



# Procedures Manual City of Oxnard City Council

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(City Council Resolution No. 14,915; *see also*, Housing  
Authority Resolution No. 1,291)

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**CITY OF OXNARD**  
*Mission Statement*

It is the mission of the City government to ensure that Oxnard will have clean, safe, prosperous and attractive neighborhoods with open, transparent government.

Specifically, the City fulfills its function by:

- Addressing the needs of the residents through the City Council, the appointed commissions, and the City staff.
- Providing easy and open access to information and encouraging dialogue, enabling residents to actively engage in civic life.
- Providing for the safety of its residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Providing timely and responsive service.
- Providing special assistance to those in need.
- Functioning effectively, efficiently and with accountability.
- Creating a positive and desirable workplace environment for City employees.
- Managing change for the betterment of the City.
- Creating and maintaining a viable revenue stream, and providing for the unpredictable nature of our economy.
- Implementing and maintaining City infrastructure, facilities, and programs.
- Formulating sound environmental policies.
- Recognizing and supporting the City's diverse neighborhoods and population.
- Acting as a responsible member of the greater region.

The City Council formed the Oxnard City Council Procedures Committee in January 2011, and appointed Mayor Pro Tem Irene Pinkard and Councilman Tim Flynn to serve on the Committee. The Committee adopted the following mission statement on March 3, 2011.

**OXNARD CITY COUNCIL PROCEDURES COMMITTEE**  
*Mission Statement*

It is the mission of the City government to ensure Oxnard is a desirable, safe, and vibrant community in which to live and conduct business and to respond to the values and priorities of the residents in an open and transparent manner. In order to accomplish this mission, the Oxnard Council Procedures Committee has been created to develop guidelines and rules under which Councilmembers will operate and perform their role as legislators of the City of Oxnard.

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# Introduction

The Oxnard City Council establishes policies and priorities for the community and is responsible for the fiscal health of a public corporation with an annual budget, including as of the date of last approved revision of this Procedures Manual an operating and capital improvement budget of nearly \$500 million per year. Oxnard is a “full service” city, with its own police, fire, water, wastewater and environmental resources (solid waste) departments and is an organization with more than 1,300 full-time equivalent employees that has Citywide assets totaling nearly \$3 billion in value (roads, buildings, parks, etc).

## Purpose of the Procedures Manual

By developing and agreeing to adhere to the following guidelines and procedures, the effective administration of City Council affairs will be greatly enhanced. This Procedures Manual shall also apply when the Council acts as the Successor Agency to the Oxnard Community Development Commission, as well as to the proceedings of the Oxnard Housing Authority and the other public entities for which the City Council acts as the governing body. While attempting not to be overly restrictive, procedures are established so that expectations and practices can be clearly articulated to guide the Mayor and Councilmembers in their actions. It is anticipated that this Procedures Manual will be reviewed every two years by the City Council and may be revised from time to time.

## Overview of City Documents

This procedures manual provides a summary of important aspects of City Council activities. However, it cannot incorporate all material and information necessary for undertaking the business of a city council. Many other laws, policies, plans and documents exist which bind the City Council to certain courses of action and practices. A summary of some of the most notable documents that establish City Council direction is provided below.

**City Code:** The City Code contains local laws and regulations adopted by ordinances. The Administrative Chapter of the Code shall incorporate by reference the rules and procedures established herein including the roles of the Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem and City Council. Included in the Administrative Chapter of the Code is appointment of certain city staff positions and the establishment, qualifications, appointment and terms applicable to certain advisory commissions. In addition to these administrative matters, the City Code contains a variety of laws. The City Code is available either on the City’s website or from the City Clerk.

**California Government Code:** The California Government Code contains many statutes that set forth requirements for the operation of city government. Many of these requirements are also replicated within the City Code to ensure there is broad awareness of such requirements. Oxnard is a “general law” city, which means it is organized in accordance with provisions of the Government Code. The Government Code provides for Oxnard’s City Council-City Manager form of government, which was adopted as the City’s form of government by ordinance approved by the City’s voters. Basically, this form of government prescribes that a city council’s role is to establish policies and priorities, while the role of the City Manager is to oversee the operations of the city government.

**Annual Budget:** The City's annual budget provides a description of City services and the resources used to provide services. The document contains both a broad overview of the budget, and detailed descriptions of programs and services, organized for convenience by lead departments. The City operates on a July 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup> fiscal year with a budget that includes governmental funds like the General Fund; special revenue funds; enterprise funds like Water, Wastewater and Environmental Resources; and internal service funds.

