

2025 Commissions, Boards, and Committees

Applicants and Members Handbook



City of Culver City - City Council

CITY OF CULVER CITY

Dear CBC Member/Prospective Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in serving on a City of Culver City commission, board, or committee (CBC).

The City Council appreciates your willingness to serve your community and provide important community insight and perspective into the various issues and decisions that help make Culver City a great place to live, work, and play!

Your role as an advisory commission, board, or committee member will be a key part of the effort to engage members of the Culver City community in their government. We encourage you to use the training you will receive, as well as this handbook and guidance from CBC Chairs and staff liaisons, to augment your ideas, experiences, and talents to provide the best service you can to the organization and the Culver City community.

We hope you will gain much from your service to the community.

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Section 1: General Information

Commissions, boards, and committees (CBCs) provide one way for residents who have special experience or interests to participate in the City's decision-making process by advising the City Council on numerous issues.

This handbook is designed to serve as a guide to familiarize you with the general policies and procedures for City advisory bodies. As a new member, you will meet with the staff liaison of your CBC, to discuss ongoing work. We also recommend that you review [agendas and minutes](#) from recent meetings to see what issues have been under consideration. These are available at www.culvercity.org/meetings.

The procedures in this handbook are established so that expectations and practices can be clearly articulated to guide members in their actions; however, it does not incorporate all material and information necessary to understand your duties. Therefore, it is important you always consult with your staff liaison if you have questions concerning your duties and responsibilities.

Please note that in this manual the term "CBC Member" is inclusive of all commissions, boards, and committee members.

The following principles help ensure that a CBC operates with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. Members are expected to:

1. Prepare for and attend all meetings.
2. Contact your staff liaison prior to the meeting if you have questions or require additional information.
3. Fully participate in meetings.
4. Respect the decision-making process, and the official position or action of the commission.

CBC Functions

Quasi-Judicial

Certain CBCs hold the authority to make decisions. For example, the Planning and Cultural Affairs commissions have the right to approve or deny projects, subject to appeal to the City Council and the Civil Service Commission conducts disciplinary hearings

Advisory to the City Council

All CBCs advise the City Council concerning policies and programs upon request of the City Council or which has already been delegated to them through the Culver City Municipal Code (CCMC).

Roles of Commissions, Boards, and Committees

Background

The City Charter provides the City Council with the authority, by ordinance, to establish, and abolish such commissions and boards as it may determine, from time to time, to be necessary for the effective and efficient governance of the City. The CCMC currently establishes the Civil Service Commission, Cultural Affairs Commission, Planning Commission, Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Commission, and the Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board, and their respective powers and duties. The Charter further gives the City Council the authority, by ordinance, resolution or other action, to establish and abolish committees for a specified purpose.

CITY CHARTER SECTION 1100. IN GENERAL.

The City Council may, by ordinance, establish and abolish such commissions and boards as it may determine, from time to time, to be necessary for the effective and efficient governance of the City, to encourage citizen participation in local government and maintain positive human relations in the community.

CBC Members serve an important role in providing findings and recommendations to the City Council on matters pertaining to policies, procedures, and rules and regulations within the subject matter jurisdiction of that CBC. The CBC process provides an opportunity for issues and concerns to be thoroughly, researched, considered and debated before decisions are made or recommendations are provided to City Council. CBCs also provide a vehicle for members of the public to become part of the City administrative and policy review process.

Roles of CBCs

Essentially, each CBC assists the City Council in the business of the City, primarily in an advisory capacity. The City Council will then consider the broader issues of City management, including budget, public interest and policies in making decisions based upon CBC findings and recommendations.

As a result of the different objectives of an advisory body versus a policy making body, the City Council may periodically make decisions that are different than a CBC recommendation. This does not reflect negatively on the capabilities or integrity of any CBC or CBC Member. Rather it is the natural consequence of the City Council's overall responsibilities.

It would be extremely challenging for the City Council to address all the issues affecting the City in an efficient manner without the capable assistance of its commissions, boards, and committees. In conjunction with efficiency, CBC bodies must provide City Council with a report biannually that includes a list of accomplishments and work plans for approval. The work plan report will need to be created/written at the CBC's January/February meeting to be included in a March City Council Meeting,

and again at the CBC's July/August meeting to be included in a September City Council Meeting. Each CBC Member has a role in the analysis of issues contributing to the overall mission of providing quality public services and being responsive to community needs and sensitivities. However, once appointed, a CBC Member no longer acts solely as a private member of the public, but rather as a representative of the City. His/her conduct must be consistent with the obligations of public office.

Distribution of Meeting Materials Before a Meeting

The agenda and meeting materials for items to be considered at a CBC meeting must be published 72 hours or more prior to a regular meeting and 24 hours prior to a special meeting. The City uses Granicus and the Legistar agenda management system for publishing CBC materials electronically. CBC Members will be advised by staff of the current process for distribution of meeting materials and how to access them.

Staff will coordinate with the City Clerk's Office to set up a Legistar account for certain CBC Members. Please verify with your staff liaison.

Frequency of Meetings

CBCs shall meet on a regular or as-needed basis, as established by the CBC's bylaws, if applicable, or other policy.

Regular Meetings

The City Council has not prescribed a regular time and place of meetings for CBCs. Each body provides for its own meeting schedule. Once a regularly scheduled date and time is established, the CBC meets in accordance with the established schedule, unless a meeting is cancelled, or the schedule is changed by CBC or City Council action. Meetings must be held in a public place within the City limits. Regardless of turnover in membership, CBCs must continue to meet at the time and place fixed by previous CBC Members until the CBC makes a change to the established schedule.

If a regular meeting falls on a holiday, it shall be held the next business day. Or, at a regular meeting prior to the holiday, another meeting date may be chosen. Similarly, if it is not possible to obtain a quorum on a regular meeting date or there is no work for the body to consider, staff may cancel the meeting. In the case of a lack of a quorum, further discussions on any matter may NOT take place. Staff should notify all persons interested in business before the CBC, and proper public notification should be made of the change in date/time. If there is a change in the regular meeting date, the meeting becomes a special meeting, as it is not at the regular time and place, even though regular business may be conducted.

Special Meetings

California Government Code Section 54956 provides for the calling of a special meeting. Notice must be given to the CBC Members and proper noticing and posting must be provided with at least 24 hours' notice to the public and must indicate the business to be considered at the meeting.

Typically, special meetings are for a single purpose. Only those items listed on the agenda may be addressed at a special meeting.

Adjourned Meetings

A meeting may be adjourned to a time and place specified in the order of adjournment. If the meeting is adjourned, staff will adjourn to a stated time and place and give notice of the adjournment. In addition, a copy of the notice of adjournment shall be posted on or near the door of the Council Chamber or other meeting place within 24 hours after the meeting was adjourned, and on the City website. An adjourned regular meeting is considered a regular meeting for purposes of transacting business.

Brown Act

The State of California ("State") requirements for a regular meeting time and well-publicized notice of any special meeting are necessary to implement the right of the residents to know what their public officials are doing: The Brown Act states in the strongest terms the necessity for openness in public meetings:

In enacting the Brown Act, the State legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards, and committees and other agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is in the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

The Brown Act requires that all meetings, including special meetings, not only of the City Council but also of any standing CBC, or combination of these bodies, be open and public. Discussion among a majority of members of a legislative body outside a public meeting (including correspondence and e-mail) is strictly prohibited. The law further specifies that each member who knowingly attends a meeting where action is taken in violation of the law is guilty of a misdemeanor. Section 4 of this Handbook contains **Open & Public V** (League of California Cities publication), which explains the Brown Act in detail. If a CBC Member has questions about the Brown Act, they should contact their staff liaison.

Agenda

The agenda outlines the order of business for every public meeting. Agendas must be posted 72 hours in advance of every regular meeting on three accessible locations within the City. The agenda and any supporting materials are always posted on the City website. The minimum notice for a special meeting is 24 hours and has the same posting requirements.

The agenda must contain a brief general description of each item listed and the nature of the action proposed to be taken by the legislative body. The public must, from the posted agenda, have enough information to participate in the discussion of each item of business.

Items may be placed on the agenda in the following ways:

1. Department Work Plans are approved by the City Council each year, as part of the City's budget process. Staff may place items on the agenda relating to these work plans.
2. Staff may place items on the agenda as deemed necessary.
3. The City Council may direct a CBC body to consider items it deems appropriate before making a decision on a matter. This may entail analysis of issues and acting in an advisory role to the City Council.
4. Both members of the public and CBC Members may also, at a public meeting, request items be considered before the respective body. This method does require receiving consensus by a majority of members in order to add an item to a future agenda.

Next Steps for Agenda Items

Once an item is approved for placement on an agenda, staff prepares the item to be placed on a future meeting agenda for consideration by the body.

Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda

The "public comment" item listed on the agenda is required by law. It is intended to provide an opportunity for any interested person attending the meeting to speak about a matter that is **not** on the agenda but is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. However, the legislative body may only respond briefly or direct staff, but may not discuss at length, nor act on any item not appearing on the agenda.

Those who wish to speak are sometimes requested to complete a speaker card. However, neither registration, completion of a questionnaire nor fulfillment of any other condition shall be a prerequisite to attending or speaking at any meeting. Neither the speaker's identity nor residence address can be requested, and if given freely, only the speaker's name will appear in the minutes of the meeting.

The City Council has traditionally established a three-minute time limit per speaker, per item; however, it is often adjusted depending on the number of speakers and the number of agenda items that need to be considered during the course of the meeting. CBCs also have the discretion to establish time limits for speakers in order to efficiently conduct the business of the CBC.

Public Comment on Agenda Items

In instances where a large number of people are present to address an item, the Chair has discretion to shorten the speaker time limit to allow for input from all present. If this is ever necessary, the Chair should make the determination and announcement prior to the commencement of public comment to ensure that all speakers are allocated the same amount of time to speak. It is important that the Chair be consistent in his/her application of the time limit.

Procedures

Meetings are conducted according to rules of parliamentary procedure. The CBC chairperson directs the meeting and his/her rulings must be followed unless a majority of the CBC overrules them. Rosenberg's Rules of Order (Section 4 of this Handbook) is provided to serve as a guideline for meeting procedures. **However, if Rosenberg's Rules of Order and City policy are in conflict, City policy is controlling.**

For each item of business to be considered, the chair may, and in any order:

- Request presentation of the staff report, if necessary;
- Ask CBC members if they have questions for staff;
- Invite and then close public comment;
- Respond (or ask staff to respond) to questions posed during public comment if necessary; and
- Return discussion to the body.

The Chair will preside over the discussion. Debate should be confined to the issue(s) at hand. Personal comments should be avoided. Typically, and when feasible, each CBC Member should be given an opportunity to speak before a CBC Member speaks for a second time.

Motions: After the CBC has finished discussion of an item, a Member may make a motion to approve the item. The most common motions are a motion to approve the item as is and a motion to approve an item as amended. Below is sample language used when making a motion.

Chair: May I get a motion to approve?

1st Member: Motion. (Or press motion button on iPad if conducting meeting in Council Chambers)

2nd Member: Second. (Or press Second Motion button on iPad if conducting meeting in Council Chambers)

Secretary: I have a motion by _____ and a second by _____.

Voting on a Motion: The method of voting on any motion is dependent upon the situation and the procedures of your respective CBC. Below are the most common sample methods used to vote:

- a. By Voice - Chairperson asks those in favor to say "aye", those opposed to say "nay". EXAMPLE: Chair: All those in favor say aye? and/or if needed, all those opposed?
- b. By Roll Call – Each member answers "aye" or "nay" (as their name is called by the Secretary).

Secretary then states whether the motion passes or fails and includes how the members voted(4 ayes, 1 nay – then state who said nay). Please note those CBCs that meet in the chambers may vote by using a voting screen, after which the votes will still be stated out loud for the record.

Hearings

Public Hearings, which only occur for specific CBCs (i.e. Planning Commission), may require special public notice and meeting procedures, which will be handled by the CBC staff liaison and Department staff. Hearings must be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. If any CBC member believes to have an actual bias or a legal financial conflict of interest concerning the subject matter or participants of the hearing, he/she should recuse him/herself and not participate. (See Section 3: Code of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest for further information.)

Quorum

A quorum is the minimum number of members of a legislative body that must be present at the meeting to make the proceedings of that meeting valid. For Culver City, a quorum requires that a majority of the number of members (half of the CBC's membership +1) are present. If a quorum is not met, discussions amongst members may not occur.

Minutes

Meeting minutes are the official recording of the actions taken by the CBC on items that appear on the CBC agenda. The City of Culver City creates summary minutes, which may provide a brief description of any discussion and the actions taken by the body and are not meant to capture each word (e.g. Verbatim Minutes). It shall be the goal of each CBC to consider approval of their minutes at the next regularly scheduled meeting of their CBC.

The minutes shall reflect attendance, including late arrivals and early departures, and the duration of the meeting. Each item of business may reflect the subject matter of questions asked, public comment, the position of each member, motions (including seconds or lack thereof) but always include the result of any vote. Video proceedings of commission meetings held in the Council Chambers are currently archived on the City website and stored as per the City's retention schedule.

Changes to the minutes (except for reporting clerical errors) may only be made during the public meeting and prior to the approval of the minutes. These changes must be approved by the CBC to be incorporated into the minutes.

Correspondence Guidelines

Correspondence, including emails, sent and received by a public official, including CBC Members, related to the business of the City is subject to legal retention periods. Correspondence shall be kept a minimum of two years, and shall be produced upon request by City staff, particularly when a request is received for production under the California Public Records Act.

Individual Correspondence Related to CBC Business:

When a member of a CBC or chair corresponds (by letter or e-mail) with a person, agency, or organization as an individual on a community topic, they should indicate that the

correspondence is not sent on behalf of the CBC, but rather expresses the opinions of the author only. Correspondence received by individual CBC Members shall be sent to the staff liaison for distribution to all members of the body but shall not initiate a discussion. **In accordance with the Brown Act, an unintentional gathering of consensus or opinion, shall be avoided.**

Additionally, when speaking at a public meeting of the City Council or another CBC, the CBC Member should stipulate in what capacity they are speaking in.

Public records on personal accounts or devices may be subject to the California Public Records Act (CPRA.) All CBC Members receive a City email address to conduct their CBC business to allow for separation of personal and official City business. The City discourages the conduct of City business on personal accounts; however, should this occur, public records on personal accounts or devices must be kept in accordance with the City's records retention schedules.

Social Media

Many CBC Members use social media in various ways. However, the 'personal' style of social media can make it difficult to draw the line between public/professional and private use. As an ambassador of the City, it is important to remember that your statements and opinions should remain personal and should not be conveyed as representing the City's or the CBC's official position. Please consider this when posting on social media on topics that could be related to your work with the City. Social Media posts may also be subject to the CPRA.

Compensation

In accordance with Culver City Municipal Code Section 3.03.005, compensation of Commissioners, if any, may be established by resolution of the City Council.

Members of the Commissions and Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board shall be entitled to annual compensation in the amounts set forth in Attachment 2 to the "Updated Comprehensive City Council Policy entitled CBC" adopted by City Council Resolution No. 2017-R086, which may be updated from time to time upon approval of the City Council. Other bodies do not currently receive compensation.

The Chief Financial Officer shall pay such compensation upon the filing of a requisition by the Staff liaison to the respective body, certifying the member of that body is entitled to such compensation pursuant to the terms of this policy.

Payments shall be suspended during any extended absence by a Commissioner or Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board Member of three months or longer. Compensation may also be withheld until such time as the Commissioner or Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board Member has fully completed and submitted all documentation as required by the City Clerk.

Compensation is considered annually by the City Council as part of the City's fiscal year budget.

Commission, Board and Committee Interaction with City Staff

As part of maintaining proper decorum and respect, CBC Members shall interact with staff with professional courtesy. Issues and concerns of CBC Members and/or City Staff shall be addressed to the Department Head of the department that provides staff support to the CBC. Should resolution not be reached after consultation with the Department Head, Members may consult with the City Manager's Office.

