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IPIB Monthly Column

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Q&A from the Iowa Public Information Board

By Margaret E. Johnson, Executive Director

Question: How do I know my agenda is compliant with Iowa Code chapter 21?

Answer: The guidelines in Iowa Code section 21.4 should be considered the minimum requirements for an agenda. The agenda should include more than general topics, such as “old business”, “new business”, “action items”, without further description.

The agenda should describe the proposed topics in a way that informs citizens of the business to be conducted at the meeting. As an example: “Resolution 21-12” does not inform the public of what will be considered; “Resolution to rename city park” does inform the citizens. “Budget” is not as descriptive as “FY21 budget revisions: parks, library, emergency services.”

In its opinion in KCOB/KLVN, Inc. v. Jasper County Bd. of Sup’rs., 473 N.W.2d 171 (Iowa 1991), the Iowa Supreme Court set forth a guideline for agendas: “... The sufficiency of the detail on the tentative agenda must be viewed in the context of surrounding events.” The Court said that the test for a tentative agenda was whether the information was reasonably sufficient to alert interested people as to the subject matter to be considered.

An Attorney General’s opinion (Stork to McDonald, 81-8-24) makes clear that material prepared for discussion at a public meeting is a public record under Iowa Code chapter 22, the law for inspection of public records. An individual may request copies of that material in advance of the public meeting.

Specific information about Iowa transparency laws and training guidance is available at the Iowa Public Information Board website: www.ipib.iowa.gov or by calling the IPIB at 515-725-1781.

Board Members

Joan Corbin • E. J. Giovannetti • Keith Luchtel • Monica McHugh
Frederick Morain • Julie Pottorff • Suzan Stewart • Stan Thompson

Did You Know that the Iowa Public Information Board staff is available to assist you with questions or problems involving open meetings and public records in Iowa? During the month of November 2020, 44 contacts were made with the Iowa Public Information Board office.

TYPE	November 2020
Formal complaints	11
Advisory opinions	1
Declaratory orders	0
Informal complaints	3
Informal requests	21
Miscellaneous	8
TOTAL:	44

Who can contact the IPIB and how long does it take? Any person can contact the IPIB for assistance by telephone (515-725-1781), by email, or on the IPIB website. In 2020, 687 identifiable people have contacted the IPIB. Of these, 334 were private citizens, 269 were government officials or employees, and 84 were members of the media. In 2020, 68% of the incoming contacts were resolved the first day, 12% were resolved in one to five days, and 20% were resolved in six or more days. Opinions, rulings, FAQs, reports, and training documents are available on the IPIB website – www.ipib.iowa.gov.