**General Plan:** The General Plan is comprised of a number of elements, such as land use, circulation, open-space, and housing, all in accordance with State requirements, and provides a policy framework for various matters that fall within these areas. A separate planning document, the Coastal Land Use Plan, applies in selected regulatory areas in the City's Coastal Zone.

## **Orientation of New Councilmembers**

It is important that members of the Council have an understanding of the full range of services and programs provided by the organization. As new members join the City Council the City Manager arranges for new member training, conferences and familiarization with all facets of City government.

## **League of California Cities *Guide***

A publication that provides additional useful information is the *New Mayors and Council Members Resource Guide* updated annually and available through the League of California Cities website: <http://www.cacities.org/>. The *Guide* contains general information on the role and responsibilities of city councilmembers and on the specific requirements and laws that govern Council actions.

# Oxnard City Council: Powers and Responsibilities

## City Council Generally

The powers of a city council in California to establish policy are quite broad. Essentially, councils may undertake any action related to the establishment of city policies that affect city affairs other than those that are denied by the California Constitution and general laws or are preempted by state or federal law. Specifically, *the Council shall have the power, in the name of the City, to do and perform all acts and things appropriate to a municipal corporation and the general welfare of its inhabitants, subject to statutory limitations and which are not specifically forbidden by the Constitution and laws of the State of California.*

It is important to note that the City Council acts as a body. No member has any extraordinary powers beyond those of other members. While the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem have some additional ceremonial and administrative responsibilities as described below, in the establishment of policies, voting and in other significant areas, all members are equal. It is also important to note that policy is established by at least a majority vote of the Council. While individual members may disagree with decisions of the majority, a decision of the majority does bind the Council to a course of action. In turn, it is staff's responsibility to ensure the policy of the Council is upheld. Actions of staff to pursue the policy direction established by a majority of Council does not reflect any bias against Councilmembers who held a minority opinion on an issue.

The City Council has occasionally debated whether it should take positions of a broader nature or limit itself to purely municipal functions. Historically, Oxnard City Councils have chosen to not take positions on issues outside of their immediate authority to effect. The propensity of the City Council to involve itself in such issues reflects the personalities and outlooks of the members who are elected to four-year Councilmember terms and a two-year Mayoral term.

Limitations are imposed on a Councilmember's ability to serve on appointed boards of the City. State law expresses that no member of the Council shall serve as a voting member of any city board, committee, or commission, whether composed of citizen volunteers, city employees, or a combination of both. This is not construed as prohibiting members of the Council from serving on committees or subcommittees of the Council itself, or of agencies representing other levels of government. In fact, Councilmembers often participate and provide leadership in regional and state programs and meetings. Councilmembers are strongly encouraged to provide a written report to the Council on matters discussed at subcommittees and other regional or state board/agency/group activities in which they have been involved.

## Role of Mayor & Mayor Pro Tempore

**Mayor:** The Mayor is to preside at all meetings of the City Council. The Mayor does not possess any power of veto. As presiding officer of the Council, the Mayor is to faithfully communicate the will of the Council majority in matters of policy. The Mayor is also recognized as the official head of the City for ceremonial purposes only.

The Mayor, unless unavailable, shall sign all ordinances, and other documents that have been adopted by the City Council and require an official signature; except in those instances when the City Manager, or other staff, have been authorized by Council action to sign documents. In the event the Mayor is unavailable, the Mayor Pro Tempore's signature will be used.

**Mayor Pro Tempore:** The City Council has specified that the Mayor Pro Tempore shall perform the duties of the Mayor during the Mayor's absence or disability. The Mayor Pro Tempore shall serve in this capacity at the pleasure of the City Council.

## **Appointment of City Manager and City Attorney**

The City Council only has the authority to appoint two positions within the City organization: the City Manager and the City Attorney. Both positions serve at the will of the City Council. The City Manager is an employee of the City and has an employment agreement that specifies certain terms of employment including an annual evaluation by the City Council. The City Manager is responsible for all other personnel appointments within the City. The current City Attorney is an employee of the City and has an employment agreement that specifies certain terms of employment including regular evaluation by the City Council.

## **Role in Disaster**

In consultation with the City Manager, the City Council may be asked to participate at the City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC), located within the Fire Department, to provide policy guidance and to receive information in an emergency. The California Emergency Services Act (California Government Code Sections 8550 et seq.) provides for the preservation of local government during an emergency and specifies the duties and powers of local government to appoint contingency successors in office for various public officials, including the City Council and the City Manager, to serve when the elected or appointed incumbent is unavailable during an emergency.