No City staff members are assigned to be full-time assistants to CBC Members. Rather, staff support CBC Members as part of their overall responsibilities. The priority of duties and responsibilities are established by the City Council and administered by the City Manager and the respective Department Head.

CBCs, as bodies, and individual Members may make routine informational requests to staff that do not require significant research or other allocation of staff resources. Agenda item requests which require the dedication of significant time resources shall not be undertaken without the approval of the Department Head and/or the City Manager.

CBCs wishing to consider agenda items that are not part of the Department's approved Work Plans, which would require significant research or other allocation of staff resources, must receive City Council approval prior to the matter being placed on a CBC agenda. Such requests that require City Council approval shall be made through the Department Head, who shall vet the matter and may provide additional information/comments to the City Council, along with the CBC's request.

Section 2: Application & Appointment Process

The City Clerk's Office is responsible for administering the process for the appointment of interested individuals to all CBCs. Specifically, the City Clerk's Office is responsible for processing new incoming members and departing existing members, updating CBC Rosters throughout the City, and maintenance and distribution of this handbook.

This Section 2 addresses all aspects of the process of becoming a CBC Member, serving on the CBC, the responsibilities tied with the position, and leaving the CBC.

Annual Application Process

The application is open year-round and the City Clerk's Office encourages all interested candidates to apply.

The City Clerk's Office:

- Advertises applicants sought in the Culver City News, on the City website, social media.
- Coordinates annual CBC Meet & Greet event for the Culver City Community.
- Coordinates receipt and distribution to City Council of applications for commission, board, and committee appointments.
- Schedules a Special City Council meeting for Applicant Interviews.
- Prepares staff report for City Council consideration of CBC applicants.
- Following appointments, generates notifications of appointment and non-appointment via email on behalf of the City Council, usually 24-48 hours after the City Council makes the appointment.
- Sends an email transmitting information about the Statement of Economic Interests Form (700 Form) to be completed and returned, other mandatory training requirements such as AB1234 Ethics, AB1661 (Sexual Harassment Training) and distributes this CBC Handbook.
- Coordinates with CBC secretaries and collects Oaths of Office for all new incoming CBC Members.

Advertising for Commission, Board, and Committee applicants will include local newspapers, the City Website, "Banners" on the City cable television broadcasts, announcements at government meetings, flyers on public counters throughout City Hall and other City facilities, and other innovative methods, as appropriate.

Applicants will be provided the opportunity to address the City Council if they so desire at a designated City Council Meeting, which will also be advertised.

At a City Council meeting, City Council Members shall nominate candidates from the applicant list for specific CBC seats, and a vote of the majority of City Council Members will determine the appointee(s).

Upon appointment by the City Council, the City Clerk shall advise the newly appointed CBC Members in collaboration with the CBC Secretary and/or City staff liaison. The City Clerk shall ensure CBC Members are sworn into office.

Interim vacancies will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Appointment Information

Eligibility Requirements

With few exceptions, members of each body must reside in the City at the time of appointment and must always maintain residence within the City during their service on the CBC. CBC Members shall be residents of the City, none of whom shall hold any paid office or employment in the City Government. Minors, age 16 or older, are eligible to apply with parental or legal guardian consent.

Please note that the Local Business Representative of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, the Business seat for the Finance Advisory Committee, the Landlord seat for the Landlord Tenant Mediation Board, the Disability Advisory Committee, and the

Fiesta La Ballona Committee positions do not require applicants to be Culver City residents.

No person may serve on more than one (1) CBC at the same time unless approved by the City Council.

Appointments and Terms of Members

Appointments to CBCs are made for terms of up to four years. All terms begin July 1st and end on June 30th, unless otherwise stated.

CCMC: § 3.03.010 TERMS OF MEMBERS.

Members of the Commissions shall generally serve for a term of four (4) years and until their respective successors are appointed and qualified. The terms of at least one (1) and not more than two (2) members shall expire on July 1 of each succeeding odd-numbered year, and any appointment to fill an unexpired term shall be for such unexpired period only. The City Council may determine to appoint persons to the Commissions for terms less than four (4) years for purposes of creating staggered terms or for any other reason determined by the City Council.

Term Limits

Term limits are established by the CCMC and CBC By-Laws. The CCMC provides term limits for Commissioners and serves as guideline for other CBCs. Such guideline shall apply to other CBCs unless otherwise stated in their respective by-laws.

CCMC: § 3.03.015 TERM LIMITS.

- A. No person shall serve more than two consecutive full terms as Commissioner on any one (1) Commission. If a person serves a partial term in excess of two (2) years, it shall be considered a full term for the purpose of this provision.
- B. Nothing in this provision shall act as a bar to service as a Commissioner on the same Commission after at least two (2) years have elapsed from the last full term as Commissioner.
- C. A Commissioner who has served two (2) consecutive full terms as a Commissioner on one (1) Commission may serve on a different Commission without waiting the required two (2) year period provided for in this section.

Chair and Vice Chair

As soon as practicable, following the first day of July of each year, each CBC shall reorganize by electing one of its members to serve as Chair, and one as Vice Chair, each who shall serve at the pleasure of the CBC. Only those members present at the meeting shall have the right to vote and the candidate receiving the majority of votes of those present shall be declared the Chair and/or Vice Chair.

The Chair is the presiding officer of the CBC meeting. In that role, the Chair is responsible for maintaining order and decorum. The Chair calls the meetings to order, recognizes speakers, and manages the agenda. It is also the Chair's responsibility to ensure the person who has the floor is given the attention of other members and the public and is allowed to speak without undue or inappropriate interruption, and that all individuals are treated with due respect.

CULVER CITY CHARTER SECTION 1102. CHAIRPERSON AND VICE CHAIRPERSON.

As soon as practicable, following the first day of July of every year, each commission or board of the City shall organize by electing one of its members to serve as its presiding officer, with the title of Chairperson, and electing one of its members as Vice Chairperson. The Chairperson and Vice Chairperson shall each serve at the pleasure of the commission or board.

The Chairperson shall have a voice and vote in all proceedings of the commission or board, shall be the official head of the commission or board for all ceremonial purposes, and shall perform such other duties as may be prescribed by this Charter or by ordinance. The Vice Chairperson shall perform the duties of the Chairperson during the absence or incapacity of the Chairperson.

Oath of Office

According to the California Constitution in Article 20, §3, members of the Legislature, and all public officers and employees, executive, legislative, and judicial, except such inferior officers and employees as may be by law exempted, shall, before they enter upon the duties of their respective offices, take and subscribe the Oath of Office.

The Oath of Office is administered by the staff liaison, usually the Secretary of the respective CBC, at the member's first CBC meeting or during their initial AB1234 training. A renewed Oath of Office will be administered to re-appointed members starting any additional terms. All Oath of Office hardcopies must be signed and filed with the City Clerk's office.

Orientation and Training

Member Training/Orientation is important to prepare new CBC Members for the key role they play. Ongoing training is also important to keep CBC Members informed of the latest developments in their field(s).

- General City Operations

- The State Open Meetings Law (The Brown Act) (Mandatory)

- General Parliamentary Procedure (Rosenberg's Rules) and Etiquette
- Ethics, Including Conflicts of Interest Regulations and mandatory filings

- Public Records Act

- Electronic Voting System

- City Email Registration (Mandatory)

- Sexual Harassment Prevention and Education Training (Mandatory)

- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (Mandatory)

Issuance and Use of Official City Identification

PLEASE NOTE: At this time, only Commissioners shall receive City Identification (including identification badges and business cards).

Each Commissioner shall be provided with a City identification card which states the name of the office held and other pertinent data identifying the individual. Business cards shall also be provided to each Commissioner.

All City Identification (including identification cards, business cards, etc.) shall only be used in the conduct of related City business. If City Identification is lost and replacement requested, the Commissioner may be required to pay for the cost of replacement.

Upon vacating office, Commissioners shall return all City Identification to the City Manager or designee.

Inappropriate use of City Identification items shall be classified as Major Misconduct, as defined in Section 3 of this Handbook, with significant consequences.

Section 3: Code of Conduct and Conflicts of Interest

Code of Conduct

As representatives of the City Council and the City, it is important that CBC Members set an example of conduct appropriate for their key roles. Therefore, CBC Members are required to adhere to the following:

Preparation for Meetings

It is necessary for CBC Members to be prepared to discuss the items on the Agenda. Therefore, CBC Members should, whenever possible, be provided with agenda packets at least three business days prior to the meeting date. Questions should be posed to staff prior to the meeting to allow staff the time necessary to prepare and provide responses.

Punctuality/Attire

The City Council views CBC Members as professionals in their respective areas. This, coupled with the public nature of CBC meetings, makes it important for CBC Members to begin meetings on time. Further, when attending official City events, including monthly CBC meetings, members shall be appropriately attired. Business casual shall be the generally acceptable mode of attire.

Attendance Requirements/Misconduct/Forfeiture of Seat

Annually, in May, the City Clerk shall provide the City Council with a summary of attendance by Members at their respective CBC meetings.

Any CBC Member who is absent from any three (3) consecutive meetings of the respective CBC, or who is absent for a total of five (5) meetings of said CBC in any six-month period, shall automatically forfeit his/her seat on said CBC. Provided, however, there shall be no forfeiture in the event of the following:

- (a) Absence due to illness or incapacity
- (b) When the City Council has determined before forfeiture that an absence is justified.

For purposes of this Policy, attendance at a meeting shall be established if a Member is present for a minimum of 50% of the duration of the meeting. Duration of the meeting shall be the total time period elapsed from the convening of the meeting until the adjournment of the meeting, including any recesses.

Member Misconduct

As appointees of the City Council, CBC Members serve at the pleasure of the City Council. Violations of this Code of Conduct shall be handled in the following manners:

- (1) Minor Misconduct: Issues will be reported to the Department Head of the department that provides staff support to the CBC. The Department Head shall then attempt to resolve the issue with the City Manager and Member.
- (2) Major Misconduct: Issues of this level will involve the City Manager's and City Attorney's Offices and may lead to a recommendation to the City Council to remove the Member from his or her seat.

The City Manager shall report Member misconduct to the City Council. Following are examples of misconduct which may subject Commissioners to disciplinary action(s):

- (1) Minor misconduct: Lack of preparation for a meeting; late arrival at meetings; failure to complete mandatory training; discourteous behavior in relations with fellow CBC Members, staff, and/or members of the public.
- (2) Major misconduct: repeated instances of minor misconduct; misuse of official City identification; violation of City Council Policies (including, but not limited to, the City Council Policies addressing violence in the workplace; acceptance of gifts or gratuities; drug free workplace; drugs and alcohol in the workplace; discrimination and harassment in the workplace; smoking in the workplace; and other policies as may be adopted by the City Council from time to time).

While the above items are presented as examples, the determination of what (if any) discipline to impose, up to and including removal from a CBC, shall be at the sole discretion of the City Council.

Discipline of CBC Members by the City Council

In accordance with the CCMC, should the City Council determine, in its sole discretion, that a CBC Member may have allegedly acted in a manner inconsistent with law or this Policy, the City Council may determine to impose any or all of the following:

- (1) Provide direction to the City Manager to meet with the CBC Members(s) to informally investigate alleged misconduct and provide counseling to the CBC Members(s) to indicate behavior consistent with law and this Policy.
- (2) Provide direction to the City Manager to investigate CBC Member alleged misconduct and report findings to the City Council.
- (3) Require the CBC Member to appear before the City Council to hear charges of alleged misconduct.
- (4) Determine, in the City Council's sole discretion and with or without cause, to remove a CBC Member from his/her seat. Such removal shall only be effective upon a 4/5ths vote of the City Council.

Conflicts of Interest

The City Council considers it desirable to appoint persons with expert knowledge about Culver City issues to serve on commissions, boards, and committees. Consequently, it is inevitable that matters will occasionally come before the City's legislative bodies with which individual members have a direct or indirect personal interest.

If a CBC Member has a financial interest relating to an item on which they will be making a decision, and such decision will materially affect that financial interest, he/she must recuse himself/herself from all participation relating to that item. This means the CBC Member may not discuss the matter with other Members, may not participate in the deliberations concerning the matter, and may not attempt to influence the CBC's decision on the matter. CBC members shall leave the room while the matter is under consideration. The general nature of the conflict should be stated for the record.

Members should seek the advice of the City Attorney's Office in any case where there is the slightest possibility of a conflict of interest.

Conflict of Interest Code

The City of Culver City has adopted a Conflict of Interest Code in compliance with the Political Reform Act. **Newly designated commissioners and certain committee members must file a Form 700 within 30 days of appointment and annually thereafter. The City Clerk's Office will notify you if you are required to submit a Form 700. Additionally, you must file within 30 days after leaving office.** Forms are available in the City Clerk's office and on the FPPC website (<http://www.fppc.ca.gov>). The forms on the FPPC website are interactive. Read this form carefully to fully understand financial interests, as well as disclosure requirements which vary from CBC to CBC. **Please note these forms are a matter of public record.**

AB 1234 Ethics Training (Mandatory)

State law requires local officials to receive two hours of ethics training biennially. The training must cover both ethics laws and ethics principles. Although State law specifies the law applying to elected or appointed officials who receive compensation, local agencies are given the authority to expand the requirement. The City requires all local officials of City-created bodies to receive the training on a biennial basis.

While under the law you have one year from the date you take office to complete the initial requirement, the City strongly encourages you to take the training within thirty (30) days of appointment in order to familiarize yourself with the laws pertaining to your services as a CBC Member prior to your first meeting. Training is then required every two years. If taken online and not when offered annually in person by the City, the time you spend on the training will be printed on your certificate of completion. **The certificate must include the minimum two hours of mandatory study or it will be considered incomplete.**

Once you receive proof of participation in AB 1234 training, please provide the City Clerk's Office with a signed copy of the certificate, or the original if possible. These are public records and are kept on file for a minimum of five years. If you have been required to take this training in the course of employment or other service within the last two years, you do not need to immediately take the training, but will need to provide the City Clerk's Office with a copy of your certificate of completion. You will then be notified in advance of when your two year certificate will be expiring, and a new training session required.

Please contact the City Clerk's Office for further assistance.

Additional Trainings

Other trainings shall be scheduled as needed or required by the enacting authorities.

Section 4: Resources

Open and Public V

Rosenberg's Rules of Order

CBC Policy Number 3002

Open & Public VI

A GUIDE TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT

REVISED JANUARY 2024



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Open & Public VI

A GUIDE TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT

REVISED JANUARY 2024

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IT IS THE PEOPLE’S BUSINESS

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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 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.

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 or videoconference.

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.

New communication technologies present new Brown Act challenges. For example, common email 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. Social Media posts, comments, and “likes” can result in a Brown Act violation. Communicating during meetings using electronic technology (such as laptop computers, tablets, or smart phones) may create the perception that private communications are influencing the outcome of decisions, and some state legislatures have banned the practice. On the other hand, widespread video streaming and videoconferencing of meetings has greatly expanded public access to the decision-making process.

Narrow exemptions

The express purpose of the Brown Act is to ensure 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 multimember 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 do not 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 and staff. 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 limits on the time allotted to each speaker. For more information, see chapter 4.

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. A local policy on the use of laptop computers, tablets, and smart phones during Brown Act meetings may help avoid problems.

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.

Some 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 businesslike, 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 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 does not 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.
- The right of the press to fully understand and communicate public agency decision-making.

A detailed 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 to 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.

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 are 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 titled "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 Governor 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 Assembly in 1942 and served 19 years, including the last three years as Speaker. He then became an appellate court justice.

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.

Updates to this publication responding to changes in the Brown Act or new court interpretations are available at <https://www.calcities.org/home/resources/open-government2>. A current version of the Brown Act may be found at <https://leginfo.ca.gov>.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54950.
- 2 Cal. Const., Art. 1, § 3, subd. (b)(1).
- 3 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (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 Const., Art. 1, § 3, subd. (b)(2).
- 5 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subds. (b)(2) and (c)(1); *Wolfe v. City of Fremont* (2006) 144 Cal.App.4th 533.
- 6 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953.7.



