



ETHICS IN A NUTSHELL Jan. 2015
Government in the Sunshine:
A Guideline for Boards and Commissions

Carla Miller, Director Ethics, Compliance and Oversight, 630-1476
“ECO” office; email at ethics@coj.net Hotline: 630-1015



All members of Boards and Commissions must know about and follow two important Florida laws: the Sunshine Law and Public Records Law. The purpose of these laws is to give the citizens of our community more transparency and information about their government.

I. SUNSHINE LAW–(Florida Statute 286.011)

There are 3 major requirements of this law:

- 1) Your Board meetings must be open and accessible to the public
- 2) Reasonable advance notice of the meetings must be given
- 3) Written minutes must be taken and open for inspection

****NOTICE MEETINGS; MAKE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC; AND TAKE MINUTES!!**

What is considered a “meeting”? A meeting is any time you communicate (phone, mail, email, talking) with another member of your commission and you are talking about subjects that are likely to come up in front of your commission/board. This includes sub-committee meetings. You cannot discuss any public business or matters connected with your board with another member of your board outside of a “noticed meeting”. This includes: casual gatherings, talking in the hall, chance meetings, emails, telephone conversations, and letters or emails that are used to develop a position.

Activities which are OK:

-- talking with other board members about your family or sports;

II. PUBLIC RECORDS (Florida Statute section 119)



Requirements: Documents generated by a commission or board are public records and must be open for public inspection and copying. If you receive any request for the records or documents of your board or commission, immediately forward them to your city liaison so it can be handled correctly and in a timely fashion.

1. What items are covered as “public documents”?

Everything—all documents, papers, emails, letters, books, tapes, photos, software, videos, audio recordings, or other material regardless of how it is kept; if it is made in connection with the official business of your board or commission.

This can even include non-final documents, such as draft documents or notes you take to remember events.

2. What documents are not covered?

Personal notes used to prepare other documents, strictly personal emails or other personal writings; and notes given by you to someone else to type up a final document.

In general, however, you should assume that all of your writings in connection with your board duties may become public records as you write them and that citizens can ask for copies of them.

3. Penalties: up to one year in jail and fines; or a civil fine of \$500 or civil law suits.