## **Appointment of Advisory Bodies**

The City has a number of standing advisory bodies, the rules, regulation and requirements of which can be found in the Administrative Chapter (Chapter 2) of the City Code. The Mayor, "with the approval of the city council, shall make all appointments to boards, commissions, and committees unless otherwise specifically provided by statute." California Government Code Section 40605. For appointments to Citizen Advisory Groups (CAGs) each Councilmember shall strive to nominate a commissioner from the Councilmember's district to serve on each CAG. The Mayor shall nominate one commissioner at-large for each CAG.

# City Council Meetings

## General Procedures

**Rules of Order:** Except as otherwise provided by applicable law or as specifically provided in this Procedures Manual, the latest revised edition of "Rosenberg's Rules of Order" shall govern the conduct of the meetings of City Council.

**Presiding Officer:**

- a. The Mayor or in the Mayor's absence, the Mayor Pro Tempore, or a temporary presiding officer in appropriate circumstances, shall be the presiding officer of City Council.
- b. In the absence of the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tempore, the City Clerk shall call the City Council to order. The temporary presiding officer shall be the Councilmember present with the greatest length of service on City Council. Upon the arrival of the Mayor or the Mayor Pro Tempore, the temporary presiding officer shall relinquish the chair at the conclusion of the business then before City Council.
- c. The presiding officer shall assume the chair at the hour appointed for the meeting and shall call City Council to order.
- d. The presiding officer shall preserve strict order and decorum at all City Council meetings, state questions before City Council, and announce City Council's decision on all matters.
- e. The presiding officer shall decide all questions of order, subject however, to an appeal by any Councilmember to City Council as a whole, in which event a majority vote of City Council shall govern and conclusively determine questions of order.
- f. Unless prohibited by State law, the presiding officer shall vote on all questions before City Council.
- g. The presiding officer may move, second and debate from the chair, subject only to such limitations of debate as are imposed on all Councilmembers by this resolution.
- h. The presiding officer shall not be deprived of any of the rights or privileges of a Councilmember by reason of acting as presiding officer.

**Seating arrangement of the Council:** The Mayor Pro Tempore is seated immediately next to the Mayor. The Mayor, with the approval of individual Councilmembers, shall establish the seating arrangement for regular Council meetings.

**Quorum:** Four-sevenths of the Councilmembers constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. When there is no quorum, any Councilmember shall adjourn such meeting or, if no Councilmember is present, the City Clerk shall adjourn the meeting.

**Minutes:** The minutes of City Council meetings shall be prepared by the City Clerk and shall be maintained in a book as a record of each particular type of business transacted. The City

Clerk shall be required to make a record only of such business as was actually passed upon by a vote of City Council and shall not be required to record any remarks of Councilmembers or of any other person except at the special request of a Councilmember. If provided, the City Clerk shall record the name of any person addressing City Council or submitting a written speaker card. As soon as possible after each City Council meeting, the City Clerk shall cause a copy of the minutes thereof to be forwarded to each Councilmember and the City Manager. Unless the reading of the minutes of a City Council meeting is requested by a Councilmember, such minutes may be approved without reading, if the City Clerk has previously furnished each Councilmember with a copy thereof. Any Councilmember, upon request, shall have entered in the minutes the right to have personal reasons for support for, dissent from, or protest against, any action of City Council.

## **Meeting Schedule**

By Ordinance No. 2,949 the City Council has established their regular meeting calendar, which provides that unless otherwise approved by City Council action, the Council shall conduct regular meetings in the Council Chambers, at 305 West Third Street on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. Regular meetings begin no earlier than 4:30 p.m. Closed sessions are generally held, as needed, at the beginning of the regular meeting.

Regular meetings throughout the year may be cancelled. The Mayor and Councilmembers should inform the City Manager's secretary as soon as possible if they intend to be out of town on a set meeting date.

## **Special Meetings**

Special meetings may be called by the Mayor or a majority of the City Council in compliance with the Brown Act, which is discussed in more detail later in this Chapter. Written notice typically must be given to the public, and to the media requesting such notice, at least seven (7) days prior to a special meeting. No business other than that officially noticed may be discussed. The Mayor or City Council may call a special meeting to discuss goals and priorities for the upcoming year.

## **Development of Agenda**

Subject to certain exceptions set forth in the City Code, a copy of the agenda for Council meetings is transmitted to the Council and posted to the City's website twelve days prior to a regular meeting and seven days prior to a special meeting. All agenda materials are posted with the agenda on the City's website and are also available after posting during normal business hours at the Main Branch of the Public Library and in the Office of the City Clerk.

