

SUNSHINE ADVISORY

A Bulletin on Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records Laws

By Attorney General Tom Miller – September 2007

Advance Agendas for Public Meetings

Agendas are the public's invitation to watch government at work.

Agendas for public meetings play a vital role in the ability of citizens to watch the decision-making process that affects public affairs at every level of government in Iowa. Clear and effective agendas are a matter of good policy, because they keep citizens informed and help public officials be better prepared for meetings. Good agendas also are a matter of law -- Iowa's Open Meetings Law.

Here are some basic principles for advance agendas for public meetings:

- Tentative agendas must be posted in a prominent place at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting, except in case of a bona fide emergency. (*Iowa Code* section 21.4.) For example, tentative agendas may be posted at an accessible bulletin board designated for that purpose at the office and provided to news media who have filed a request for notice.
- Agendas must provide notice sufficient to inform the public of the specific actions to be taken and matters to be discussed at the meeting. (An agenda that merely states "Approve minutes, old business, new business" does not provide reasonable notice to the public.) Notice also must include the time, date and place of meetings.
- The precise detail needed to communicate effectively will depend on the situation, including whether the public is familiar with an issue. The less the public knows about an issue, the more detail is needed in the tentative agenda.

For example, an agenda listing "mid-semester review of administrative performance" probably is sufficient to inform the public that personnel issues will be discussed, but it would not be sufficient to alert the public about a general discussion of administrative issues.

Officials and citizens alike should remember: Meeting agendas are the public's invitation to watch government in action. So, agendas should take care to describe the specific actions to be taken and matters to be discussed in public meetings.

Citizens who have inquiries or complaints may call the Iowa Citizens' Aide/Ombudsman Office – toll-free at 888-IA-OMBUD (888-426-6283.)

[This Sunshine Advisory was first issued in March 2002.]



Iowa Attorney General's Office: Hoover Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

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