

# SUNSHINE ADVISORY

A Bulletin on Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records Laws

By Attorney General Tom Miller -- November 2007

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## Minutes of Public Meetings Should be Accurate, Complete, Accessible

Accurate minutes of public meetings are a key tool for conducting the public's business in an open and accountable fashion. Minutes are a vital organizational tool for any government body, and they are a crucial way for citizens to review or examine public action taken on their behalf.

Minutes create a permanent record -- accessible upon request -- of who met, when they met, what they decided, and by what votes. Iowa's Open Meetings Law (Ch. 21 of the Iowa Code) spells out the basic requirements for minutes.

### **Here are some key principles of Iowa law for minutes of public meetings:**

#### **Minutes of an open session shall always include:**

- The date, time and place of a meeting, and which members were present.
- Actions taken – with sufficient information to reflect the members' votes (no secret ballots.)

#### **If a closed session is held, minutes and decisions in open session shall include:**

- The reason for holding a closed session, with a reference to the specific legal basis.
- The roll call vote of each member on the question of whether to go into closed session.
- Final action on any matter discussed in closed session (no final votes in closed session.)

#### **If applicable, open session minutes shall also reflect:**

- If the meeting was held on less than 24 hours notice, an explanation of why it was impossible or impractical to provide more notice.
- If the meeting was held at a time or place not reasonably accessible to the public, an explanation of why it was impossible or impractical to meet at an accessible time or place.
- If the meeting was held electronically (by telephone, for example), an explanation of why it was impossible or impractical to hold the meeting in person.

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

"Sunshine Advisory" bulletins provide information on Iowa's public records and open meetings laws – our "Sunshine Laws." The bulletins are a resource for government officials and citizens. Local officials should obtain legal advice from their counsel, such as the city or county attorney.



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On the Web: [www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.org](http://www.IowaAttorneyGeneral.org)