d 518, 524. *Accord Shapiro v. San Diego City Council* (2002) 96 Cal. App. 4th 904, 916 & fn.6

7 *Kleitman v. Superior Court* (1999) 74 Cal.App.4th 324, 334-36

8 *Los Angeles Times Communications, LLC v. Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors* (2003) 112 Cal.App.4th 1313, 1324-27 and cases cited therein.

9 California Government Code section 54960.5

10 California Government Code section 54959. A misdemeanor is punishable by a fine of up to $1,000 or up to six months in county jail, or both. California Penal Code section 19. Employees of the agency who participate in violations of the Brown Act cannot be punished criminally under section 54959. However, at least one district attorney instituted criminal action against employees based on the theory that they criminally conspired with the members of the legislative body to commit a crime under section 54949.

11 California Government Code section 54959

12 California Government Code section 54952.6

13 61 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen.283 (1978)

14 California Government Code section 54959

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at www.cacities.org/opengovernment. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov.

OPEN & PUBLIC IV:

A GUIDE TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT, 2ND EDITION

1400 K Street, Sacramento, CA 95814
Phone: (916) 658-8200 | Fax: (916) 658-8240
www.cacities.org

Price: $25.00
SKU 789

APPENDIX - B

Oceanside Conflict of Interest Code

ARTICLE XI. - CONFLICT OF INTEREST CODE[6]

Sec. 2.61. - Purpose and effect.

The terms of 2 California Code of Regulations; Section 18730 et seq., and any amendments thereto duly adopted by the fair political practices commission are hereby incorporated by reference and, along with the following sections in which officials and employees are designated and disclosure categories are set forth, constitute the conflict of interest code of the City of Oceanside and any local government agency with jurisdiction wholly within the City of Oceanside.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83; Ord. No. 90-08, § 1, 2-28-90)

Sec. 2.62. - Designated positions; disclosure categories.

Annually, the city council shall adopt a resolution indicating the employee positions and members of city boards, commissions and committees subject to conflict of interest disclosure requirements.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83; Ord. No. 86-03, § 1, 1-8-86; Ord. No. 87-12, § 1, 3-11-87; Ord. No. 88-40, § 1, 11-16-88; Ord. No. 90-08, § 2, 2-28-90; Ord. No. 91-24, § 1, 4-24-91; Ord. No. 92-08, § 1, 3-4-92)

Sec. 2.63. - Disclosure category L.

Statements required of designated employees in disclosure category "L" shall contain all the following information:

(a) Investments worth more than one thousand dollars ($1,000.00) in any business entity, which within the last two (2) years has contracted with or in the future foreseeably may contract with the employer to provide services, supplies, materials, machinery or equipment to the employer and associated with the job assignment of the employee; and

(b) Income of two hundred fifty dollars ($250.00) or more and fifty dollars ($50.00) or more in case of gifts which is derived from a source which within the last two (2) years has contracted with the employer or in the future foreseeably may contract with the employer to provide services, supplies, materials, machinery or equipment to the employer and associated with the job assignment of the employee.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83; Ord. No. 90-08, § 3, 2-28-90)

Sec. 2.64. - Place and time of filing.

All designated employees shall file statements of financial interest with the city clerk who shall receive said statement on behalf of the code reviewing body. Unless otherwise required by state law, all statements of financial interest shall be deemed timely filed only when received by the city clerk on or before the following deadlines:

(a) Annual statements shall be filed on or before April 1 of each calendar year. Such statements shall cover the period of the preceding calendar year or from the date of filing such statement as otherwise required under this code.

(b) Initial statements shall be filed within thirty (30) days after assuming office disclosing interests held on the date of assuming office.

(c) Leaving office statements shall be filed within thirty (30) days of leaving office. Such statements shall cover the period between the closing date of the last statement required to be filed and the date of leaving office.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83; Ord. No. 90-08, § 4, 2-28-90)

Sec. 2.65. - Conflict with other laws.

Nothing contained herein is intended to modify or abridge the provisions of the Political Reform Act of 1974 (Government Code Section 81000). The provisions of this code are additional to Government Code Section 87100 and other laws pertaining to conflicts of interest (including, but not limited to, Government Code Section 1090, et seq.).

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83)

Sec. 2.66. - Definition of terms.

In addition to terms defined in 2 California Code of Regulations, section 18730(b)(1), all references therein to "appendix" shall mean Chapter 2, Article XI of the Oceanside City Code.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83; Ord. No. 90-08, § 5, 2-28-90)

Sec. 2.67. - Severability.

If any section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase of this article is for any reason held by court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this article. The city council hereby declares that it would have passed this article and each section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase thereof irrespective of the fact that any one or more section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase be declared invalid.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83)

Sec. 2.68. - Copies filed with city clerk.

Three (3) copies of the standardized conflict of interest code incorporated by this article shall be kept on file with the city clerk.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83)

Sec. 2.69. - Interim designation by city or district manager; annual review of Code.

(a) The city manager and manager of any local government agency with jurisdiction wholly within the City of Oceanside shall have the power to designate employees on an interim basis. Such designations shall be made if the manager determines that the employee's position entails the making or participation in the making of decisions which may foreseeably have a material effect on financial interests.

(b) An annual review of this Code shall be made by the city council at which time interim designations may be incorporated herein.

(Ord. No. 83-04, § 1, 2-23-83; Ord. No. 90-08, § 6, 2-28-90)

Secs. 2.70—2.72. - Reserved.