## **Placing Items on Agenda**

### **Inclusion of Item on Future Agenda by City Council:**

While most agenda items are scheduled through the City Manager's Office based on the administrative needs of the City, the intent of this policy is to provide an orderly means through which an individual Councilmember can raise an issue for discussion and possible City Council direction or action. A Councilmember requesting an item to be placed on a future Council meeting agenda may (1) briefly announce their request during the City Council Business/Committee Reports portion of a Council meeting agenda, (2) submit a detailed request

in writing to the City Clerk, or (3) both. Each request shall be referred to the City Council Committee most related to the subject of the request.

If a majority of such committee agrees the City Council should consider the item, the City Manager will determine when to place the item on a future agenda based on time necessary to complete the research and staff workload considerations and the effect on City Council established priorities.

**Emergency and Non-Agendized items:** Emergency and non-agendized items may be added to an agenda only in accordance with state law. *Emergency items* are only those matters affecting public health or safety such as work stoppages, disasters and other severe emergencies. Adding an emergency item requires a majority vote. Emergency items are very rare. More likely, after the agenda has been posted an item arises that the Council would like to act on. *Non-agendized items* may be added to the agenda only if the Council makes findings that (1) the need to consider the item arose after the posting of the agenda, and; (2) there is a need to take immediate action at this meeting of the City Council. These findings must be approved by a two-thirds vote of members present; if less than five members of Council are present, the findings require a unanimous vote of those present.

## Notification and Advertising

The City will continue to publicize matters of significant neighborhood or community public interest that appear on a City Council agenda, as well as all matters where advertising is required by law.

## Order of Business

At every meeting, the order of business shall be discussed and acted upon in substantially the following manner, provided that the presiding officer may alter the order of business with City Council concurrence.

- Roll call/posting of agenda
- Public comments on closed session items
- Closed session
- Appointment items
- Opening ceremonies / Pledge of Allegiance
- Ceremonial calendar
- Public comments on matters not on the agenda and within the subject matter jurisdiction of City Council
- City Manager's report
- City Council business/committee reports
- Review of information/consent agenda
- Public comments on information/consent agenda
- Information/consent agenda
- Public hearings to commence at 6:15 p.m.
- Reports
- Study session
- Adjournment

**Roll Call:** Before proceeding with the business of City Council, the City Clerk shall enter in the minutes the names of all Councilmembers present.

**Ceremonial Calendar:** Ceremonial items shall normally be limited to two items per meeting, not to exceed five minutes per item.

**Public Comment:** Public comments shall be received at several times during each meeting for particular portions of the agenda as specified above. Comments on agenda items are not heard until the particular item is called. Unless otherwise approved by City Council action, public comments relating to the subject matter of discretionary public hearings or public hearings required by law, shall be presented only at the time of the conduct of the hearing. Individuals desiring to speak are to address the Council from the speaker podium. Speaker cards should be filled out and given to the City Clerk prior to public comment, although persons who wish to speak are not required to provide their names or addresses.

A block of thirty (30) minutes time is set aside at the beginning of a regular meeting to receive general public comment about issues not on the agenda. Public comments not heard during this thirty-minute period will be heard just prior to adjournment. Speaker cards will not be accepted after the beginning of the general public comment period in order to allow for fair allocation of time amongst the known speakers. If the time required to complete general public comments exceeds 30 minutes, any public comments thereafter shall occur immediately prior to the adjournment of the meeting. If during public comment, a person expresses a concern regarding City Council staff or service, City Council may refer the nature of the concern to staff for investigation, resolution or a report.

Comments should focus on a specific matter within the Council's jurisdiction. Members of the public are encouraged to present written comments, preferably in advance of the meeting, as a way to fully communicate their thoughts on agenda items or non-agenda items. When written materials are presented, they should be submitted to the City Clerk for distribution and record keeping ahead of time.

Videos, PowerPoint or similar presentations during public comment ordinarily are not permitted. Prior notice and coordination with the City Clerk is strongly encouraged and the Mayor reserves the privilege to limit such requests as necessary for the effective conduct of the meeting.

Public comment on regular business items normally follows staff's presentation of the staff report, clarifying questions from Councilmembers and applicant comments as necessary and appropriate. Speaker cards should be filled out and given to the City Clerk prior to public comment.

Unless additional time is granted by the presiding officer, each person shall limit public comments to three minutes on any agenda item at a meeting with a cumulative total of ten minutes for all agenda items at such meeting, provided that such ten minute limit shall be voluntary. The presiding officer may grant a representative of a large speaker group additional time (up to ten minutes) to speak for the group on any agenda item.

A person wishing to address City Council shall first be recognized by the presiding officer. Each person shall address all remarks to City Council as a body, not to any member thereof and not to staff. No person, other than a Councilmember and the person having the floor, shall be permitted to enter into any discussion without recognition by the presiding officer.