Chapter 2

LEGISLATIVE BODIES

What is a “legislative body” of a local agency? 12

What is not a “legislative body” for purposes of the Brown Act? 14

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 following:

- The “**governing body** of a local agency” and certain of its subsidiary bodies; “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, city and county, school district, municipal corporation, successor agency to a redevelopment agency, district, political subdivision, or other local 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 also 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.

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.

- 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.*

- **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 and report back to their respective boards, 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 it comprises less than a quorum of the governing body, a standing committee is subject to the Brown Act. For example, if a governing body creates committees on budget and finance or on public safety that are not limited in duration or scope, those are standing committees subject to the Brown Act. Further, according to the California Attorney General, 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 A majority of the members of a legislative body may attend an open and public meeting of a standing committee of that body, provided the members who are not part of the standing committee only observe.¹² For more information, see chapter 3.
- 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.¹³ These include some nonprofit corporations created by local agencies.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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 nonexempt 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.”

- 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.*

- **Certain types 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹
- 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.²⁰

- 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 is not subject to the Brown Act since such assemblies are not those of a legislative body.²¹
- Public employees, each acting individually and not engaging in collective deliberation on a specific issue, such as the drafting and review of an agreement, do not constitute a legislative body under the Brown Act, even if the drafting and review process was established by a legislative body.²²
- County central committees of political parties are also not Brown Act bodies.²³

Legal counsel for a governing body is not a member of the governing body, therefore, the Brown Act does not apply to them. But counsel should take care not to facilitate Brown Act violations by members of the governing body.²⁴

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Taxpayers for Livable Communities v. City of Malibu* (2005) 126 Cal.App.4th 1123, 1127.
- 2 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952, subds. (a) and (b).
- 3 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54951; Cal. Health & Saf. Code, § 34173, subd. (g) (successor agencies to former redevelopment agencies subject to the Brown Act). But see Cal. Ed. Code § 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 of Housing Authority of Tulare County* (1979) 89 Cal.App.3d 545, 549-550.
- 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, 362.
- 7 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.1.
- 8 *Joiner v. City of Sebastopol* (1981) 125 Cal.App.3d 799, 804-805.
- 9 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952, subd. (b)
- 10 79 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 69 (1996).
- 11 *Frazer v. Dixon Unified School District* (1993) 18 Cal.App.4th 781, 793.
- 12 Cal. Gov. Code § 54952, subd. (c)(6).
- 13 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952, subd. (c)(1). Regarding private organizations that receive local agency funding, the same rule applies to a full voting member appointed prior to February 9, 1996, who, after that date, is made a nonvoting board member by the legislative body. Cal. Gov. Code § 54952, subd. (c)(2).
- 14 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952(c)(1)(A); *International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union v. Los Angeles Export Terminal, Inc.* (1999) 69 Cal.App.4th 287, 300; *Epstein v. Hollywood Entertainment Dist. II Business Improvement District* (2001) 87 Cal.App.4th 862, 876; see also 85 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 55 (2002).
- 15 *International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union v. Los Angeles Export Terminal, Inc.* (1999) 69 Cal.App.4th 287, 300 fn. 5.
- 16 "The Brown Act, Open Meetings for Local Legislative Bodies," California Attorney General's Office (2003), p. 7.

- 17 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952, subd. (d).
- 18 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952, subd. (b); see also *Freedom Newspapers, Inc. v. Orange County Employees Retirement System Board of Directors* (1993) 6 Cal.4th 821, 832.
- 19 *Taxpayers for Livable Communities v. City of Malibu* (2005) 126 Cal.App.4th 1123, 1129.
- 20 56 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 14, 16-17 (1973).
- 21 *Wilson v. San Francisco Municipal Railway* (1973) 29 Cal.App.3d 870, 878-879.
- 22 *Golightly v. Molina* (2014) 229 Cal.App.4th 1501, 1513.
- 23 59 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 162, 164 (1976).
- 24 *GFRCO, Inc. v. Superior Court of Riverside County* (2023) 89 Cal.App.5th 1295, 1323; *Stockton Newspapers, Inc. v. Redevelopment Agency of the City of Stockton* (1985) 171 Cal.App.3d 95, 105 (a series of individual telephone calls between the agency attorney and the members of the body constituted a meeting).



Chapter 3

MEETINGS

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Chapter 3

MEETINGS



The Brown Act only applies to meetings of local legislative bodies. It defines a meeting as “any congregation of a majority of the members of a legislative body at the same time and location, including teleconference location as permitted by Section 54953, to hear, discuss, deliberate, or take any action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body.”¹ The term *meeting* is not limited to gatherings at which action is taken but includes deliberative gatherings as well. A hearing before an individual hearing officer is not a meeting under the Brown Act because it is not a hearing before a legislative body.²

Brown Act meetings

Brown Act meetings 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.³
- **“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 and are subject to 24-hour posting requirements.⁴
- **“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.⁵
- **“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.⁶

Six exceptions to the meeting definition

The Brown Act creates six exceptions to the meeting definition:⁷

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 their 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, as 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. A majority cannot discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled program, business of a specific nature that is within the legislative body'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 reelection and all three participate. All of the candidates are asked their views on a controversial project scheduled for a meeting to occur just after the election. May the three incumbents answer the question?
- A.** Yes, because the chamber of commerce, not the city, is organizing the debate. The city should not sponsor the event or assign city staff to help organize or run the event. Also, 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. Finally, incumbents participating in the event should take care to limit their remarks to the program set by the chamber and safeguard due process by indicating they will keep an open mind regarding specific applications that might come before the council.
- Q.** May the three incumbents accept an invitation from the editorial board of a local paper to all candidates to meet as a group and answer questions about and/or debate city issues?
- A.** No, unlike the chamber of commerce event, this would not be allowed under the Brown Act because it is not an open and publicized meeting.

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.⁸ Again, the majority cannot discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled meeting, business of a specific nature that is within their 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, trying to influence the outcome of proceedings before a subordinate body, or discussing the merits with interested parties.

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 that 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, and they must sit where members of the public sit).⁹

Q. The legislative body establishes a standing committee of two of its five members that 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.*

Q. Can the legislative body establish multiple standing committees with partially overlapping jurisdiction?

A. *Yes. One result of this overlap in jurisdiction may be that three or more of the members of the legislative body ultimately end up discussing an issue as part of a standing committee meeting. This is allowed under the Brown Act provided each standing committee meeting is publicly noticed and no more than two of the five members discuss the issue at any given standing committee meeting.*

Social or ceremonial events

The 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 legislative body.

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 attend the function, but whether business of a specific nature within the subject matter jurisdiction of the body is discussed. As long as no such business is discussed, there is no violation of the Brown Act.

Grand Jury Testimony

In addition, members of a legislative body, either individually or collectively, may give testimony in private before a grand jury.¹⁰ This is the equivalent of a seventh exception to the Brown Act's definition of a "meeting."

Collective briefings

None of these 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. Staff may provide written briefings (e.g., staff updates, emails from the city manager, confidential memos from the city attorney) to the full legislative body, but apart from privileged memos, the written materials may be subject to disclosure as public records as discussed in chapter 4.

Retreats, trainings, and workshops of legislative bodies

Gatherings by a majority of legislative body members at the legislative body's retreats, study sessions, trainings, or workshops are subject to the requirements of the Brown Act. This is the case whether the gathering focuses on long-range agency planning, discussion of critical local issues, satisfying state-mandated ethics training requirements, or team building and group dynamics.¹¹



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 include only a portion of a legislative body, but eventually they comprise a majority. 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.”¹² The problem with serial meetings is the process, which deprives the public of an opportunity for meaningful observation of and participation in legislative body decision-making.

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 at least two scenarios. In the first scenario, Member A (the hub) sequentially contacts Members B, C, D, and so on (the spokes) until a quorum has been contacted. In the second scenario, a staff member (the hub), functioning as an intermediary for the legislative body

or one of its members, communicates with a majority of members (the spokes) one by one for discussion, deliberation, or a decision on a proposed action.¹³ Another example of a serial meeting is when a chief executive officer (the hub) briefs a majority of members (the spokes) 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 (but not with a majority of the body, counting the member) 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.”¹⁴

The Brown Act is violated, however, if several one-on-one meetings or conferences lead to a discussion, deliberation, or action by a majority. In one case, a violation occurred when a quorum



Photo credit: Courtesy of the City of West Hollywood. Photo by Jon Viscott.

of a city council, by a letter that had been circulated among members outside of a formal meeting, directed staff to take action in an eminent domain proceeding.¹⁵

A unilateral written communication to the legislative body, such as an informational or advisory memorandum, does not violate the Brown Act.¹⁶ Such a memo, however, may be a public record.¹⁷

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?"

The lobbyist and the reporter are facilitating a violation of the Brown Act. 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.

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."¹⁸ 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. "I'm sure Council Member Jones is OK with these changes. How are you leaning?"

"Well," said Council Member Kim, "I'm leaning toward approval. I know that two of my colleagues definitely favor approval."

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

The planning director should not disclose Jones' prospective vote, and Kim should not disclose the prospective votes of two colleagues. Under these facts, there likely has been a serial meeting in violation of the Brown Act.

- Q.** Various social media platforms and websites include forums where agency employees and officials can 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 a majority of a body to call a special meeting, 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 all” option that may inadvertently result in a Brown Act violation. Staff should consider using the “bcc” (blind carbon copy) option when addressing an email to multiple members of the legislative body and remind recipients not to “reply all.”

Social media should also be used with care. A member of the legislative body cannot respond directly to any communication on an internet-based social media platform that is made, posted, or shared by any other member of the legislative body. This applies to matters within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. For example, if one member of a legislative body “likes” a social media post of one other member of the same body, that could violate the Brown Act, depending on the nature of the post.¹⁹

Finally, electronic communications (such as text messaging) among members of a legislative body during a public meeting should be discouraged. If such communications are sent to a majority of members of the body, either directly or through an intermediary, on a matter on the meeting agenda, that could violate the Brown Act. Electronic communications sent to less than a majority of members of the body during a quasi-judicial proceeding could potentially raise due process concerns, even if not per se prohibited by the Brown Act. Additionally, some legislative bodies have rules governing electronic communications during meetings of the legislative body and how their members should proceed if they receive a communication on an agenda item that is not part of the record or not part of an agenda packet.

Informal gatherings

Members of legislative bodies are often 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.²⁰ A gathering at which a quorum of the legislative body discusses matters within their jurisdiction violates the Brown Act even if that gathering occurs in a public place. The Brown Act is not satisfied by public visibility alone. It also requires public notice and an opportunity to attend, hear, and participate.

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 — which might be difficult. This kind of situation should be avoided. The public is unlikely to believe the board members could meet regularly without discussing public business. A newspaper executive's presence does not lessen the potential for a violation of the Brown Act.

Technological conferencing

Except for certain non-substantive purposes, such as scheduling a special meeting, a conference call including a majority of the members of a legislative body is an unlawful meeting. But in an effort to keep up with modern technologies, the Brown Act specifically allows a legislative body to use any type of teleconferencing to meet, receive public comment and testimony, deliberate, or conduct a closed session.²¹ While the Brown Act contains specific requirements for conducting a teleconference, the decision to use teleconferencing is entirely discretionary with the body. No person has a right under the Brown Act to have a meeting by teleconference.

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.”²² 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 teleconferencing requirements:²³

- 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.
- 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, including a hotel room or residence, 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.
- All votes must be by roll call.



Photo credit: Courtesy of the City of West Hollywood. Photo by Jon Viscott.

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 an open, noticed, and posted teleconference location.*

Until Jan. 1, 2026, teleconferencing may also be used on a limited basis where a member indicates their need to participate remotely for “just cause” (e.g., childcare or a contagious illness) or due to

“emergency circumstances” (e.g., a physical or family medical emergency).

This teleconferencing option has extremely detailed requirements, and careful review is needed. If the City experiences a technical issue that prevents members of the public from viewing the meeting and/or offering comments virtually, then no further action can be taken until the technical issue is resolved.²⁴

The use of teleconferencing to conduct a legislative body meeting presents a variety of 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.²⁵

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:²⁶

- Comply with state or federal law or a court order, or attend a judicial conference or administrative proceeding in which the local agency is a party.
- Inspect real or personal property that 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 allowed 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 of those agencies must give proper notice.
- Meet in the closest meeting facility if the local agency has no meeting facility within its boundaries, or meet 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.
- Visit the office of its legal counsel for a closed session on pending litigation when to do so would reduce legal fees or costs.²⁷

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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.³⁰ State law has also allowed for virtual meetings under certain emergency situations.³¹

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (a).
- 2 *Wilson v. San Francisco Municipal Railway* (1973) 29 Cal.App.3d 870.
- 3 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954, subd. (a).
- 4 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.
- 5 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.5.
- 6 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54955.
- 7 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (c).
- 8 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (c)(4).
- 9 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (c)(6). See 81 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 156 (1998).
- 10 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953.1.
- 11 "The Brown Act," California Attorney General (2003), p. 10.
- 12 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (b)(1).
- 13 *Stockton Newspapers, Inc. v. Redevelopment Agency of the City of Stockton* (1985) 171 Cal.App.3d 95.
- 14 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (b)(2).
- 15 *Common Cause v. Stirling* (1983) 147 Cal.App.3d 518.
- 16 *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363.
- 17 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5, subd. (a).
- 18 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (b)(2).
- 19 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (b)(3).

- 20 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2; 43 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 36 (1964).
- 21 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (b)(1).
- 22 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (b)(4).
- 23 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953. Until Jan. 1, 2024, the legislative body could use teleconferencing “during a proclaimed state of emergency” by the Governor in specified circumstances, and teleconference locations were exempt from certain requirements, such as identification in and posting of the agenda.
- 24 Cal Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (f) (which will become Govt. §54953(e) as of Jan. 1, 2024).
- 25 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954, subd. (b).
- 26 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954, subd. (b)(1)-(7).
- 27 94 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 15 (2011).
- 28 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954, subd. (c).
- 29 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954, subd. (d).
- 30 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954, subd. (e).
- 31 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (e) (exp. January 1, 2026).



Chapter 4

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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.

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 a location open and 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 This provision may be satisfied by posting on a touch screen electronic kiosk accessible without charge to the public 24 hours a day during the 72-hour period.³ While posting an agenda on an agency’s internet website will not, by itself, satisfy the “freely accessible” requirement since there is no universal access to the internet, an agency has a supplemental obligation to post the agenda on its website if (1) the local agency has a website and (2) the legislative body whose meeting is the subject of the agenda is either (a) a governing body or (b) has members that are compensated, with one or more members that are also members of a governing body.⁴

- Q.** May the meeting of a governing body go forward if its agenda was either inadvertently not posted on the city’s website or if the website was not operational during part or all of the 72-hour period preceding the meeting?
- A.** *At a minimum, the Brown Act calls for “substantial compliance” with all agenda posting requirements, including posting to the agency website.⁵ Should website technical difficulties arise, seek a legal opinion from your agency attorney. The California Attorney General has opined that technical difficulties that cause the website agenda to become inaccessible for a portion of the 72 hours preceding a meeting do not automatically or inevitably lead to a Brown Act violation, provided the agency can demonstrate substantial compliance.⁶ This inquiry requires a fact-specific examination of whether the agency or its legislative body made “reasonably effective efforts to notify interested persons of a public meeting” through online posting and other available means.⁷ The Attorney General’s opinion suggests that this examination would include an evaluation of how long a technical problem persisted, the efforts made to correct the problem or otherwise ensure that the public was informed, and the actual effect the problem had on public*

awareness, among other factors.⁸ For these reasons, obvious website technical difficulties might not require cancellation of a meeting, provided that the agency meets all other Brown Act posting requirements and the agenda is available on the website once the technical difficulties are resolved.

PRACTICE TIP: Putting together a meeting agenda requires careful thought.

