



GREG ANDERSON
PRESIDENT
Council Memeber,
At-Large Group 4
Office (904) 630-1398
Fax (904) 630-2906
E-Mail: GAnderson@coj.net

117 West Duval Street
City Hall, Suite 425
Jacksonville, FL 32202

OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

October 8, 2015
4:00 p.m.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the Council

FROM: Council President Greg Anderson
At-Large Group 4

RE: Electronic Communication during Council Meetings

I find it imperative as Council President to address the texting issue that has recently become the subject of much media coverage. In 2009, the NY Times ran an article titled "When Texting Is Wrong". It cited the battles between teenagers' texting at the dinner table and their parents; the stress between managers and younger employees' texting during meetings; and of course the well documented dangers of texting while driving.

That same year, Santa Clara University, published a paper entitled, "Web 1 & 2: Ethical Issues for Government Officials", that discussed the interplay of new communication technologies and their effect on government. The article contrasted the benefits of a more informed public with the risks of a loss in governmental transparency.

Disruptive technologies and products will continue to stretch our traditional policies and procedures. In my opinion, how we react to these changes should be guided by the simple principles of equal access and transparency.

An effective government requires citizens' input and communication; however during meetings we have specific procedures to ensure that our guiding principles are followed and allow us to conduct a timely and orderly meeting. Further, there should be reasonable safeguards to protect all persons who may unknowingly become a conduit between council members and thereby cause Sunshine violations.

There are many places that the use of cell phones is prohibited and others where their use would be considered rude or disrespectful such as during airplane travel, restaurants, theaters and places of worship. An argument can be made that texting is important for emergency communication especially when a family member or friend needs to get in touch with you. In this regard, texting has become a safety net for us.

But there is too much at stake to not address the practice, especially when it can potentially be used to promote or defeat legislation during a vote. Each of you manages your office toward your own goals. As President, it is my duty to manage the council so that each member and the body as a whole are successful.

To this end, I believe it is a best practice for council members to turn off cell phones while seated at the dais. I understand this may be hardship for those who have children or family at home or those of us trying to balance careers and public service; however, public trust is paramount to excellence in government. I'll be sending out a written policy outlining this in great detail. In addition, the General Counsel will be providing a summary of this for your review.

Finally, legislation was introduced this week addressing this concern. You will have an opportunity to debate, amend and vote on this legislation and I will yield to your wisdom. In the meantime, the policy to turn off cell phones while on the dais is effective immediately.