**Information/Consent Agenda:** The information/consent agenda shall consist of routine items for which staff contemplates no discussion by City Council. Information/consent agenda items shall be supported by such written reports and information as the City Manager deems necessary to apprise City Council of the action required and to enable City Council to make a decision in the best interests of the City. An information/consent agenda item may be removed for discussion at the request of a Councilmember or the City Manager. A removed information/consent agenda item may be considered after City Council acts upon the remainder of the information/consent agenda.

**Appointment Items:** The City Council may schedule items for a specific time to accommodate presentations on selected matters.

**Special Presentations:** Special presentations may be conducted at any City Council meeting at City Council's discretion.

**Public Hearings:** Public hearings are scheduled to comply with State law or at the discretion of the City Council to discuss a matter of special community interest. Unless otherwise approved by the City Council, public hearings shall be scheduled to commence at 6:15 p.m. Any person directly involved in the subject matter of a public hearing, such as an applicant, developer, representative of affected homeowners association, property owner or neighborhood council may speak for any length of time at the discretion of the presiding officer.

**Reports:** A report shall consist of an item contemplated by staff to require a written or oral report and on which the City Council will discuss and deliberate on a course of action, including an item appearing on the agenda under City Manager's Report. Unless additional time is granted by the presiding officer or has been previously approved by the City Manager, staff reports shall be limited to ten minutes.

**Study Session:** The City Council may conduct a study session on subjects and issues as appropriate at any meeting. Such a study session shall be open to the public and shall be devoted to the gathering of information preliminary to consideration of the subject matter at a future regular or special meeting, or for the City Council to discuss various issues and programs with the City Manager and staff. The City Council shall not formally act upon any matter during a study session.

**City Council Business/Committee Reports:** Each Councilmember may make a brief announcement, or make a brief report on their activities, including reports on meetings attended at City expense; and may request to schedule consideration of placing an item on a future agenda. The Council cannot enter into detailed discussion or take action on any item presented during this report. A Councilmember's report shall not exceed three minutes, unless additional time is granted by the presiding officer.

**Adjournment:** City Council meetings shall adjourn no later than 10:00 p.m., unless the meeting is extended by a majority vote. No new items will begin after 10:00 p.m. unless 80% of the members present votes to allow the items to be heard.

## Discussion Rules

To assist the City Council in the orderly discussion of items, rules are followed which represent accepted practices for the management of Council meetings.

1. **Obtaining the Floor:** A member of the City Council or staff shall first address the presiding officer to gain recognition. Comments and questions should be directed through the presiding officer and limited to the issue before the Council. Cross-exchange between Councilmembers and public should be avoided.
2. **Questions to Staff:** A Councilmember shall, after recognition by the presiding officer, address questions to the City Manager, City Attorney, department head or designated staff member. If a Councilmember has questions on an agenda item, that member should preferably contact the City Manager prior to the meeting in order to allow the City Manager to direct staff with enough time to research a response for the meeting.
3. **Interruptions:**
  - a. Once recognized, a Councilmember is considered to have the floor, and another Councilmember may not interrupt the speaker except to make a point of order or point of personal privilege, or as otherwise permitted in the Rules of Order. In such a circumstance, the Councilmember holding the floor shall cease speaking until the issue raised is resolved.
  - b. Upon being recognized by the Chair, members of the staff shall hold the floor until completion of their remarks or until recognition is withdrawn by the Chair.
4. **Discussion:** A Councilmember should not speak more than once on a particular subject until every other Councilmember has had the opportunity to speak, and shall be limited to speaking twice during discussion on an agenda item unless additional time is granted by the presiding officer. Councilmembers are encouraged to discuss items during the decision-making process and may ask staff to respond when appropriate. The Mayor normally allows other members to speak first, then will give his/her views and summarize. If a Councilmember desires to use a PowerPoint presentation or similar visual aid during a meeting, the Councilmember shall provide the City Clerk with a copy of the material to be used prior to the commencement of the meeting at which it will be used.
5. **Tabling Procedure:** Tabling an item immediately stops discussion and causes a vote to postpone a matter indefinitely or to a time and date certain. A motion to “continue” an agenda item has the same effect, but is generally used when a scheduling problem arises or when insufficient time is available to address the matter thoroughly.
6. **Right of Protest:** A Councilmember is not required to state reasons for a dissenting vote.
7. **Calling for the Question:** The purpose of calling for the question is to disallow further debate and put an issue to an immediate vote. Once recognized by the presiding officer, a Councilmember may move to “call for the question” on an item which is being considered. The motion requires a second, is not debatable, and must pass by a two-thirds vote. If the motion carries, the item is no longer debatable and the City Council must vote on it.