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.”⁹ For a discussion of descriptions for open and closed-session agenda items, see chapter 5. Special care should be made to describe on the agenda each distinct action to be taken by the legislative body, while an overbroad description of a “project” must be avoided if the “project” is actually a set of distinct actions, in which case each action must be listed separately on the agenda.¹⁰ For example, the listing of an “initiative measure” alone on an agenda was found insufficient where the agency was also deciding whether to accept a gift from the measure proponent to pay for the election.¹¹

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

- Consideration of a report regarding traffic on Eighth Street.
- Consideration of a 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 is listed on the agenda.

Is this permissible?

A. *Yes, as 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.¹² 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 or upon distribution to all, or a majority of all, of the members of the legislative body, whichever occurs first. If the local agency has an internet website, this requirement can be satisfied by emailing a copy of, or website link to, the agenda or agenda packet if the person making the request asks for it to be emailed. Further, 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 following January 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.¹³



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 each radio and television station that has requested such notice in writing. This notice must be delivered at least 24 hours before the time of the meeting by personal delivery or any other means that ensures receipt.

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, that is, with a brief general description. Some items must appear on a regular, not special, meeting agenda (e.g., general law city adoption of an ordinance or consideration of local agency executive compensation).¹⁴

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 using the same methods as posting an agenda for a regular meeting: at a site that is freely accessible to the public, and on the agency's website if (1) the local agency has a website and (2) the legislative body whose meeting is the subject of the agenda is either (a) a governing body or (b) has members that are compensated, with one or more members that are also members of a governing body.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

Notice requirements for emergency meetings

The special meeting notice provisions apply to emergency meetings, except for the 24-hour notice.¹⁹ 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.

Notice of compensation for simultaneous or serial meetings

A legislative body that has convened a meeting and whose membership constitutes a quorum of another legislative body, may convene a simultaneous or serial meeting of the other legislative body only after a clerk or member of the convened legislative body orally announces (1) the amount of compensation or stipend, if any, that each member will be entitled to receive as a result of convening the meeting of the other legislative body; and (2) that the compensation or stipend is provided as a result of convening the meeting of that body.²⁰

No oral disclosure of the amount of the compensation is required if the entire amount of such compensation is prescribed by statute and no additional compensation has been authorized by the local agency. Further, no disclosure is required with respect to reimbursements for actual and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of the member's official duties, such as for travel, meals, and lodging.

Educational agency meetings

The Education Code contains some special agenda and special meeting provisions.²¹ However, they are generally consistent with the Brown Act. An item is probably void if not posted.²² A school district board must also adopt regulations to make sure the public can place matters affecting the district's business on meeting agendas and can address the board on those items.²³

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 tax or assessment imposed on businesses.²⁴ Although written broadly, these Brown Act provisions do not apply to new or increased real property taxes or assessments, as those are governed by the California Constitution, Article XIII C or XIII D, enacted by Proposition 218. 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 the legislative body proposes to enact or increase the tax or assessment. Notice of the public meeting and public hearing must be provided at the same time and in the same document. The public notice relating to general taxes must be provided by newspaper publication. The public notice relating to new or increased business assessments must be provided through a



mailing to all business owners proposed to be subject to the new or increased assessment. The agency may recover the reasonable costs of the public meetings, hearings, and notice.

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.²⁵ 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:²⁶

- 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.
- When an item appeared on the agenda of, and was continued from, a meeting held not more than five days earlier.

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:

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

- First, make two determinations: (1) that there is an immediate need to take action and (2) 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 their own activities.²⁷ However, caution should be used to avoid any discussion or action on such items.



Council Member Jefferson: 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 Frank: The public works director has prepared a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation for you on the status of this project and will give it right now.

Council Member Brown: 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 Jefferson 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 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ This does not mean, however, that the public is entitled to free entry to a conference attended by a majority of the legislative body.³⁰

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.³¹

Action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final, is flatly prohibited.³²

All actions taken by the legislative body in open session, and the vote of each member thereon, must be disclosed to the public at the time the action is taken.³³

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.*

The legislative body may remove persons from a meeting who willfully interrupt or disrupt proceedings.³⁴ Ejection is justified only when audience members actually disrupt the proceedings,³⁵ or, alternatively, if the presiding member of the legislative body warns a person that their behavior is disruptive and that continued disruption may result in their removal (but no prior warning is required if there is a use of force or true threat of force).³⁶ If order cannot be restored after ejecting disruptive persons, 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 readmit an individual or individuals not responsible for the disturbance.³⁷

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.³⁸ A fee or deposit as permitted by the California Public Records Act may be charged for a copy of a public record.³⁹

- 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 nonexempt or otherwise non-privileged 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.⁴⁰ The location designated for public inspection must be open to the public, not a locked or closed office. Alternatively, the documents can be posted on the city's website for public review if statutory requirements are met.⁴¹

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.
- After the meeting if prepared by some other person.⁴²

This requirement does not prevent assessing a fee or deposit for providing a copy of a public record pursuant to the California Public Records Act except where required to accommodate persons with disabilities.⁴³

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 California 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.⁴⁴ The agency may impose its ordinary charge for copies that is consistent with the California Public Records Act.⁴⁵

In addition, the public is specifically allowed to use audio or videotape recorders or still or motion picture cameras at a meeting to record meetings of legislative bodies, absent a reasonable finding by the body that noise, illumination, or obstruction of view caused by recorders or cameras would persistently disrupt the proceedings.⁴⁶

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.

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.⁴⁷

The public's right to speak during a meeting

Every agenda for a regular meeting must allow members of the public to speak on any item of interest, as 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.⁴⁸

Q. Must the legislative body allow members of the public to show videos or make a PowerPoint 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.*

Moreover, the Brown Act, as well as case law, prevents legislative bodies from prohibiting public criticism of policies, procedures, programs, or services of the agency or the acts or omissions of the legislative body itself.⁴⁹ However, this prohibition does not provide immunity for defamatory statements.⁵⁰

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 purely 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 where relevant to the governing of the agency and an implicit criticism of the incumbents' performance of city business.*

The legislative body may adopt reasonable regulations, including a limit on the total time permitted for public comment and a limit on the time permitted per speaker.⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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 regular (but not special) 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.⁵³

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.⁵⁴

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.2, subd. (a)(1).
- 2 78 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 327 (1995).
- 3 88 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 218 (2005).
- 4 Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 54954.2, subd. (a)(1) and 54954.2, subd. (d).
- 5 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1, subd. (d)(1).
- 6 99 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 11 (2016).
- 7 *North Pacifica LLC v. California Coastal Commission* (2008) 166 Cal.App.4th 1416, 1432.
- 8 99 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 11 (2016).
- 9 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.2, subd. (a)(1).
- 10 *San Joaquin Raptor Rescue v. County of Merced* (2013) 216 Cal.App.4th 1167 (legislative body's approval of California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] action [mitigated negative declaration] without specifically listing it on the agenda violates the Brown Act, even if the agenda generally describes the development project that is the subject of the CEQA analysis). See also *GI Industries v. City of Thousand Oaks* (2022) 84 Cal.App.5th 814 (depublished) (Brown Act requires CEQA finding of exemption to be listed on agenda items that are projects under CEQA).
- 11 *Hernandez v. Town of Apple Valley* (2017) 7 Cal.App.5th 194.
- 12 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.5.
- 13 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.1.
- 14 Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 36934; 54956, subd. (b).
- 15 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956, subds. (a) and (c).
- 16 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54955.
- 17 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.2, subd. (b)(3).
- 18 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54955.1.
- 19 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.5.
- 20 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.3.
- 21 Cal. Edu. Code, §§ 35144, 35145, and 72129.
- 22 *Carlson v. Paradise Unified School District* (1971) 18 Cal.App.3d 196.
- 23 Cal. Edu. Code, § 35145.5
- 24 Cal. Edu. Code, § 54954.6
- 25 See Cal. Const. Art. XIII C, XIII D; Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.6, subd. (h).
- 26 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.2, subd. (b).
- 27 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.2, subd. (a)(2); *Cruz v. City of Culver City* (2016) 2 Cal.App.5th 239 (six-minute colloquy on non-agenda item with staff answering questions and advising that matter could be placed on future agenda fell within exceptions to discussing or acting upon non-agenda items).



- 28 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953.3.
- 29 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54961, subd. (a); Cal. Gov. Code, § 11135, subd. (a).
- 30 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.2, subd. (c)(2).
- 31 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (b).
- 32 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (c).
- 33 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953, subd. (c)(2).
- 34 Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 54957.9, 54957.95.
- 35 *Norse v. City of Santa Cruz* (9th Cir. 2010) 629 F.3d 966 (silent and momentary Nazi salute directed toward mayor is not a disruption); *Acosta v. City of Costa Mesa* (9th Cir. 2013) 718 F.3d 800 (city council may not prohibit “insolent” remarks by members of the public absent actual disruption); but see *Kirkland v. Luken* (S.D. Ohio 2008) 536 F.Supp.2d 857 (finding no First Amendment violation by mayor for turning off microphone and removing speaker who used foul and inflammatory language that was deemed as “likely to incite the members of the audience during the meeting, cause disorder, and disrupt the meeting”).
- 36 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.95.
- 37 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.9.
- 38 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5.
- 39 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5, subd. (d).
- 40 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5(b); see also *Sierra Watch v. Placer County* (2021) 69 Cal.App.5th 1.
- 41 Cal. Gov. Code § 54957.5.
- 42 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5, subd. (c).
- 43 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5, subd. (d).
- 44 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953.5, subd. (b).
- 45 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.5, subd. (d).
- 46 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953.5, subd. (a).
- 47 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54953.6.
- 48 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.3, subd. (a).
- 49 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.3, subd. (c); *Acosta v. City of Costa Mesa* (9th Cir. 2013) 718 F.3d 800.
- 50 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.3, subd. (c).
- 51 *Ribakoff v. City of Long Beach* (2018) 27 Cal.App.5th 150 (public comment time limit of three minutes for each speaker did not violate First Amendment).
- 52 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.3, subd. (b); *Chaffee v. San Francisco Public Library Commission* (2005) 134 Cal.App.4th 109; 75 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 89 (1992).
- 53 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.3, subd. (a); *Preven v. City of Los Angeles* (2019) 32 Cal.App.5th 925.
- 54 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.3, subd. (a).



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Chapter 5

CLOSED SESSIONS

A closed session is a meeting of a legislative body conducted in private without the attendance of the public or press. A legislative body is authorized to meet in closed session only to the extent expressly authorized by the Brown Act.¹



As summarized in chapter 1 of this guide, it is clear that the Brown Act must be interpreted liberally in favor of open meetings, and exceptions that limit public access (including the exceptions for closed session meetings) must be narrowly construed.² The most common purposes of the closed session provisions in the Brown Act are to avoid revealing confidential information (e.g., prejudicing the city's position in litigation or compromising the privacy interests of employees). Closed sessions should be conducted keeping those narrow purposes in mind. 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 to be considered by a legislative body must be discussed in public. However, there is no prohibition in putting overlapping exceptions on an agenda in order to provide an opportunity for more robust closed session discussions. As an example, a city council cannot give direction to the city manager about a property

negotiation during a performance evaluation exception. However, if both real property negotiation and performance evaluation exceptions are on the agenda, those discussions might be conducted. Similarly, a board of police commissioners cannot meet in closed session to provide general policy guidance to a police chief, even though some matters are sensitive and the commission considers their disclosure contrary to the public interest.³

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 applies 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, although the Brown Act does authorize closed sessions related to specified types of contracts (e.g., specified provisions of real property agreements, employee labor agreements, and litigation settlement agreements),⁴ the Brown Act does not authorize closed sessions for other 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.⁵ An item that appears on the open meeting portion of the agenda may not be taken into closed session until it has been properly put on the agenda as a

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.

closed session item 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.⁶

The Brown Act supplies a series of fill-in-the-blank sample agenda descriptions for various types of authorized closed sessions that 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, multijurisdictional law enforcement cases, hospital boards of directors, medical quality assurance committees, joint powers agencies, and audits by the California State Auditor’s Office.⁷

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.⁸ The legislative body must take public comment on the closed session item before convening in a closed session.

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 vary according to the reason for the closed session and the action taken.⁹ The announcements may be made at the site of the closed session, as 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.¹⁰

The Brown Act does not require minutes, including minutes of closed sessions. However, a legislative body may adopt an ordinance or resolution to authorize a confidential “minute book” be kept to record actions taken at closed sessions.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.

Litigation

The Brown Act expressly authorizes closed sessions to discuss what is considered pending litigation.¹³ The rules that apply to holding a litigation closed session involve complex, technical definitions and procedures. Essentially, 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, or could become, a party.¹⁴ 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 and required support staff.¹⁵ For example, it is not permissible to hold a closed session in which settlement negotiations take place between a legislative body, a representative of an adverse party, and a mediator.¹⁶

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 if not substantially compliant.

The California Attorney General has opined that if the agency's attorney is not a participant, a litigation closed session cannot be held.¹⁷ 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.

Before holding a closed session under the pending litigation exception, the legislative body must publicly state the basis for the closed session by identifying one of the following three types of matters: existing litigation, anticipated exposure to litigation, or anticipated initiation of litigation.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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 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 cannot be approved in closed session if it commits the city to take an action that is required to have a public hearing.²⁰

Anticipated exposure to litigation against the local agency

Closed sessions are authorized for legal counsel to inform the legislative body of a significant exposure to litigation against the local agency, but only if based on "existing facts and circumstances" as defined by the Brown Act.²¹ 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. In general, the "existing facts and

circumstances" must be publicly disclosed unless they are privileged written communications or not yet known to a potential plaintiff. If an agency receives a documented threat of litigation, and intends to discuss that matter in closed session, the record of a litigation threat must be included in the body's agenda packet.²²



Anticipated initiation of litigation by the local agency

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

Certain actions must be reported in open session at the same meeting following the closed session. Other actions, such as when final approval rests with another party or the court, may be announced when they become final and upon inquiry of any person.²³ Each agency attorney should be aware of and make the disclosures that are required by the particular circumstances.

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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 argue 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 negotiators, the real property that the negotiations may concern,²⁶ and the names of the parties with whom its negotiator may negotiate.²⁷

After real estate negotiations are concluded, the approval and substance of the agreement must be publicly 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 and the substance of the agreement upon inquiry by any person as soon as the agency is informed of it.²⁸

"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.

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.

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.”²⁹ 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.³⁰ The body must possess the power to appoint, evaluate, or dismiss the employee to hold a closed session under this exception.³¹ That authority may be delegated to a subsidiary appointed body.³²

An employee must be given at least 24 hours’ notice of any closed session convened to hear specific complaints or charges against them. This occurs when the legislative body is reviewing evidence, which could include live testimony, and adjudicating conflicting testimony offered as evidence. A legislative body may examine (or exclude) witnesses,³³ and the California Attorney General has opined that, when an affected employee and advocate have an official or essential role to play, they may be permitted to participate in the closed session.³⁴ The employee has the right to have the specific complaints and charges discussed in a public session rather than closed session.³⁵ If the employee is not given the 24-hour prior notice, any disciplinary action is null and void.³⁶

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.³⁷

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.

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.³⁸ 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. Examples of the latter include 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.³⁹ Action on individuals who are not “employees” must also be public — including discussing and voting on appointees to committees, 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. That means, among other things, 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.

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.⁴⁰ However, a report on a dismissal or non-renewal of an employment contract must be deferred until administrative remedies, if any, are exhausted.⁴¹

“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 must be exercised not to discuss in closed session issues, such as budget impacts in this hypothetical, beyond the scope of the posted closed session notice.

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.

A legislative body may meet in closed session to instruct its bargaining representatives, which may be one or more of its members,⁴² on employee salaries and fringe benefits for both represented (“union”) and unrepresented employees. For represented employees, it may also consider working conditions that by law require negotiation. For the purpose of labor negotiation closed sessions, an “employee” includes an officer or an independent contractor who functions as an officer or an employee, but independent contractors who do not serve in the capacity of an officer or employee are not covered by this closed session exception.⁴³

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

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

These closed 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 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.⁴⁴

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.⁴⁵ The labor closed sessions specifically cannot include final action on proposed compensation of one or more unrepresented employees.

