


**MEETING MINUTES:
STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE**

Finding the right balance between what is required by law and what the Council expects





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MEETING MINUTES

Over the past 20 years, technology has changed and society, in general, has become more casual and not as formal. While some roles have changed, the role of the Municipal Clerk has not changed. The Municipal Clerk must:

- Be a great listener.
- Capture accurate information.
- Be professional in the presentation.

How do we become comfortable with preparing minutes while maintaining accuracy and presentation?





FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

SECTION 30-4-90. Minutes of meetings of public bodies.

(a) All public bodies shall keep written minutes of all of their public meetings. Such minutes shall include but need not be limited to:

- (1) The date, time and place of the meeting.
- (2) The members of the public body recorded as either present or absent.
- (3) The substance of all matters proposed, discussed or decided and, at the request of any member, a record, by an individual member, of any votes taken.
- (4) Any other information that any member of the public body requests be included or reflected in the minutes.



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT

SECTION 30-4-90. Minutes of meetings of public bodies.

- (b) The minutes shall be public records and shall be available within a reasonable time after the meeting except where such disclosure would be inconsistent with Section 30-4-70 of this chapter.
- (c) All or any part of a meeting of a public body may be recorded by any person in attendance by means of a tape recorder or any other means of sonic or video reproduction, except when a meeting is closed pursuant to Section 30-4-70 of this chapter, provided that in so recording there is no active interference with the conduct of the meeting. Provided, further, that the public body is not required to furnish recording facilities or equipment.



WHAT ARE MEETING MINUTES?

Minutes are an official summary of what took place in a meeting, focusing primarily on what was DONE by the group (objective focus) and not what was said or done by each member. If it is desired to capture the essence of the discussion, this should be done in a concise point-form summary and without recording "who said what."

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Remember that minutes serve several purposes:

- They are an historical record of a group's decisions and actions.
- They are a reminder of who was given assignments.
- They are evidence of deadlines.
- They are a benefit for people who are absent when decisions are made.

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TYPES OF MEETING MINUTES

- > Formal
- > Work Session / Work Shop
- > Committees
- > Boards and Commissions
- > Utility Commissions
- > Executive Session



FORMS OF MINUTES

> Verbatim

Word for word transcript of meeting.

- * Individuals may not share how they really feel and withhold comments.
- * Can create undesired confrontation among the Council / Committee members.
- * Time consuming on staff.

> Actions and Summation

- * Summary of conversation focusing on major points discussed.
- * Recording of actions and directives.

> Actions Only



Consider . . . Will the Information be Important days, months or years from now?



MEETING MINUTES – Q & A

1. Who determines the form of minutes for your municipality?

- a. Municipal Clerk
- b. City Manager / Administrator
- c. Mayor / City Council
- d. Citizens / Constituents / Public
- e. Don't know. Minutes have always been prepared the same way.

Have you changed or consider changing your form of minutes?
 Do you have minute taking standards or policies?



MEETING MINUTES – Q & A

2. Describe how your minutes are taken.

- a. Shorthand / Steno Pad
- b. Laptop
- c. Tape or digital recording
- d. Audio program recording (Granicus / Liberty/IQM2/MeetingSense)
- e. Combination of above

Do you maintain your draft or working notes?
 Do you check recording equipment prior to meetings?
 Do you use a template format in preparing minutes?



MEETING MINUTES – Q & A

3. Are your meetings videoed and/or available to the public through television and/or Internet?

- Which meetings are videoed and/or available to the public?*
- What are the positives and negatives to having them available to the public?*
- Have you found an Increase/ decrease in requests for minutes since making video available to the public?*
- Have you found an Increase/decrease in meeting attendance?*



MEETING MINUTES – Q & A

4. What are some of the issues you have encountered regarding preparation and approval of minutes?

- a. Accuracy of Information / template
- b. Lack of Information / Too much Information
- c. Grammar and written communications
- d. Timeliness



KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL MEETING MINUTES

- 1. Prepare a template on your computer for use in preparing minutes. Include information as required by FOIA and Municipal Code.
- 2. Check recording equipment prior to the meeting.
- 3. Be clear, comprehensive, objective, and diplomatic. Do not interpret what happened or include emotional exchanges; simply report it.
- 4. Do not include unnecessary information that could prove harmful in the future.
- 5. Include information "for the record" from Council member.



KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL MEETING MINUTES

- 6. Include directives given during the meeting.
- 7. Record Motions word for word for accuracy.
- 8. Do not be afraid to interrupt to request information, if necessary. Collect information prior to or after meeting, if possible.
- 9. Refer to Agenda presentations and documents instead of retyping information.
- 10. Recommend following Agenda in preparing minutes; however, use your better judgment.



KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL MEETING MINUTES

- 11. Stay on track with primary conversation of meeting.
- 12. Prepare and finalize the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting.
- 13. Prepare minutes in a professional manner with correct grammar and written communications.
- 14. Prepare minutes which are understandable and easy to read by everyone.
- 15. Proofread minutes with care.



QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- 1. Do you list the person who moves and seconds a motion?
- 2. Do you recorded the vote in the minutes?
- 3. Should withdrawn motions be recorded?
- 4. Should minutes be taken for Ad-Hoc Committees?
- 5. Should executive session minutes be taken?



ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

- Roberts Rules recommends that the following should not be included in minutes:
1. Opinions or Interpretations of the recording secretary
 2. Judgmental phrases "heated debates" - avoid personal observations and use adjectives and adverbs (they become opinions of the writer which may not be correct)
 3. Discussions
 4. Motions that are withdrawn
 5. Name of the person who seconded a motion
 6. Flowery language
 7. Detailed reports
 8. Transcripts of the meeting (verbatim)



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

1. Refrain from using non-essential phrases as dependent clauses.

- "in order "
- "that"
- "opportunity to"
- "to make sure"
- "insofar"

Incorrect: They want to sit close in order to hear what is going on.
 Correct: They want to sit close to hear what is going on.



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

2. Refrain from overuse of verbs the use of "very," and becoming too descriptive.

Acknowledged	Clarified	Endorsed	Queried	Reviewed
Added	Commented	Explained	Questioned	Said
Advised	Concluded	Expressed	Recited	Shared
Announced	Consummated	Implied	Recommended	Stated
Appealed	Conveyed	Listed	Referred	Stressed
Appraised	Declared	Mentioned	Related	Suggested
Asked	Described	Noted	Remarked	Summarized
Assured	Detailed	Opposed	Replied	Thanked
Brought to our attention	Directed attention to	Outlined	Requested	Told
Called our attention to	Discussed	Pointed out	Required	Voted
Cautioned	Emphasized	Presented	Responded	Welcomed



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

- 3. Refrain from using educated words or phrases that the general public may not understand or may have difficulty interpreting. Keep it simple.
- 4. First reference to a person, company, organization, and the like, should include entire name and title written out. Use of acronym can be used throughout rest of the document.
Examples:
Engineer David Jones of the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) will be speaking to us today. Mr. Jones has worked for SCDOT for 10 years.
- 5. Maintain tense throughout the paragraph.
will / would shall / should can / could may / might / must



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

- 6. Refer to the same words, phrases, titles, etc., referenced throughout the document to eliminate any confusion.
Code of Ordinances vs. City Code
City Council vs. Council Members
- 7. Condense sentences as you can. Include question and responses in one sentence as you can.
"Councilman Sudduth asked how the proposed funding would be used, and Ms. Jones responded it would be used for patrol cars."



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

- 8. Confirm who is speaking throughout the paragraph and document by using the individual's name and not "he" or "she."
Councilman Smith requested a meeting be scheduled to discuss texting while driving further. Councilman Jones requested the meeting be scheduled prior to October 30. He said he would like to have the Police Chief and Municipal Judge in attendance at the meeting.
Councilman Smith requested a meeting be scheduled to discuss texting while driving further. He said he would like to have the Police Chief and Municipal Judge in attendance at the meeting. Councilman Jones requested the meeting be scheduled prior to October 30



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

- 9. Include topic information in first sentence of Agenda item section. (Do not assume a title of section will explain the discussion.)
- 10. Do not use a single sentence as a paragraph; determine its importance or relocate to paragraph before or after sentence.
- 11. Use headers and page numbers on secondary pages; helps with organizing paper copies of minutes.
- 12. Use same format, fonts, justifications, etc., throughout document.
- 13. Prepare professional document.



GRAMMAR SUGGESTIONS

- 14. Dates
 - Ordinal numbers may be used when the date comes before the month.
1st of November
 - Cardinal numbers are to be used when the month comes before the date.
June 1
 - Commas are used between date of month, and after the year when expressing a complete month, date, and year:
September 11, 2001, is a day our country will never forget.
 - Commas are not used between month and year in a sentence:
We would like to begin the program in June 2014.



KEY ADVICE

Write as though the public is reading the minutes for the first time and understand the actions and directives given.

Accuracy and simplicity are key!



RESOURCES

Mina's Guide to Minute Taking... Eil Mina
About.com
Businessmanagementdaily.com
Wildapricot.com
Governancehumphrey.blogspot.com
Ptoday.com
Eilmina.com
Business Management Daily.com
Business Training Works.com
Robert's Rules of Order
MASC Uptown (April 2012) *Did we agree to that? The Importance of meeting minutes*