## Voting Procedures

When present, all Councilmembers are to vote unless prohibited by law or conflict of interest. Unless a Councilmember states an intention not to vote, the City Clerk shall record silence as an affirmative vote.

A conflict of interest shall be declared whenever appropriate and in compliance with State law. The affected Councilmember will step down from the dais and leave the Chambers as required by State law.

As required by the Brown Act, the vote or abstention of each Councilmember present shall be publicly reported and such vote shall be entered in the minutes of the City Council showing those Councilmembers voting aye, those voting no and those not voting or absent. When taking a roll call vote, the City Clerk shall call the names of the Councilmembers, alternating the order.

**Tie Vote:** A motion fails on a tie vote. The presiding officer may publicly explain the effect of the tie vote for the audience or may direct the City Attorney to do so.

**Motions:** There are a number of types of motions, each of which must meet certain requirements before a vote can be taken. Enactment of an ordinance, adoption of a resolution, as well as approval of a motion or order involving a payment of money requires the affirmative vote of four Councilmembers. Other motions or actions require a vote in favor of the action or motion by a majority of a quorum of Councilmembers present, unless otherwise specified by State law.

**Reconsideration:** Reconsideration of an item shall be allowed in accordance with the following Council guidelines. A member of the prevailing majority when the previous vote was taken must make a motion for reconsideration. The City Council has determined that any motion for reconsideration should be made at the meeting at which the action was taken. No motion for reconsideration will be entertained after this time unless the City Council determines significant new information has arisen which warrants such action and the reconsideration can be properly agendaized.

## Other Guidelines

Other guidelines have been developed to ensure that meetings of the Council are conducted in a civil and professional manner. Councilmembers and staff shall:

1. Work to preserve appropriate order and decorum during all meetings.
2. Discourage side conversations, disruptions, interruptions or delaying efforts.
3. Inform the presiding officer before departing from a meeting.
4. Limit disruptive behavior. The presiding officer will call persons demonstrating rude, boisterous, or profane behavior to order. If such conduct continues, the presiding officer may call a recess, request the removal of such person(s) from the Council Chambers, adjourn the meeting, or take other appropriate action. The Council has a policy to discourage applause, booing or other similar behaviors from the public during meetings.
5. Recognize that only the City Council, staff, advisory body chairs or designated representatives, and those authorized by the presiding officer shall be permitted to sit at the Council dais or staff tables. No persons except City officials, their representatives

and representatives of news-gathering agencies shall be permitted to approach the City Council without the consent of a majority of the City Council.

6. Limit breaks of the City Council to 5-10 minutes. The Mayor will resume the meeting if a quorum exists and other members have not returned from the break within the announced time period.
7. Impose time limits on speakers. While the City Council encourages and embraces the need for and right of public participation, it acknowledges that public comments must, at times, be limited. The Mayor, as presiding officer, may poll the audience for an indication of the number of people wishing to speak on a particular item, and to impose time limits per speaker. Typically, speakers are limited to three minutes but a shorter time limit may be established as deemed necessary; however, project applicants, developers of a project under consideration, representatives of affected homeowners associations, neighborhood councils or similar groups may, at the discretion of the presiding officer be granted a longer time period for comment. After the time limit, Council may ask questions of the speaker for clarification, if needed. Each speaker will be thanked for his or her participation.
8. Meetings outside the City of a majority of City Council, even if permissible under the Brown Act, are discouraged, so as to maximize public participation.

**Values of Respect:** The City Council has also recognized the importance of approaching the public's business in an environment of personal respect and courtesy, which emphasizes the consideration of policy and avoids personalization of comments. Some guidelines utilized by the City Council include:

1. Discussion should focus on policy matters.
2. Personal criticism of members is inappropriate.
3. Proper decorum should be displayed as other members express their views.
4. Treat members of the public equally, applying rules in a fair and consistent manner.

**Enforcement of Order:** The Police Chief or designee acts as the Sergeant-At-Arms. Any Councilmember may request the presiding officer to enforce the rules of protocol. Upon motion and majority vote, the presiding officer shall be required to do so.

## **Open Meeting Laws (the "Brown Act")**

Operations and procedures of the City and City Council incorporate requirements of the Ralph M. Brown Act, which is the State's open meeting law (California Government Code Sections 54950 et seq., commonly referred to as the Brown Act). Because this law is such an important part of local government operations, some specific requirements of the law are highlighted below.

**Applicability and Penalties:** The entire City organization conducts its business in compliance with the Brown Act. The intent of the Brown Act is to ensure that deliberation and actions of local public agencies are conducted in open and public meetings.