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.
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.⁴⁶

Public participation under the Rodda Act also takes another form.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰ Kindergarten through 12th grade districts may also meet in closed session to review the contents of the statewide assessment instrument.⁵¹

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

Joint powers authorities

The legislative body of a joint powers authority may adopt a policy regarding limitations on disclosure of confidential information obtained in closed session, and may meet in closed session to discuss information that is subject to the policy.⁵²

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. The applicant and the applicant's attorney are authorized to attend the closed session meeting. If the body decides to deny the license, the applicant may withdraw the application. If the applicant does not withdraw it, the body must deny the license in public, either 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.⁵³

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 Governor, Attorney General, district attorney, agency attorney, sheriff or chief of police, or their deputies or agency security consultant or security operations manager.⁵⁴ Action taken in closed session with respect to such public security issues is not reportable action.

Multijurisdictional law enforcement agency

A joint powers agency formed to provide law enforcement services (involving drugs; gangs; sex crimes; firearms trafficking; felony possession of a firearm; high technology, computer, or identity theft; human trafficking; or vehicle theft) to multiple jurisdictions may hold closed sessions to discuss case records of an ongoing criminal investigation, to hear testimony from persons involved in the investigation, and to discuss courses of action in particular cases.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

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:⁵⁷

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 that is not generally known to the public or competitors and that (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.⁵⁸

Other legislative bases for closed session

Since any closed session meeting of a legislative body must be authorized by the Legislature, it is important to review the Brown Act carefully to determine if there is a provision that authorizes a closed session for a particular subject matter. There are some less frequently

encountered topics that are authorized to be discussed by a legislative body in closed session under the Brown Act, including a response to a confidential final draft audit report from the Bureau of State Audits,⁵⁹ consideration of the purchase or sale of particular pension fund investments by a legislative body of a local agency that invests pension funds,⁶⁰ hearing a charge or complaint from a member enrolled in a health plan by a legislative body of a local agency that provides Medical services,⁶¹ discussions by a county board of supervisors that governs a health plan licensed pursuant to the Knox-Keene Health Care Services Plan Act related to trade secrets or contract negotiations concerning rates of payment,⁶² and discussions by an insurance pooling joint powers agency related to a claim filed against, or liability of, the agency or a member of the agency.⁶³

PRACTICE TIP: Meetings are either open or closed. There is nothing “in between.”⁶⁴

Who may attend closed sessions

Meetings of a legislative body are either fully open or fully closed; there is nothing in between. Therefore, local agency officials and employees must pay particular attention to the authorized attendees for the particular type of closed session. As summarized above, the authorized attendees may differ based on the topic of the closed session. 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, with very limited exceptions for adversaries or witnesses with official roles in particular types of hearings (e.g., personnel disciplinary hearings and license hearings). In any case, individuals who do not have an official or essential role in the closed session subject matters must be excluded from closed sessions.⁶⁵

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.*

The confidentiality of closed session discussions

The Brown Act explicitly prohibits the unauthorized disclosure of confidential information acquired in a closed session by any person present, and offers various remedies to address breaches of confidentiality.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ Only the legislative body acting as a body may agree to divulge confidential closed session information. With regard to attorney-client privileged communications, the entire body is the holder of the privilege, and only the entire body can decide to waive the privilege.⁶⁸

Before adoption of the Brown Act provision specifically prohibiting disclosure of closed session communications, agency attorneys and the Attorney General long opined 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 regarding pending litigation that was received during a closed session,⁶⁹ though the Attorney General has also concluded that a local agency is preempted from adopting an ordinance criminalizing public disclosure of closed session discussions.⁷⁰ In any event, in 2002, the Brown Act was amended to prescribe particular remedies for breaches of confidentiality. These remedies include injunctive relief and, if the breach is a willful disclosure of confidential information, disciplinary action against an employee and referral of a member of the legislative body to the grand jury.⁷¹

The duty of maintaining confidentiality, of course, must give way to the responsibility to disclose improper matters or discussions that may come up in closed sessions. In recognition of this public policy, under the Brown Act, a local agency may not penalize a disclosure of information learned during a closed session if the disclosure (1) is made in confidence to the district attorney or the grand jury due to a perceived violation of law; (2) is an expression of opinion concerning the propriety or legality of actions taken in closed session, including disclosure of the nature and extent of the illegal action; or (3) is information that is not confidential.⁷²

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 may be appropriate if it is a part of an action taken by the city council in closed session that must be reported publicly.⁷³ 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.

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

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54962.
- 2 Cal. Const. , Art. 1, § 3.
- 3 61 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 220 (1978); but see Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.8 (multijurisdictional law enforcement agencies are authorized to meet in closed session to discuss the case records of ongoing criminal investigations and other related matters).
- 4 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1.
- 5 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.5.
- 6 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.2.
- 7 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54954.5.
- 8 Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 54956.9, 54957.7.
- 9 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1, subd. (a).
- 10 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1, subd. (b).
- 11 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.2.
- 12 *Hamilton v. Town of Los Gatos* (1989) 213 Cal.App.3d 1050; 2 Cal. Code Regs. § 18707.
- 13 But see *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363 (protection of the attorney-client privilege alone cannot by itself be the reason for a closed session).
- 14 Cal. Gov. Code, § 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).
- 15 82 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 29 (1999).
- 16 *Page v. Miracosta Community College District* (2009) 180 Cal.App.4th 471.
- 17 “*The Brown Act*,” California Attorney General (2003), p. 40.
- 18 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.9, subd. (g).
- 19 See e.g., *Avco Community Developers, Inc. v. South Coast Regional Com.* (1976) 17 Cal.3d 785; *Trancas Property Owners Assn. v. City of Malibu* (2006) 138 Cal.App.4th 172.
- 20 *Trancas Property Owners Assn. v. City of Malibu* (2006) 138 Cal.App.4th 172.
- 21 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.9, subd. (e).
- 22 *Fowler v. City of Lafayette* (2020) 46 Cal.App.5th 360.
- 23 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1.
- 24 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.8.
- 25 *Shapiro v. San Diego City Council* (2002) 96 Cal.App.4th 904. See also 93 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 51 (2010) (redevelopment agency may not convene a closed session to discuss rehabilitation loan for a property already subleased to a loan recipient, even if the loan incorporates some of the sublease terms and includes an operating covenant governing the property); 94 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 82 (2011) (real estate closed session may address form, manner, and timing of consideration and other items that cannot be disclosed without revealing price and terms).
- 26 73 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 1 (1990).
- 27 Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 54956.8, 54954.5, subd. (b).
- 28 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1, subd. (a)(1).
- 29 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957, subd. (b).
- 30 63 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 153 (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 but only if related to the evaluation of a particular employee).

- 31 *Gillespie v. San Francisco Public Library Commission* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 1165; 85 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 77 (2002).
- 32 *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.
- 33 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957, subd. (b)(3).
- 34 88 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 16 (2005).
- 35 *Morrison v. Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles* (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 860.
- 36 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957, subd. (b); but see *Bollinger v. San Diego Civil Service Commission* (1999) 71 Cal.App.4th 568 (notice not required for closed session deliberations regarding complaints or charges when there was a public evidentiary hearing prior to closed session).
- 37 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.
- 38 *Moreno v. City of King* (2005) 127 Cal.App.4th 17.
- 39 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.
- 40 *Gillespie v. San Francisco Public Library Commission* (1998) 67 Cal.App.4th 1165.
- 41 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1, subd. (a)(5).
- 42 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.6.
- 43 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.6, subd. (b); see also 98 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 41 (2015) (a project labor agreement between a community college district and workers hired by contractors or subcontractors is not a proper subject of closed session for labor negotiations because the workers are not “employees” of the district).
- 44 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.6; 51 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 201 (1968).
- 45 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1, subd. (a)(6).
- 46 Cal. Gov. Code, § 3549.1.
- 47 Cal. Gov. Code, § 3540.
- 48 Cal. Gov. Code, § 3547.
- 49 Cal. Edu. Code, § 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).
- 50 Cal. Edu. Code, § 72122.
- 51 Cal. Edu. Code, § 60617.
- 52 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.96.
- 53 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.7.
- 54 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.
- 55 *McKee v. Los Angeles Interagency Metropolitan Police Apprehension Crime Task Force* (2005) 134 Cal. App.4th 354.
- 56 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.8.
- 57 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54962.
- 58 Cal. Health and Saf. Code, § 32106.
- 59 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.75.
- 60 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.81.

- 61 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.86.
- 62 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.87.
- 63 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54956.95.
- 64 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 34 (1965)
- 65 82 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 29 (1999); 2022 WL 1814322, 105 Ops. Cal.Atty.Gen. 89 (2022).
- 66 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54963.
- 67 *Kleitman v. Superior Court* (1999) 74 Cal.App.4th 324, 327. See also Cal. Gov. Code, § 54963.
- 68 *Roberts v. City of Palmdale* (1993) 5 Cal.4th 363.
- 69 80 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 231 (1997).
- 70 76 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 289 (1993).
- 71 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54963.
- 72 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54963.
- 73 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54957.1.



Chapter 6

REMEDIES

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Chapter 6

REMEDIES



A violation of the Brown Act can lead to invalidation of the agency's action, payment of a challenger's attorney fees, public embarrassment, and even criminal prosecution. As explained below, a legislative body often has an opportunity to correct a violation prior to the filing of a lawsuit. 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 of action taken

Any interested person, including the district attorney, may seek to invalidate certain actions of a legislative body on the grounds that they violate the Brown Act.¹ The following actions cannot be invalidated:

- Those taken in substantial compliance with the law. No Brown Act violation is found when the given notice substantially complies with the Brown Act, even when the notice erroneously cites the wrong Brown Act section but adequately advises the public that the legislative body will meet with legal counsel to discuss potential litigation in closed session.²
- Those involving the sale or issuance of notes, bonds, or other indebtedness, or any related contracts or agreements.³
- 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.⁴
- Those connected with the collection of any tax.⁵
- Those in which the complaining party had actual notice at least 72 hours prior to the regular meeting or 24 hours prior to the special meeting, as the case may be, at which the action is taken.⁶

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 and the nature of the claimed violation. This demand must be sent within 90 days of the alleged violation, or within 30 days if the action was taken in open session but in violation of Section 54954.2, which requires (subject to specific exceptions) that a legislative body may act only on items posted on the agenda.⁷ The legislative body then has up to 30 days to cure and correct its action.⁸ The purpose of this requirement is to offer the body an opportunity to consider whether a violation has occurred and, if so, consider correcting the action to avoid the costs of litigation. If the legislative body does not act, any lawsuit must be filed within the next 15 days.⁹

Although just about anyone has standing to bring an action for invalidation,¹⁰ the challenger must show prejudice as a result of the alleged violation.¹¹ An action to invalidate fails to state a cause of action against the agency if the body deliberated but did not take an action.¹²

Declaratory relief to determine whether past action violated the act

Any interested person, including the district attorney, may file a civil action to determine whether a past action of a legislative body constitutes a violation of the Brown Act and is subject to a mandamus, injunction, or declaratory relief action.¹³ Before filing an action, the interested person must, within nine months of the alleged violation of the Brown Act, submit a “cease and desist” letter to the legislative body clearly describing the past action and the nature of the alleged violation.¹⁴ The legislative body has 30 days after receipt of the letter to provide an unconditional commitment to cease and desist from the past action.¹⁵ If the body fails to take any action within the 30-day period or takes an action other than an unconditional commitment, the interested person has 60 days to file an action.¹⁶

The legislative body’s unconditional commitment must be approved at a regular or special meeting as a separate item of business and not on the consent calendar.¹⁷ The unconditional commitment must be substantially in the form set forth in the Brown Act.¹⁸ No legal action may thereafter be commenced regarding the past action.¹⁹ However, an action of the legislative body in violation of its unconditional commitment constitutes an independent violation of the Brown Act, and a legal action consequently may be commenced without following the procedural requirements for challenging past actions.²⁰

The legislative body may rescind its prior unconditional commitment by a majority vote of its membership at a regular meeting as a separate item of business not on the consent calendar. At least 30 days written notice of the intended rescission must be given to each person to whom the unconditional commitment was made and to the district attorney. Upon rescission, any interested person may commence a legal action regarding the past actions without following the procedural requirements for challenging past actions.²¹

Civil action to prevent future violations

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

- Stop or prevent violations or threatened violations of the Brown Act by members of the legislative body.
- 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.
- Compel the legislative body to audio-record its closed sessions.²²

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. 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 start over, or reaffirm the action if the local agency relied on the action and rescinding the action would prejudice the local agency.

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 when the public agency refuses to admit to the alleged violation or to renounce or curtail the practice.²³ A court may not compel elected officials to disclose their recollections of what transpired in a closed session.²⁴

Upon finding a violation of the Brown Act pertaining to closed sessions, a court may compel the legislative body to audio record its future closed sessions.²⁵ 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 audio recording if it finds there is good cause to think the Brown Act has been violated and make public a certified transcript of the relevant portion of the closed session recording.²⁶

Costs and attorney's fees

A plaintiff 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.²⁷ When evaluating how to respond to assertions that the Brown Act has been violated, elected officials and their lawyers should assume that attorney's fees will be awarded against the agency if a violation of the Brown Act is proven.

An attorney's 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.²⁸

Misdemeanor penalties

A violation of the Brown Act is a misdemeanor if (1) a member of the legislative body attends a meeting where action is taken in violation of the Brown Act, and (2) the member intends to deprive the public of information that the member knows or has reason to know the public is entitled to.²⁹

"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.³⁰ 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.³¹ 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.

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.

Some attorneys and district attorneys take the position that a Brown Act violation may be pursued criminally under Government Code section 1222.³² There is no case law to support this view. If anything, the existence of an express criminal remedy within the Brown Act would suggest otherwise.³³

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

Voluntary resolution

Successful enforcement actions for violations of the Brown Act can be costly to local agencies. 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 and its members. It is in the agency's interest 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.

Overall, 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.



Photo credit: Courtesy of the City of West Hollywood. Photo by Jon Viscott.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cal. Gov. Code, § 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), 54956 (special meetings), and 54956.5 (emergency situations). Violations of sections not listed above cannot give rise to invalidation actions, but they are subject to the other remedies listed in section 54960.1.
- 2 *Castaic Lake Water Agency v. Newhall County Water District* (2015) 238 Cal.App.4th 1196, 1198.
- 3 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1(d)(2).
- 4 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1(d)(3).
- 5 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1(d)(4).
- 6 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1(d)(5).
- 7 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1, subds. (b), (c)(1).
- 8 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1, subd. (c)(2).
- 9 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.1, subd. (c)(4).
- 10 *McKee v. Orange Unified School District* (2003) 110 Cal.App.4th 1310, 1318-1319.
- 11 *Cohan v. City of Thousand Oaks* (1994) 30 Cal.App.4th 547, 556, 561.
- 12 *Boyle v. City of Redondo Beach* (1999) 70 Cal.App.4th 1109, 1116-17, 1118.
- 13 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (a); Senate Bill No. 1003, Section 4 (2011-2012 Session).
- 14 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subds. (a)(1), (2).
- 15 The legislative body may provide an unconditional commitment after the 30-day period. If the commitment is made after the 30-day period, however, the plaintiff is entitled to attorneys' fees and costs. Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (b).
- 16 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (a)(4).
- 17 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (c)(2).

- 18 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (c)(1).
- 19 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (c)(3).
- 20 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (d).
- 21 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.2, subd. (e).
- 22 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960, subd. (a).
- 23 *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 and fn.6.
- 24 *Kleitman v. Superior Court* (1999) 74 Cal.App.4th 324, 334-36.
- 25 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960, subd. (b).
- 26 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960, subd. (c).
- 27 *Los Angeles Times Communications, LLC v. Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors* (2003) 112 Cal. App.4th 1313, 1327-29 and cases cited therein.
- 28 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54960.5.
- 29 Cal. Gov. Code, § 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.
- 30 Cal. Gov. Code, § 54952.6.
- 31 61 Ops.Cal.Atty.Gen. 283 (1978).
- 32 California Government Code section 1222 provides that “[e]very wilful omission to perform any duty enjoined by law upon any public officer, or person holding any public trust or employment, where no special provision is made for the punishment of such delinquency, is punishable as a misdemeanor.”
- 33 The principle of statutory construction known as *expressio unius est exclusio alterius* supports the view that section 54959 is the exclusive basis for criminal liability under the Brown Act.



