

## Collective Concurrence From the Forthcoming 2015 Administrative Guidelines

The attempt to develop a collective concurrence among a majority of the members, also known as conducting a serial meeting, outside of a meeting held in accordance with the Brown Act requirements, is a prohibited meeting. A serial meeting is best described as a series of discussions or deliberations held between one member and any other member(s) that does not comply with the Brown Act's public noticing and comment requirements, for the purpose of, or with the result of, developing a concurrence among the members regarding an action to be taken.

This type of serial discussion does not allow for public notice and participation in the decision-making process, and therefore violates the purpose of the Brown Act. The use of intermediaries or technological devices for this purpose is also prohibited. Although contact between one member and one other would not be a majority of the membership, the communication could continue in a chain fashion, and result in a collective concurrence. Alternatively, one member could contact several others individually, and develop a collective concurrence in that fashion. Because one party to the communication may unknowingly participate in what becomes a collective concurrence, the better practice is to engage in all discussions about matters within the board's jurisdiction at a noticed public meeting.

Distribution or availability of electronic documents should be considered as well. Individual members of a community planning group should not share their thoughts or opinions, or any documents, with any member outside a noticed public meeting. Documents intended for discussion at a meeting may be provided to the chair, if he/she permits, for distribution with the agenda or to members in advance of the meeting. Any electronic memos or documents that relate to community planning group business should either be shared AT a noticed meeting or, if shared electronically, posted to the group's website so that all group members and members of the public have equal access.

Note that collective concurrence does not apply to the development of positions by a community planning group AT a noticed meeting. Also, members of a community planning group may receive staff briefings as long as the comments or positions of the members are not purposefully communicated to other group members by the staff providing the briefings. Be aware that the possibility of serial communication could also occur as a result of communications with other individuals, such as members of the public or an applicant.

## **BROWN ACT RELATED TO PUBLIC RECORDS ACT**

**54957.5.** (a) Notwithstanding Section 6255 or any other provisions of law, agendas of public meetings and any other writings, when distributed to all, or a majority of all, of the members of a legislative body of a local agency by any person in connection with a matter subject to discussion or consideration at an open meeting of the body, are disclosable public records under the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Division 7 of Title 1), and shall be made available upon request without delay. However, this section shall not include any writing exempt from public disclosure under Section 6253.5, 6254, 6254.3, 6254.7, 6254.15, 6254.16, or 6254.22.

(b) (1) If a writing that is a public record under subdivision (a), and that relates to an agenda item for an open session of a regular meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, is distributed less than 72 hours prior to that meeting, the writing shall be made available for public inspection pursuant to paragraph (2) at the time the writing is distributed to all, or a majority of all, of the members of the body.

(2) A local agency shall make any writing described in paragraph (1) available for public inspection at a public office or location that the agency shall designate for this purpose. Each local agency shall list the address of this office or location on the agendas for all meetings of the legislative body of that agency. The local agency also may post the writing on the local agency's Internet Web site in a position and manner that makes it clear that the writing relates to an agenda item for an upcoming meeting.

(3) This subdivision shall become operative on July 1, 2008.

(c) Writings that are public records under subdivision (a) and that are distributed during a public meeting shall be made available for public inspection at the meeting if prepared by the local agency or a member of its legislative body, or after the meeting if prepared by some other person. These writings shall be made available in appropriate alternative formats upon request by a person with a disability, as required by Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132), and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof.

(d) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the legislative body of a local agency from charging a fee or deposit for a copy of a public record pursuant to Section 6253, except that no surcharge shall be imposed on persons with disabilities in violation of Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132), and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof.

(e) This section shall not be construed to limit or delay the public's right to inspect or obtain a copy of any record required to be disclosed under the requirements of the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Division 7 of Title 1). Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to require a legislative body of a local agency to place any paid advertisement or any other paid notice in any publication.