A. Applicability: The Brown Act applies to Council and all commissions, boards and Council appointed subcommittees (except if comprised entirely of less than a quorum of Councilmembers for a limited purpose and duration) that advise Council. Staff cannot promote actions that would violate the Brown Act.

B. Meetings: All meetings shall be open and public. A City Council meeting takes place whenever a quorum (four or more members) is present and information about City business is received; discussions qualify as a meeting. Social functions (e.g., receptions, dinners) do not fall under the Brown Act unless City business is discussed.

Serial meetings, which take place when any member of Council or City staff contact more than three Councilmembers for the purpose of deliberating or acting upon an item pending before the City Council, are prohibited. This restriction does not apply to individual contacts where the comments or position of Councilmembers are not communicated to a majority of Councilmembers. Note that the Brown Act applies to City Councilmembers immediately after their election and prior to their swearing-in ceremony.

C. Agendas: Agendas must be posted in a location freely accessible to the public as well as the City's website, and must meet various requirements, such as including a brief general description of each item to be discussed or acted upon by City Council. The time periods set forth in the City's Sunshine Ordinance and described previously for posting agendas exceed the minimum requirements of the Brown Act. The City Council shall adhere to the broader requirements of the Sunshine Ordinance.

D. Actions: No action can be taken on any item not appearing on the posted agenda.

*Exceptions:* 1) An emergency situation exists (determined by a majority of the Council). 2) The need to take action arose subsequent to the agenda being posted and there is a need for immediate action (determined by two-thirds vote of the Council; or if less than two-thirds are present, by unanimous vote). 3) The item was continued to another meeting that was scheduled and posted within 5 days of the original agenda.

E. Public Input: The Brown Act contains provisions concerning Public Comment on matters within the City Council's jurisdiction and particular matters on the agenda, summarized elsewhere in this manual. These provisions will be followed by the City Council.

F. Public Disruptions: A portion or all of the public may be removed if willful disruption makes conducting the meeting "unfeasible"; the press may remain unless they participate in the disruption.

G. Correspondence: All writings distributed for discussion or consideration at a public meeting are public records.

H. Emergency Meetings: Emergency meetings may be called without notification due to the disruption or threatened disruption of public facilities. Only work stoppages or crippling disasters that impair the public health and/or safety qualify for emergency meetings.

I. Other Provisions: The Brown Act provides many other restrictions and requirements; this Chapter is intended merely as a Council summary and overview of the Brown Act, and nothing in this Chapter supersedes the provisions of the Brown Act. Please check with the City Attorney and/or the City Clerk for more information.

# Council Communications

## Overview

Perhaps the most fundamental role of a Councilmember is communication: communication with the public to assess community opinions and needs, and communication with staff to provide policy direction and to gain an understanding of the implications of various policy alternatives. Because the City Council performs as a body (that is, acting based on the will of the majority as opposed to individuals), it is important that general guidelines be understood when speaking as a Councilmember. Equally important, when members are expressing personal views and not those of the Council, the public should be so advised.

## Correspondence from Councilmembers

Members of the City Council may occasionally be called upon to write letters to citizens, businesses or other public agencies. Typically, the City Manager will be charged with transmitting the City's position on policy matters to outside agencies on behalf of the City Council. Correspondence sent on behalf of the Council is placed on official City letterhead and is signed by the Mayor or City Manager. Individual members of Council may prepare letters to constituents in response to inquiries or to provide requested information. Individualized City Councilmember letterhead is available for this purpose, and staff can assist in the preparation of such correspondence. Councilmembers are encouraged to provide copies of any correspondence on City letterhead to the City Manager.

On occasion, Councilmembers may wish to transmit correspondence on an issue upon which the Council has yet to take a position or about an issue for which the Council has no position. In these circumstances, Councilmembers should use their personalized letterhead and clearly indicate within letters that they are not speaking for the City Council as a whole, but for themselves as one member of Council.

After the City Council has taken a position on an issue, official correspondence should reflect this position. While Councilmembers who may disagree with a position are free to prepare correspondence on such issues as private citizens, City letterhead, official Council title, and staff support should not be utilized in order to avoid confusion. In addition, City letterhead and staff support cannot be utilized for personal or political purposes.

Councilmembers may be asked to prepare letters of recommendation for students and others seeking appointment. Councilmembers may utilize City letterhead and their Council titles, but should indicate that the views expressed are those of the Councilmember (as opposed to the City Council). No review by the full Council is required; however, copies will be kept on file.

## Speaking for "the City"

Similar to written correspondence, when Councilmembers are requested to speak to groups or are asked the Council's position on an issue, the response should reflect the position of the Council as a whole. Of course, a Councilmember may clarify their vote on a matter by stating, for example, "While I voted against X, the City Council voted in support of it." When

representing the City at meetings or other venues, it is important that those in attendance gain an understanding of the City Council's position rather than that of an individual member.