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Rosenberg's Rules of Order

REVISED 2011

Simple Rules of Parliamentary Procedure for the 21st Century

By Judge Dave Rosenberg



MISSION AND CORE BELIEFS

To expand and protect local control for cities through education and advocacy to enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Rosenberg is a Superior Court Judge in Yolo County. He has served as presiding judge of his court, and as presiding judge of the Superior Court Appellate Division. He also has served as chair of the Trial Court Presiding Judges Advisory Committee (the committee composed of all 58 California presiding judges) and as an advisory member of the California Judicial Council. Prior to his appointment to the bench, Rosenberg was member of the Yolo County Board of Supervisors, where he served two terms as chair. Rosenberg also served on the Davis City Council, including two terms as mayor. He has served on the senior staff of two governors, and worked for 19 years in private law practice. Rosenberg has served as a member and chair of numerous state, regional and local boards. Rosenberg chaired the California State Lottery Commission, the California Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District, the Yolo County Economic Development Commission, and the Yolo County Criminal Justice Cabinet. For many years, he has taught classes on parliamentary procedure and has served as parliamentarian for large and small bodies.



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INTRODUCTION

The rules of procedure at meetings should be simple enough for most people to understand. Unfortunately, that has not always been the case. Virtually all clubs, associations, boards, councils and bodies follow a set of rules — *Robert's Rules of Order* — which are embodied in a small, but complex, book. Virtually no one I know has actually read this book cover to cover. Worse yet, the book was written for another time and for another purpose. If one is chairing or running a parliament, then *Robert's Rules of Order* is a dandy and quite useful handbook for procedure in that complex setting. On the other hand, if one is running a meeting of say, a five-member body with a few members of the public in attendance, a simplified version of the rules of parliamentary procedure is in order.

Hence, the birth of *Rosenberg's Rules of Order*.

What follows is my version of the rules of parliamentary procedure, based on my decades of experience chairing meetings in state and local government. These rules have been simplified for the smaller bodies we chair or in which we participate, slimmed down for the 21st Century, yet retaining the basic tenets of order to which we have grown accustomed. Interestingly enough, *Rosenberg's Rules* has found a welcoming audience. Hundreds of cities, counties, special districts, committees, boards, commissions, neighborhood associations and private corporations and companies have adopted *Rosenberg's Rules* in lieu of *Robert's Rules* because they have found them practical, logical, simple, easy to learn and user friendly.

This treatise on modern parliamentary procedure is built on a foundation supported by the following four pillars:

1. **Rules should establish order.** The first purpose of rules of parliamentary procedure is to establish a framework for the orderly conduct of meetings.
2. **Rules should be clear.** Simple rules lead to wider understanding and participation. Complex rules create two classes: those who understand and participate; and those who do not fully understand and do not fully participate.
3. **Rules should be user friendly.** That is, the rules must be simple enough that the public is invited into the body and feels that it has participated in the process.
4. **Rules should enforce the will of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority.** The ultimate purpose of rules of procedure is to encourage discussion and to facilitate decision making by the body. In a democracy, majority rules. The rules must enable the majority to express itself and fashion a result, while permitting the minority to also express itself, but not dominate, while fully participating in the process.

Establishing a Quorum

The starting point for a meeting is the establishment of a quorum. A quorum is defined as the minimum number of members of the body who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted. The default rule is that a quorum is one more than half the body. For example, in a five-member body a quorum is three. When the body has three members present, it can legally transact business. If the body has less than a quorum of members present, it cannot legally transact business. And even if the body has a quorum to begin the meeting, the body can lose the quorum during the meeting when a member departs (or even when a member leaves the dais). When that occurs the body loses its ability to transact business until and unless a quorum is reestablished.

The default rule, identified above, however, gives way to a specific rule of the body that establishes a quorum. For example, the rules of a particular five-member body may indicate that a quorum is four members for that particular body. The body must follow the rules it has established for its quorum. In the absence of such a specific rule, the quorum is one more than half the members of the body.


The Role of the Chair

While all members of the body should know and understand the rules of parliamentary procedure, it is the chair of the body who is charged with applying the rules of conduct of the meeting. The chair should be well versed in those rules. For all intents and purposes, the chair makes the final ruling on the rules every time the chair states an action. In fact, all decisions by the chair are final unless overruled by the body itself.

Since the chair runs the conduct of the meeting, it is usual courtesy for the chair to play a less active role in the debate and discussion than other members of the body. This does not mean that the chair should not participate in the debate or discussion. To the contrary, as a member of the body, the chair has the full right to participate in the debate, discussion and decision-making of the body. What the chair should do, however, is strive to be the last to speak at the discussion and debate stage. The chair should not make or second a motion unless the chair is convinced that no other member of the body will do so at that point in time.

The Basic Format for an Agenda Item Discussion

Formal meetings normally have a written, often published agenda. Informal meetings may have only an oral or understood agenda. In either case, the meeting is governed by the agenda and the agenda constitutes the body's agreed-upon roadmap for the meeting. Each agenda item can be handled by the chair in the following basic format:



First, the chair should clearly announce the agenda item number and should clearly state what the agenda item subject is. The chair should then announce the format (which follows) that will be followed in considering the agenda item.

Second, following that agenda format, the chair should invite the appropriate person or persons to report on the item, including any recommendation that they might have. The appropriate person or persons may be the chair, a member of the body, a staff person, or a committee chair charged with providing input on the agenda item.

Third, the chair should ask members of the body if they have any technical questions of clarification. At this point, members of the body may ask clarifying questions to the person or persons who reported on the item, and that person or persons should be given time to respond.

Fourth, the chair should invite public comments, or if appropriate at a formal meeting, should open the public meeting for public input. If numerous members of the public indicate a desire to speak to the subject, the chair may limit the time of public speakers. At the conclusion of the public comments, the chair should announce that public input has concluded (or the public hearing, as the case may be, is closed).

Fifth, the chair should invite a motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who makes the motion.

Sixth, the chair should determine if any member of the body wishes to second the motion. The chair should announce the name of the member of the body who seconds the motion. It is normally good practice for a motion to require a second before proceeding to ensure that it is not just one member of the body who is interested in a particular approach. However, a second is not an absolute requirement, and the chair can proceed with consideration and vote on a motion even when there is no second. This is a matter left to the discretion of the chair.

Seventh, if the motion is made and seconded, the chair should make sure everyone understands the motion.

This is done in one of three ways:

1. The chair can ask the maker of the motion to repeat it;
2. The chair can repeat the motion; or
3. The chair can ask the secretary or the clerk of the body to repeat the motion.

Eighth, the chair should now invite discussion of the motion by the body. If there is no desired discussion, or after the discussion has ended, the chair should announce that the body will vote on the motion. If there has been no discussion or very brief discussion, then the vote on the motion should proceed immediately and there is no need to repeat the motion. If there has been substantial discussion, then it is normally best to make sure everyone understands the motion by repeating it.

Ninth, the chair takes a vote. Simply asking for the “ayes” and then asking for the “nays” normally does this. If members of the body do not vote, then they “abstain.” Unless the rules of the body provide otherwise (or unless a super majority is required as delineated later in these rules), then a simple majority (as defined in law or the rules of the body as delineated later in these rules) determines whether the motion passes or is defeated.

Tenth, the chair should announce the result of the vote and what action (if any) the body has taken. In announcing the result, the chair should indicate the names of the members of the body, if any, who voted in the minority on the motion. This announcement might take the following form: “The motion passes by a vote of 3-2, with Smith and Jones dissenting. We have passed the motion requiring a 10-day notice for all future meetings of this body.”

Motions in General

Motions are the vehicles for decision making by a body. It is usually best to have a motion before the body prior to commencing discussion of an agenda item. This helps the body focus.

Motions are made in a simple two-step process. First, the chair should recognize the member of the body. Second, the member of the body makes a motion by preceding the member’s desired approach with the words “I move ...”

A typical motion might be: “I move that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”


The chair usually initiates the motion in one of three ways:

1. **Inviting the members of the body to make a motion**, for example, “A motion at this time would be in order.”
2. **Suggesting a motion to the members of the body**, “A motion would be in order that we give a 10-day notice in the future for all our meetings.”
3. **Making the motion**. As noted, the chair has every right as a member of the body to make a motion, but should normally do so only if the chair wishes to make a motion on an item but is convinced that no other member of the body is willing to step forward to do so at a particular time.

The Three Basic Motions

There are three motions that are the most common and recur often at meetings:

The basic motion. The basic motion is the one that puts forward a decision for the body’s consideration. A basic motion might be: “I move that we create a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.”



The motion to amend. If a member wants to change a basic motion that is before the body, they would move to amend it. A motion to amend might be: “I move that we amend the motion to have a 10-member committee.” A motion to amend takes the basic motion that is before the body and seeks to change it in some way.

The substitute motion. If a member wants to completely do away with the basic motion that is before the body, and put a new motion before the body, they would move a substitute motion. A substitute motion might be: “I move a substitute motion that we cancel the annual fundraiser this year.”

“Motions to amend” and “substitute motions” are often confused, but they are quite different, and their effect (if passed) is quite different. A motion to amend seeks to retain the basic motion on the floor, but modify it in some way. A substitute motion seeks to throw out the basic motion on the floor, and substitute a new and different motion for it. The decision as to whether a motion is really a “motion to amend” or a “substitute motion” is left to the chair. So if a member makes what that member calls a “motion to amend,” but the chair determines that it is really a “substitute motion,” then the chair’s designation governs.

A “friendly amendment” is a practical parliamentary tool that is simple, informal, saves time and avoids bogging a meeting down with numerous formal motions. It works in the following way: In the discussion on a pending motion, it may appear that a change to the motion is desirable or may win support for the motion from some members. When that happens, a member who has the floor may simply say, “I want to suggest a friendly amendment to the motion.” The member suggests the friendly amendment, and if the maker and the person who seconded the motion pending on the floor accepts the friendly amendment, that now becomes the pending motion on the floor. If either the maker or the person who seconded rejects the proposed friendly amendment, then the proposer can formally move to amend.

Multiple Motions Before the Body

There can be up to three motions on the floor at the same time. The chair can reject a fourth motion until the chair has dealt with the three that are on the floor and has resolved them. This rule has practical value. More than three motions on the floor at any given time is confusing and unwieldy for almost everyone, including the chair.

When there are two or three motions on the floor (after motions and seconds) at the same time, the vote should proceed *first* on the *last* motion that is made. For example, assume the first motion is a basic “motion to have a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” During the discussion of this motion, a member might make a second motion to “amend the main motion to have a 10-member committee, not a five-member committee to plan and put on our annual fundraiser.” And perhaps, during that discussion, a member makes yet a third motion as a “substitute motion that we not have an annual fundraiser this year.” The proper procedure would be as follows:

First, the chair would deal with the *third* (the last) motion on the floor, the substitute motion. After discussion and debate, a vote would be taken first on the third motion. If the substitute motion *passed*, it would be a substitute for the basic motion and would eliminate it. The first motion would be moot, as would the second motion (which sought to amend the first motion), and the action on the agenda item would be completed on the passage by the body of the third motion (the substitute motion). No vote would be taken on the first or second motions.

Second, if the substitute motion *failed*, the chair would then deal with the second (now the last) motion on the floor, the motion to amend. The discussion and debate would focus strictly on the amendment (should the committee be five or 10 members). If the motion to amend *passed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) as *amended*. If the motion to amend *failed*, the chair would then move to consider the main motion (the first motion) in its original format, not amended.

Third, the chair would now deal with the first motion that was placed on the floor. The original motion would either be in its original format (five-member committee), or if *amended*, would be in its amended format (10-member committee). The question on the floor for discussion and decision would be whether a committee should plan and put on the annual fundraiser.

To Debate or Not to Debate


The basic rule of motions is that they are subject to discussion and debate. Accordingly, basic motions, motions to amend, and substitute motions are all eligible, each in their turn, for full discussion before and by the body. The debate can continue as long as members of the body wish to discuss an item, subject to the decision of the chair that it is time to move on and take action.

There are exceptions to the general rule of free and open debate on motions. The exceptions all apply when there is a desire of the body to move on. The following motions are not debatable (that is, when the following motions are made and seconded, the chair must immediately call for a vote of the body without debate on the motion):

Motion to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately adjourn to its next regularly scheduled meeting. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to recess. This motion, if passed, requires the body to immediately take a recess. Normally, the chair determines the length of the recess which may be a few minutes or an hour. It requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to fix the time to adjourn. This motion, if passed, requires the body to adjourn the meeting at the specific time set in the motion. For example, the motion might be: “I move we adjourn this meeting at midnight.” It requires a simple majority vote.



Motion to table. This motion, if passed, requires discussion of the agenda item to be halted and the agenda item to be placed on “hold.” The motion can contain a specific time in which the item can come back to the body. “I move we table this item until our regular meeting in October.” Or the motion can contain no specific time for the return of the item, in which case a motion to take the item off the table and bring it back to the body will have to be taken at a future meeting. A motion to table an item (or to bring it back to the body) requires a simple majority vote.

Motion to limit debate. The most common form of this motion is to say, “I move the previous question” or “I move the question” or “I call the question” or sometimes someone simply shouts out “question.” As a practical matter, when a member calls out one of these phrases, the chair can expedite matters by treating it as a “request” rather than as a formal motion. The chair can simply inquire of the body, “any further discussion?” If no one wishes to have further discussion, then the chair can go right to the pending motion that is on the floor. However, if even one person wishes to discuss the pending motion further, then at that point, the chair should treat the call for the “question” as a formal motion, and proceed to it.

When a member of the body makes such a motion (“I move the previous question”), the member is really saying: “I’ve had enough debate. Let’s get on with the vote.” When such a motion is made, the chair should ask for a second, stop debate, and vote on the motion to limit debate. The motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body.

NOTE: A motion to limit debate could include a time limit. For example: “I move we limit debate on this agenda item to 15 minutes.” Even in this format, the motion to limit debate requires a two-thirds vote of the body. A similar motion is a *motion to object to consideration of an item*. This motion is not debatable, and if passed, precludes the body from even considering an item on the agenda. It also requires a two-thirds vote.

Majority and Super Majority Votes

In a democracy, a simple majority vote determines a question. A tie vote means the motion fails. So in a seven-member body, a vote of 4-3 passes the motion. A vote of 3-3 with one abstention means the motion fails. If one member is absent and the vote is 3-3, the motion still fails.

All motions require a simple majority, but there are a few exceptions. The exceptions come up when the body is taking an action which effectively cuts off the ability of a minority of the body to take an action or discuss an item. These extraordinary motions require a two-thirds majority (a super majority) to pass:

Motion to limit debate. Whether a member says, “I move the previous question,” or “I move the question,” or “I call the question,” or “I move to limit debate,” it all amounts to an attempt to cut off the ability of the minority to discuss an item, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to close nominations. When choosing officers of the body (such as the chair), nominations are in order either from a nominating committee or from the floor of the body. A motion to close nominations effectively cuts off the right of the minority to nominate officers and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to object to the consideration of a question. Normally, such a motion is unnecessary since the objectionable item can be tabled or defeated straight up. However, when members of a body do not even want an item on the agenda to be considered, then such a motion is in order. It is not debatable, and it requires a two-thirds vote to pass.

Motion to suspend the rules. This motion is debatable, but requires a two-thirds vote to pass. If the body has its own rules of order, conduct or procedure, this motion allows the body to suspend the rules for a particular purpose. For example, the body (a private club) might have a rule prohibiting the attendance at meetings by non-club members. A motion to suspend the rules would be in order to allow a non-club member to attend a meeting of the club on a particular date or on a particular agenda item.

Counting Votes

The matter of counting votes starts simple, but can become complicated.