APPENDIX - C

Electronic Campaign and SEI Filing Ordinance

ORDINANCE NO. 14-OR0050-1

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OCEANSIDE AMENDING CHAPTER TWO, ARTICLE XII OF THE OCEANSIDE CITY CODE BY THE ADDITION OF SECTIONS 2.75 – 2.79 TO REQUIRE ONLINE OR ELECTRONIC FILING OF CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS AND EXPENDITURES AND STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTEREST REPORTS

WHEREAS, public access to campaign and Statement of Economic Interest disclosure information is an integral component of a fully informed electorate; and transparency is critical in order to maintain public trust and support of the political process;

WHEREAS, since the enactment of the Political Reform Act, candidates and committees have complied with filing requirements by filing paper copies of campaign statements and reports, and, in accordance with the City's current Conflict of Interest resolutions and appendices and Government Code Section 87200, designated persons have filed Statements of Economic Interest reports;

WHEREAS, the City Clerk is the Local Filing Officer for both types of filings, and the City Clerk Department has expended a significant amount of staff time to make such paper filings readily available to the public;

WHEREAS, in July 2012, the California Legislature approved Assembly Bill 2452, which authorizes local jurisdictions to require the filing of campaign statements and reports solely in an electronic format;

WHEREAS, the elimination of manual processing of filings through electronic filing requirements will conserve resources and ensure the public has access to information disclosed in campaign statements and Statement of Economic Interest reports in a more timely manner; and

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that the electronic filing system will operate securely and effectively and will not unduly burden filers.

NOW, THEREFORE, the City Council of the City of Oceanside does ordain as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 2, Article XII is amended to add Sections 2.75through 2.79 to read as follows:

"2.75. Online or Electronic Filing of Campaign Disclosure Statements of Economic Interest Filings.

The purpose of this section is to require online or electronic filing of campaign statements and require online or electronic reporting of contributions and independent expenditures regarding elections of candidates to city offices and the qualification or passage of local ballot measures within the City of Oceanside as currently required under the Political Reform Act, commencing with California Government Code Section 84200 et seq., in order to facilitate review and maximize the availability of this information to the public.

Additionally, this section also requires online or electronic filing of Statement of Economic Interest reports as required by the City's current Conflict of Interest resolutions and Appendices and Government Code Section 87200.

"2.76. Definitions

Committee. Any person or combination of persons who, directly or indirectly, does any of the following:

1) Receives contributions totaling one thousand dollars ($1,000) or more in any calendar year; or
2) Makes independent expenditures totaling one thousand dollars ($1,000) or more in any calendar year;

A person or combination of persons that becomes a committee shall retain its status as a committee until such time as that status is terminated pursuant to California Government Code Section 84214. A committee includes, but is not limited to, "Controlled Committee," "Independent Committee," and "General Purpose Committee."

Statement of Economic Interest (SEI) Filer. Any person holding a position that is listed in California Government Code Section 87200 or any person holding a position listed in the current City of Oceanside Conflict of Interest resolutions and Appendices.

"2.77. Electronic Filings.

A) Each Elected Official, Candidate, Candidate Controlled Committee and Independent Committee that is required to file a semi-annual campaign statement, a pre-election campaign

statement or an amended campaign statement with the City Clerk of the City of Oceanside pursuant to Chapter 4 of the Government Code (commencing with Section 84100) and that receives a total of one thousand dollars ($1,000) or more in Contributions or makes a total of one thousand dollars ($1,000) or more in Independent Expenditures, shall file the statement with the City Clerk of the City of Oceanside in an electronic format.

B) Each person listed as a Statement of Economic Interest Filer that is required to file an assuming office, annual or leaving office statement with the City Clerk of the City of Oceanside pursuant to Government Code Section 87200 or the current City of Oceanside Conflict of Interest resolutions and appendices shall file the statement with the City Clerk of the City of Oceanside in an electronic format.

"2.78. Exemption from filing paper copy

A Candidate or Committee or Statement of Economic Interest Filer that has filed an electronic statement or report is not required to file a paper copy.

"2.79. Option to file electronically

Any Candidate or Committee not required to file an electronic statement or report under Section 2.77 may voluntarily opt to file an electronic statement or report by submitting written notice to the City Clerk. A Candidate or Committee that opts to file an electronic statement of report is not required to file a paper copy."

SECTION 2. Severability.

If any section, sentence, clause or phrase of this Ordinance is for any reason held to be invalid or unconstitutional by a decision of any court of competent jurisdiction, such decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this Ordinance. The City Council hereby declares that it would have passed this ordinance and adopted this Ordinance and each section, sentence, clause or phrase thereof, irrespective of the fact that any one or more sections, subsections, sentences, clauses or phrases be declared invalid or unconstitutional.

SECTION 3. The City Clerk of the City of Oceanside is hereby directed to publish this ordinance, or the title hereof as a summary, pursuant to state statute, once within fifteen (15)

/ / / / /

days after its passage in the *Union Tribune*, a newspaper of general circulation published in the City of Oceanside.

SECTION 4. This ordinance shall take effect and be in force on the thirtieth (30th) day from and after its final passage.

INTRODUCED at a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Oceanside, California, held on the 22nd day of January, 2014, and, thereafter,

PASSED AND ADOPTED at a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Oceanside California, held on the 5th day of February, 2014, by the following vote:

AYES: WOOD, FELIEN, FELLER, KERN, SANCHEZ

NAYS: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE

/s/ Jim Wood
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF OCEANSIDE

ATTEST:

/s/ Zack Beck
CITY CLERK

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

/s/ John P. Mullen
CITY ATTORNEY