Usually, it’s pretty easy to determine whether a particular motion passed or whether it was defeated. If a simple majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then one vote more than 50 percent of the body is required. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is three in favor and two opposed, the motion passes. If it is two in favor and three opposed, the motion is defeated.

If a two-thirds majority vote is needed to pass a motion, then how many affirmative votes are required? The simple rule of thumb is to count the “no” votes and double that count to determine how many “yes” votes are needed to pass a particular motion. For example, in a seven-member body, if two members vote “no” then the “yes” vote of at least four members is required to achieve a two-thirds majority vote to pass the motion.

What about tie votes? In the event of a tie, the motion always fails since an affirmative vote is required to pass any motion. For example, in a five-member body, if the vote is two in favor and two opposed, with one member absent, the motion is defeated.

Vote counting starts to become complicated when members vote “abstain” or in the case of a written ballot, cast a blank (or unreadable) ballot. Do these votes count, and if so, how does one count them? The starting point is always to check the statutes.

In California, for example, for an action of a board of supervisors to be valid and binding, the action must be approved by a majority of the board. (California Government Code Section 25005.) Typically, this means three of the five members of the board must vote affirmatively in favor of the action. A vote of 2-1 would not be sufficient. A vote of 3-0 with two abstentions would be sufficient. In general law cities in



California, as another example, resolutions or orders for the payment of money and all ordinances require a recorded vote of the total members of the city council. (California Government Code Section 36936.) Cities with charters may prescribe their own vote requirements. Local elected officials are always well-advised to consult with their local agency counsel on how state law may affect the vote count.

After consulting state statutes, step number two is to check the rules of the body. If the rules of the body say that you count votes of “those present” then you treat abstentions one way. However, if the rules of the body say that you count the votes of those “present and voting,” then you treat abstentions a different way. And if the rules of the body are silent on the subject, then the general rule of thumb (and default rule) is that you count all votes that are “present and voting.”

Accordingly, under the “present and voting” system, you would **NOT** count abstention votes on the motion. Members who abstain are counted for purposes of determining quorum (they are “present”), but you treat the abstention votes on the motion as if they did not exist (they are not “voting”). On the other hand, if the rules of the body specifically say that you count votes of those “present” then you **DO** count abstention votes both in establishing the quorum and on the motion. In this event, the abstention votes act just like “no” votes.

How does this work in practice?

Here are a few examples.

Assume that a five-member city council is voting on a motion that requires a simple majority vote to pass, and assume further that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Accordingly, the default rule kicks in and we count all votes of members that are “present and voting.” If the vote on the motion is 3-2, the motion passes. If the motion is 2-2 with one abstention, the motion fails.

Assume a five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, and further assume that the body has no specific rule on counting votes. Again, the default rule applies. If the vote is 3-2, the motion fails for lack of a two-thirds majority. If the vote is 4-1, the motion passes with a clear two-thirds majority. A vote of three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain” also results in passage of the motion. Once again, the abstention is counted only for the purpose of determining quorum, but on the actual vote on the motion, it is as if the abstention vote never existed — so an effective 3-1 vote is clearly a two-thirds majority vote.

Now, change the scenario slightly. Assume the same five-member city council voting on a motion that requires a two-thirds majority vote to pass, but now assume that the body **DOES** have a specific rule requiring a two-thirds vote of members “present.” Under this specific rule, we must count the members present not only for quorum but also for the motion. In this scenario, any abstention has the same force and effect as if it were a “no” vote. Accordingly, if the votes were three “yes,” one “no” and one “abstain,” then the motion fails. The abstention in this case is treated like a “no” vote and effective vote of 3-2 is not enough to pass two-thirds majority muster.

Now, exactly how does a member cast an “abstention” vote?

Any time a member votes “abstain” or says, “I abstain,” that is an abstention. However, if a member votes “present” that is also treated as an abstention (the member is essentially saying, “Count me for purposes of a quorum, but my vote on the issue is abstain.”) In fact, any manifestation of intention not to vote either “yes” or “no” on the pending motion may be treated by the chair as an abstention. If written ballots are cast, a blank or unreadable ballot is counted as an abstention as well.

Can a member vote “absent” or “count me as absent?” Interesting question. The ruling on this is up to the chair. The better approach is for the chair to count this as if the member had left his/her chair and is actually “absent.” That, of course, affects the quorum. However, the chair may also treat this as a vote to abstain, particularly if the person does not actually leave the dais.

The Motion to Reconsider

There is a special and unique motion that requires a bit of explanation all by itself; the motion to reconsider. A tenet of parliamentary procedure is finality. After vigorous discussion, debate and a vote, there must be some closure to the issue. And so, after a vote is taken, the matter is deemed closed, subject only to reopening if a proper motion to consider is made and passed.

A motion to reconsider requires a majority vote to pass like other garden-variety motions, but there are two special rules that apply only to the motion to reconsider.

First, is the matter of timing. A motion to reconsider must be made at the meeting where the item was first voted upon. A motion to reconsider made at a later time is untimely. (The body, however, can always vote to suspend the rules and, by a two-thirds majority, allow a motion to reconsider to be made at another time.)

Second, a motion to reconsider may be made only by certain members of the body. Accordingly, a motion to reconsider may be made only by a member who voted in the majority on the original motion. If such a member has a change of heart, he or she may make the motion to reconsider (any other member of the body — including a member who voted in the minority on the original motion — may second the motion). If a member who voted in the minority seeks to make the motion to reconsider, it must be ruled out of order. The purpose of this rule is finality. If a member of minority could make a motion to reconsider, then the item could be brought back to the body again and again, which would defeat the purpose of finality.

If the motion to reconsider passes, then the original matter is back before the body, and a new original motion is in order. The matter may be discussed and debated as if it were on the floor for the first time.



Courtesy and Decorum

The rules of order are meant to create an atmosphere where the members of the body and the members of the public can attend to business efficiently, fairly and with full participation. At the same time, it is up to the chair and the members of the body to maintain common courtesy and decorum. Unless the setting is very informal, it is always best for only one person at a time to have the floor, and it is always best for every speaker to be first recognized by the chair before proceeding to speak.

The chair should always ensure that debate and discussion of an agenda item focuses on the item and the policy in question, not the personalities of the members of the body. Debate on policy is healthy, debate on personalities is not. The chair has the right to cut off discussion that is too personal, is too loud, or is too crude.

Debate and discussion should be focused, but free and open. In the interest of time, the chair may, however, limit the time allotted to speakers, including members of the body.

Can a member of the body interrupt the speaker? The general rule is “no.” There are, however, exceptions. A speaker may be interrupted for the following reasons:

Privilege. The proper interruption would be, “point of privilege.” The chair would then ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of privilege relate to anything that would interfere with the normal comfort of the meeting. For example, the room may be too hot or too cold, or a blowing fan might interfere with a person’s ability to hear.

Order. The proper interruption would be, “point of order.” Again, the chair would ask the interrupter to “state your point.” Appropriate points of order relate to anything that would not be considered appropriate conduct of the meeting. For example, if the chair moved on to a vote on a motion that permits debate without allowing that discussion or debate.

Appeal. If the chair makes a ruling that a member of the body disagrees with, that member may appeal the ruling of the chair. If the motion is seconded, and after debate, if it passes by a simple majority vote, then the ruling of the chair is deemed reversed.

Call for orders of the day. This is simply another way of saying, “return to the agenda.” If a member believes that the body has drifted from the agreed-upon agenda, such a call may be made. It does not require a vote, and when the chair discovers that the agenda has not been followed, the chair simply reminds the body to return to the agenda item properly before them. If the chair fails to do so, the chair’s determination may be appealed.

Withdraw a motion. During debate and discussion of a motion, the maker of the motion on the floor, at any time, may interrupt a speaker to withdraw his or her motion from the floor. The motion is immediately deemed withdrawn, although the chair may ask the person who seconded the motion if he or she wishes to make the motion, and any other member may make the motion if properly recognized.

Special Notes About Public Input

The rules outlined above will help make meetings very public-friendly. But in addition, and particularly for the chair, it is wise to remember three special rules that apply to each agenda item:

Rule One: Tell the public what the body will be doing.

Rule Two: Keep the public informed while the body is doing it.

Rule Three: When the body has acted, tell the public what the body did.



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EXHIBIT A
TO RESOLUTION NO. 2023-R 062

CITY OF CULVER CITY
COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT

Policy Number: 3002

General Subject: City Council and Administration

Date Issued: 10/23/2023

Specific Subject: City Commissions, Boards and
Committees; Appointed
Representatives to Outside
Agencies and Boards

Effective Date: 10/23/2023

Resolution No: 2023-R 062

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Policy is to provide general guidelines, consistent with the City Charter, Culver City Municipal Code and other applicable laws, on topics related to the City's Commissions, Board and Committees, as well as to representatives appointed to outside agencies and boards.

At the time of the adoption of this Policy, the following Commissions, Boards and Committees exist:

Commissions:

- Civil Service Commission
- Cultural Affairs Commission
- Parks, Recreation and Community Services Commission
- Planning Commission

Boards:

- Landlord Tenant Mediation Board

Committees:

Existing Committees are identified in Attachment No. 1 to this Policy, which may be updated from time to time, as Committees are dissolved and/or created, without further action of the City Council.

Except as specifically noted, this Policy shall apply to all Commissions, Boards and Committees that exist at the time of the adoption of this Policy and are established subsequent to the adoption of this Policy.

II. ELIGIBILITY:

Appointees to all Commissions, Boards and Committees shall be residents of the City, none of whom shall hold any paid office or employment in the City Government, unless the vacant seat, bylaws or other operating documents specifically allow for the

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appointment of non-residents to a Board or Committee and/or the appointment of a City employee.

It is the intent of the City Council to achieve and maintain a diverse composition of City Commissions, Boards and Committees, with respect to race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, actual or perceived gender identity, disability and age.

Minors, who will be age 16 or older at the start of their term of office, are eligible to apply with the consent of their parent or legal guardian.

No person may serve on more than one Commission, Board or Committee at the same time, unless authorized and approved by City Council.

III. BACKGROUND:

The City Charter provides the City Council with the authority, by ordinance, to establish and abolish such commissions and boards as it may determine, from time to time, to be necessary for the effective and efficient governance of the City. The Culver City Municipal Code establishes the Civil Service, Cultural Affairs, Planning, and Parks, Recreation and Community Services commissions, and the Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board, as well as their respective powers and duties. The Charter further gives the City Council the authority, by ordinance, resolution or other action, to establish and abolish committees for a specified purpose. In general, the primary difference between commissions and boards versus committees are the means by which the bodies are created, including their roles and duties. Commissions and boards are created by ordinance and can only be dissolved by ordinance. Similarly, the role, and duties and authority of a commission and board are also set by ordinance and can only be modified by ordinance. Whereas, the creation, role and duties of a committee are established by City Council resolution. Each body, whether a commission, board or committee, only has the authority that is vested in the body by the City Council.

Each Commission, Board and Committee (CBC) acts in an advisory capacity, providing findings and recommendations, to the City Council on matters pertaining to policies, procedures, rules and regulations within the subject matter jurisdiction of that CBC. The City Council gives great weight to a CBC's advice and recommendations when making policy decisions for the governance of the City.

Certain CBCs' duties expand beyond an advisory capacity, as set forth in the Culver City Municipal Code. For example:

- The Civil Service Commission may serve in a quasi-judicial capacity when considering employee disciplinary appeals and, in that capacity, its decisions are final, unless the appellant seeks judicial review.

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- The Cultural Affairs Commission may serve in a quasi-judicial capacity when considering public art applications and, in that capacity, its decisions are final, unless appealed to the City Council.
- Members of the Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board may serve as mediators of disputes relating to rent increases.
- The Planning Commission may serve in a quasi-judicial capacity when considering certain land use permit applications and, in that capacity, its decisions are final, unless appealed to the City Council.

In addition to advisory roles, CBCs may advise on, plan, host or produce an event that has been approved by City Council, in accordance with Section VII of this Policy, or periodically, may take on other roles as authorized by the City Council, in its sole discretion.

As a result of the different objectives of an advisory body versus a policy-making body, the Council may periodically override a CBC. This does not reflect negatively on the capabilities or integrity of any CBC or any individual Commissioner or Board or Committee Member (CBC Member). Rather, it is the natural course of the City Council's overall responsibilities.

Each CBC Member has a role in the evaluation and analysis of issues, contributing to the overall mission of providing quality public services and being responsive to community needs and sensitivities. Once appointed, however, a CBC Member no longer acts solely as a private individual, but a representative of the City. Their conduct must be consistent with the obligations of public office.

IV. GENERAL ROLE OF THE CITY'S COMMISSIONS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES:

The City of Culver City prides itself on the participatory nature of its local government and encourages civic engagement by members of the public. The City's CBCs play an important role in the efficient governance of the City and provide interested community members with the opportunity to serve the public.

As advisory bodies to the City Council, the CBCs' advice on topics within their purview, combined with factual research performed by City Staff, provide the City Council with a more complete picture of many issues. In the role of advisors to the City Council, CBCs make recommendations concerning City policy, and may administer policies adopted by the City Council. However, unless expressly authorized to do so by the City Council, CBCs shall not make policy.

Each Commission's and Board's specific powers and duties are set forth in the Culver City Municipal Code. A Committee's specific powers and duties may be established by resolution or other action of the City Council. Each CBC may establish its own bylaws,

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which must be approved by the City Council. To the extent any CBCs' bylaws are in conflict with this Policy, this Policy shall control.

Pursuant to and consistent with Culver City Municipal Code Section 3.03.035, the City Council retains jurisdiction on all items which may otherwise be considered by the various CBCs. Either the City Council or the City Manager, in their sole discretion, may determine to have any item heard directly by the City Council.

V. CODE OF CONDUCT:

As representatives of the City Council and the City, it is important that CBC Members set an example of conduct appropriate for their key roles. Therefore, CBC Members are required to adhere to the following:

Preparation for Meetings

It is necessary for CBC Members to be prepared to discuss the items on the Agenda. Therefore, CBC Members should, whenever possible, be provided with agendas and any agenda packets at least three business days prior to the meeting date. Questions should be posed to staff prior to the meeting to allow staff the time necessary to prepare and provide responses.

Punctuality/Attire

The City Council views CBC Members as professionals in their respective areas. This, coupled with the public nature of CBC meetings, makes it important for CBC Members to begin meetings on time. Further, when attending official City events, including monthly CBC meetings, CBC Members shall be appropriately attired. Business casual shall be the generally acceptable mode of attire.

Conduct at Meetings

The Ralph M. Brown Act ("Brown Act") is the most important open-meetings law for local governments in California. Compliance with the Brown Act is a critical role for every CBC and its Members. Violations of the Brown Act may result in the action taken being invalidated and the award of attorney's fees and costs if there is a successful legal action against a public agency. Certain intentional violations may result in criminal prosecution. The City offers regular trainings on the Brown Act for CBC Members. CBC Members who believe they may have a concern related to Brown Act compliance shall consult with the City Attorney.

Pursuant to the Brown Act, CBCs can only take action on items that appear on the Agenda. Generally, agenda items will be placed by staff as per a work plan or direction approved by City Council or by consensus of the CBC members. CBC Members wishing to have an item agendaized for discussion must obtain consensus (a majority of the CBC

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Members' support) to place an item on a future agenda. A majority of the CBC Members' votes to place an item on a future agenda does not indicate an implicit approval or denial of the agenda item itself.

While considering items at CBC meetings, differences of opinion may arise, which is a natural part of the process in a participatory government. However, it is important that CBC Members conduct meetings with proper decorum and respect.

Rosenberg's Rules of Order shall be the parliamentary standard and guide for the conduct of meetings, but no action of the CBC shall be invalidated, or the legality thereof otherwise affected, by the failure or omission to observe or follow said rules.

Each CBC Member shall be cautious in expressing views which might be considered views of the entire CBC. Until an issue has been fully considered and a decision or recommendation rendered by the full CBC, no individual CBC Member should purport to represent the collective opinion of other CBC Members. When speaking at City Council meetings, other meetings, or to members of the public, a Member may state they are a member of the CBC; however, they must also specifically state they are speaking as an individual and any statements, views or opinions expressed are their own. A member may only speak on behalf of a CBC if the Member has been authorized by a majority of such CBC to speak on the CBC's behalf about a particular matter. Best practice is for the Chair or Vice Chair to be the representative of choice for representing the entire body.

Fair and Unbiased Consideration of Issues

Pursuant to the letter and spirit of the Brown Act and appropriate ethical standards, CBC Members shall approach items before the CBC in a fair and unbiased manner. It is the responsibility of each CBC Member to ensure that the programs, policies and activities it oversees provide equal access and opportunities to all persons without regard to race, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, immigration status, citizenship, color, ethnicity, or national origin, ancestry, socioeconomic status, income or other protected categories or personal characteristics.

While each member is entitled to their viewpoint, the quality of CBC recommendations relies on consideration of all viewpoints; therefore, individual CBC Members shall be cautious of creating the appearance of predetermined bias. Consistent with this requirement, CBC Members shall conduct themselves in an appropriate manner at all times, including prior to and during meetings and while in contact with the press and members of the public.

Role of the Chair

The Chair is the presiding officer of the CBC meeting. In that role, the Chair is responsible for maintaining order and decorum. The Chair calls the meetings to order, recognizes speakers, and manages the agenda. It is also the Chair's responsibility to ensure the person who has the floor is given the attention of other CBC Members and the public and

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is allowed to speak without undue or inappropriate interruption, and that all individuals are treated with due respect.

During certain proceedings, such as an official Public Hearing conducted by some Commissions, legal procedures are in place to ensure all persons are able to address a Commission during consideration of an Agenda Item. The Chair is responsible for guiding the Commission's discussion in accordance with the procedures either contained in the staff report or reported by staff.

Issuance and Use of Official City Identification

Each Commissioner shall be provided with an official City photo identification card (similar to employees) which states the name of the office held and other pertinent data identifying the individual. Business cards shall also be provided to Commissioners upon request. Board and Committee Members have the option of purchasing business cards at their own expense.

Board and Committee Members shall be provided with a general identification card (including Culver City logo lanyard) and a City lapel pin for identification purposes.

All City Identification (including identification cards, business cards, etc.) shall only be used in the conduct of City-related business. If City Identification is lost and replacement requested, the CBC Member may be required to pay for the cost of replacement.

Upon vacating office, CBC Members shall return all City Identification to the City Manager or designee.

Inappropriate use of City Identification items shall be classified as Major Misconduct, as defined below, with significant consequences.

Member Misconduct

As appointees of the City Council, CBC Members serve at the pleasure of the City Council. Violations of this Policy shall be handled in the following manners:

- (1) *Minor Misconduct:* Issues will be reported to the Department Head of the department that provides staff support to the CBC. The Department Head shall then attempt to resolve the issue with the City Manager and Member.
- (2) *Major Misconduct:* Issues of this level will involve a preliminary review by the City Manager's and City Attorney's Offices and may lead to a recommendation to the City Council to remove the Member from their seat.

The City Manager shall inform the City Council of all Member misconduct. Following are examples of misconduct which may subject CBC Members to disciplinary action(s):

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- (1) *Minor misconduct:* Examples include, but are not limited to, lack of preparation for a meeting; late arrival at meetings; consistent absence from meetings; failure to complete mandatory training; discourteous behavior in relations with fellow CBC Members, staff, and/or members of the public.
- (2) *Major misconduct:* Examples include, but are not limited to, repeated instances of minor misconduct; misuse of official City identification; violation of City Council Policies (including, but not limited to, the City Council Policies addressing violence in the workplace; acceptance of gifts or gratuities; drugs and alcohol in the workplace; discrimination and harassment in the workplace; smoking in the workplace; and other policies as may be adopted by the City Council from time to time).

While the above items are presented as examples, the determination of what (if any) discipline to impose, up to and including removal from a CBC, shall be at the sole discretion of the City Council.

Allegations of misconduct shall be reviewed and considered in a manner that ensures there is not disparate treatment of CBC Members.

Discipline of CBC Members by the City Council

In accordance with the CCMC, should the City Council determine, in its sole discretion, that a CBC Member may have allegedly acted in a manner inconsistent with law or this Policy, the City Council may determine to impose any or all of the following:

- (1) Provide direction to the City Manager to meet with the CBC Member(s) to informally investigate alleged misconduct and provide counseling to the CBC Member(s) to indicate behavior consistent with law and this Policy.
- (2) Provide direction to the City Manager to formally investigate CBC Member misconduct and report findings to the City Council.
- (3) Require the CBC Member to appear before the City Council at a public meeting to hear charges of misconduct.
- (4) Determine, in the City Council's sole discretion and with or without cause, to remove a CBC Member from their seat. Such removal shall only be effective upon a majority vote of the City Council.

CBC Member Attendance and Forfeiture of Seat

Annually, in May, the City Clerk shall provide the City Council with a summary of attendance by Members at their respective CBC meetings.

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Any Member who is absent from three consecutive meetings of their respective CBC or a total of five meetings in any six-month period shall automatically forfeit their membership on said CBC, provided, however, that there shall be no such forfeiture in the event of any of the following:

- (1) When a Member is unable to attend due to illness or physical incapacity.
- (2) When the City Council has pre-approved a leave of absence due to special circumstances.

For purposes of this Policy, attendance at a meeting shall be established when a Member is present for a minimum of 50% of the duration of the meeting. Duration of the meeting shall be the total time period elapsed from the convening of the meeting until the adjournment of the meeting, including any recesses.

VI. COMMISSION, BOARD AND COMMITTEE INTERACTION WITH THE CITY COUNCIL AND OTHER COMMISSIONS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

In an effort to facilitate regular communications between the City Council and its Commissions, joint meetings between the City Council and each of the Commissions shall be scheduled on an annual basis.

Periodically, but no less than biannually, each CBC shall submit to the City Council a written report on their respective activities.

On each City Council meeting agenda, there is an opportunity for a representative(s) from a CBC to provide a report to the City Council. CBC Members wishing to make such a report at a City Council meeting must have the authority from their respective CBC to make the report and shall coordinate with Department staff and the City Clerk's Office to request time on the agenda.

Nothing in this Policy shall preclude the City Council from requesting a report from any CBC at any time.

CBC Members' communications with the City Council may be subject to the Brown Act and Members shall take measures to ensure such communications do not create a serial meeting of their CBC or the City Council.

A CBC does not have the authority to require the City Council or any City Council Member to attend or otherwise participate in CBC meetings or activities.

The City Council has created separate CBCs for the purpose of a particular CBC advising the Council on matters related to specific topics and issues. Accordingly, a CBC may not determine to work in collaboration with another CBC, without the express approval of the City Council. On occasion, when there is an overlap of subject matter among CBCs, a CBC body may, through City Staff, recommend to the City Council that a particular CBC body take the lead on a particular issue/topic. Collaboration among CBCs is rare and

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shall only occur with the approval of the City Council. Any approved collaboration between CBCs must comply with the requirements of the Brown Act.

Requests to City Council for collaboration among CBC members shall be made to the respective CBC Department and the City Clerk. Such requests shall be agendaized in an expeditious manner and will appear on the first City Council meeting agenda after the date of the request, when feasible.

VII. COMMISSION, BOARD AND COMMITTEE WORK PLANS AND INTERACTION WITH THE CITY STAFF

As part of maintaining proper decorum and respect, CBC Members shall interact with staff with proper politeness and courtesy. Issues and concerns of CBC Members and/or City Staff shall be addressed to the Department Head of the department that provides staff support to the CBC. Should resolution not be reached after consultation with the Department Head, Members may consult with the City Manager's Office.

No City Staff members are assigned to be full-time assistants to CBC Members. Rather, staff serve and support the CBC as a whole and as part of their overall responsibilities. The priority of duties and responsibilities are established by the City Council and administered by the City Manager and the respective Department Head.

CBCs, as bodies, and individual Members may make routine informational requests to staff that do not require significant research or other allocation of staff resources. Neither CBCs nor individual CBC Members shall provide direction to staff (other than to place items on future Agendas). Agenda item requests which require the dedication of significant time resources shall not be undertaken without the approval of the Department Head and/or the City Manager.

Department Work Plans are approved by the City Council each year, as part of the City's budget process. CBCs wishing to consider items that are not part of the Department's approved Work Plans, which would require significant research or other allocation of staff resources, must receive prior City Council approval, prior to being placed on a CBC agenda. Such requests that require City Council approval shall be made through the Department Head, who shall vet the matter and may provide additional information/comments to the City Council, along with the CBC's request.

CBCs may recommend the creation of their own Work Plans, beyond the Department's approved Work Plans and those directed by the City Council. CBCs' Work Plans shall be created in collaboration with City Staff and presented to City Council for approval. Approval of CBC Work Plans may or may not be approved, based on availability of City Staff resources and the desire of City Council. From time to time, the City Council may remand certain topics to a specific CBC body to research and/or provide recommendations to the City Council. Council-directed topics shall take priority over any CBC Work Plan.

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Standing and ad hoc subcommittees of CBC bodies may be created in accordance with the requirements of the Brown Act. Such subcommittees may only be created for matters within the purview of the specific CBC and only as needed.

A CBC may only advise on, plan, host or produce an event that is included in the approved Department Work Plans, approved CBC Work Plans, or otherwise approved by City Council. In order for a CBC event to be considered for City Council approval, the CBC must identify the following minimum information:

- (1) Amount of City Staff time required;
- (2) Other City resources needed;
- (3) Amount of City funding requested; and
- (4) Any other information requested by City Staff that may be necessary for City Council to have an informed discussion.

VIII. ORIENTATION/TRAINING:

Member Training/Orientation is important to prepare new Members for the key role they play. Ongoing training for Members is also important to keep Commissioners abreast of the latest developments in their field(s).

Member Orientation and Training

To ensure newly appointed Members are best prepared for their important advisory roles, new CBC appointees are required to attend an orientation within 90 days of their appointment. Failure to attend such orientation may result in forfeiture of the appointment. The orientation program will provide new Members with information in the following basic areas, including, but not limited to:

- General City Operations
- The State Open Meetings Law (The Brown Act)
- General Parliamentary Procedure (Rosenberg's Rules) and Etiquette
- Ethics, Including Conflicts of Interest Regulations and mandatory filings
- Public Records Act
- Electronic Voting System
- City Email Registration
- Sexual Harassment Prevention and Education Training
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The City Council shall consider funding that would provide ongoing training to Members during each fiscal year as necessary. Members are encouraged to recommend applicable training for consideration in future year budgets. This training should include training specific to the area of responsibility of the Member. Requests to participate in

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training opportunities shall be subject to the prior approval of the respective Department Head and the City Manager. Members may be required to attend certain trainings annually, such as Sexual Harassment Prevention and Education Training.

IX. MEETINGS OF COMMISSIONS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES:

Frequency of Meetings

CBCs shall meet on a regular, but as needed basis. For the purpose of increasing efficiency and conserving staff and financial resources, the City Manager shall have the authority to make the final determination as to whether there is sufficient business to be conducted during any given period to warrant a CBC meeting being convened. This determination shall be based upon input from the respective Department Head and the CBC Chair.

Quorum

A quorum is defined as the majority of the members of a body who must be present at a meeting for business to be legally transacted. One exception to this rule is that in the absence of a quorum, a lesser number may declare a meeting adjourned. For each CBC, a quorum shall be determined based on the total number of seats on the CBC, whether or not such seat is filled or vacant. For example, in a nine-member body a quorum is five. If there are two vacancies on such body, leaving only seven seated positions, a quorum is still five.

Meeting Minutes

Meeting minutes are an important summary of the actions taken by the CBC on items that appear on the CBC Agenda (Action Minutes). They are not meant to capture each word (Verbatim Minutes). To facilitate more rapid production and transmittal of the minutes, Staff shall prepare and CBCs shall approve Action Minutes similar to those produced for the City Council meetings. Where there is a dissenting opinion, a one sentence description of the nature of the opinion may be included upon the request of the dissenting Member(s). CBC Members or members of the public interested in additional information may seek a copy of the audio/video recording of the meeting from City Staff or view it online.

With the adoption of this standardized form of minutes, it shall be the goal of each CBC to consider approval of their minutes at the next regularly scheduled meeting of their CBC.

Compensation

In accordance with Culver City Municipal Code Section 3.03.005, compensation of Commissioners, if any, may be established by resolution of the City Council.

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Members of the Commissions and Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board shall be entitled to annual compensation in the amounts set forth in Attachment No. 2 to this Policy, which attachment may be updated from time to time upon approval of the City Council. The Chief Financial Officer shall pay such compensation upon the filing of a requisition by the Staff liaison to the respective body, certifying the member of that body is entitled to such compensation pursuant to the terms of this Policy.

Payments shall be suspended during any extended absence by a Commissioner or Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board Member of three months or longer. Compensation may also be withheld until such time as the Commissioner or Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board Member has fully completed and submitted all documentation and training(s), as required by the City Clerk.

Compensation shall be considered annually by the City Council as part of the City's fiscal year budget.

X. APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE AGENCIES AND BODIES:

Representatives appointed by City Council to an outside agency or board shall report to City Council as needed, but not less than every six months. The appointed representative shall contact the City Clerk to request an item be placed on a City Council agenda for this purpose.

The appointed representative shall not take a position on behalf of the City, at their respective agency or board meeting, which has not been previously authorized or directed by the City Council.

As issues arise that need immediate attention, appointed representatives may communicate with their respective City staff liaison. The City Council Subcommittee that has subject matter jurisdiction consistent with the subject matter of the outside agency/board shall be the liaison for the appointed representative (i.e., the LAX/FAA Ad Hoc Subcommittee shall be the liaison for the representative of the LAX Community Noise Roundtable). If no City Council Subcommittee exists related to the subject matter of the outside agency/board, then the Mayor shall serve as the liaison for the appointed representative.

****This Policy supersedes the following City Council Policies:***

- ***Policy No. 3002 issued on May 29, 2007 by Resolution No. 2007-R029***
- ***Policy No. 3101 issued on January 23, 1995 by Resolution No. 95-R005***
- ***Policy No. 3102 issued on October 25, 1999 by Resolution No. 99-R086***
- ***Policy No. 3302 issued on January 23, 1995 by Resolution No. 95-R005***
- ***Policy No. 3303 issued on January 23, 1995 by Resolution No. 95-R005***
- ***Policy No. 3304 issued on January 23, 1995 by Resolution No. 95-R005 and revised on June 13, 2011 by Resolution No. 2011-R065***

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- *Policy No. 2007-01 issued on May 29, 2007 by Resolution No. 2007-R029, revised on June 27, 2011 by Resolution No. 2011-R063, and revised on September 25, 2017 by Resolution No. 2017-R086*
- *Policy No. 3002 issued on January 27, 2020 by Resolution No. 2020-R004*
- *Policy No. 3002 issued on May 10, 2021 by Resolution No. 2020-040*

**EXHIBIT A
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**ATTACHMENT NO. 1
TO
CITY COUNCIL POLICY 3002
CITY COMMISSIONS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES; APPOINTED
REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE AGENCIES AND BOARDS**

List of Current City Committees

- Advisory Committee on Housing and Homelessness
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Disability Advisory Committee
- Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee
- Fiesta La Ballona Committee
- Finance Advisory Committee
- General Plan Advisory Committee

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**ATTACHMENT 2
TO
CITY COUNCIL POLICY 3002
CITY COMMISSIONS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES; APPOINTED
REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE AGENCIES AND BOARDS**

The City Council hereby establishes the following annual compensation for its City Commissions and Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board, which shall be dispersed in accordance with a payment schedule determined by the City's Chief Financial Officer:

Civil Service Commission	\$599
Cultural Affairs Commission	\$599
Parks, Recreations and Community Services Commission	\$599
Planning Commission	\$599
Landlord-Tenant Mediation Board	\$25 per meeting; \$25 per mediation