## **Local Ballot Measures**

At times measures that affect City Council policy may be placed on the ballot. There are restrictions regarding what actions a City Council or individual Councilmembers may take on ballot measures. Guidelines as to what is permissible are available from the City Clerk or City Attorney upon request.

## **State Legislation, Propositions**

The City Council periodically adopts a Legislative Program to enable the City to respond to pending state and federal legislation in a proactive manner (the current Legislative Program is posted on the City's website). The Mayor (or Mayor Pro Tem in the Mayor's absence) would be authorized to sign correspondence expressing the City Council's position on legislation consistent with the Legislative Program and/or other positions approved by the City Council.

Staff maintains direct and consistent contact with contracted state and federal lobbyists and monitors the League of California Cities, Association of California Water Agencies and other sources to identify pending legislation that may impact the City. Letters expressing the City's position will be drafted for the Mayor's signature, with copies distributed to each Councilmember. Pending legislation not addressed by the Legislative Program, or staff recommendations that deviate from the Legislative Program, would be agendaized for City Council consideration.

# Interaction with City Staff

## Overview

City Council policy is implemented on a daily basis through staff. Therefore, it is critical that the relationship between Council and staff be well understood by all parties so that policies and programs may be implemented successfully. The City of Oxnard has a long tradition of positive relationships between members of the City Council and staff. To maintain these effective relationships it is important that roles are clearly recognized.

## Council-Manager Form of Government

Like most California cities, Oxnard has adopted a City Council-City Manager form of government. The Council appoints a City Manager to implement policy, enforce its laws, to direct the daily operations of city government, and to prepare and monitor the municipal budget. The City Code specifies roles and responsibilities and requires that Councilmembers work through the City Manager in dealing with City staff unless simply requesting information from department heads or other staff members. The City Manager is responsible to the City Council as a body rather than to individual Councilmembers.

## Council-Manager Relationship

The employment relationship between the City Council and City Manager reflects the fact that the City Manager is the chief executive officer of the City. The City Manager has an employment agreement with the City Council. Regular communication between the City Council and City Manager is important in maintaining effective interpersonal relations. All dealings with the City Manager, whether in public or private, should be consistent with the authority of the City Manager in administrative and personnel matters. Councilmembers should avoid situations that can result in City staff being directed, intentionally or unintentionally, by one or more members of the City Council. Further, Councilmembers should avoid involving themselves in matters regarding individual City employees or related affairs.

The City Council evaluates the City Manager's performance annually to ensure that both the City Council and City Manager are in agreement about organizational performance and priority goals that are based on mutual trust and common objectives which are put forth in a strategic summit, which should be conducted every three to five years.

As in any professional relationship, it is important that the City Manager keep the City Council informed. The City Manager respects that the final responsibility for establishing the policy direction of the City is held by the City Council. The City Manager communicates with City Council in various ways. In addition to the formal Council meetings, there are periodic briefing meetings with individual Councilmembers and written memoranda and email. Communication must be undertaken in such a way that all Councilmembers are treated similarly and kept equally informed and provided with updates on significant fiscal matters, major projects, or other critical issues. It is also important that the Council provide ongoing feedback, information and perceptions to the City Manager including responses to written communications and surveys requesting feedback.

## City Manager Code of Ethics

The City Manager is subject to a professional code of ethics developed by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) that binds the City Manager to certain practices that are designed to ensure his or her actions are in support of the City's best interests. Violations of such standards can result in censure. A copy of the ICMA Code of Ethics can be found at <https://icma.org/icma-code-ethics>.

## City Council-City Attorney Relationship

The City Attorney is the legal advisor for the Council, City Manager and departments. The general legal responsibilities of the City Attorney are to: 1) provide legal assistance necessary for formulation and implementation of legislative policies and projects; 2) represent the City's interest, as determined by the City Council, in litigation, administrative hearings, negotiations and similar proceedings; 3) prepare ordinances, resolutions, contracts and other legal documents to best reflect and implement the purposes for which they are prepared; and 4) keep City Council and staff apprised of court rulings and legislation affecting the City's legal interests. It is important to note that the City Attorney does not represent individual members of Council, but the City Council as a whole.

## Roles and Information Flow

**Objectives:** It is the intent of staff to ensure Councilmembers have free and easy access to information from the City and to ensure that such information is communicated completely, with candor and without bias. Individual Councilmembers may not intervene in staff decision-making, the development of staff recommendations, scheduling of work, or executing department priorities without the prior knowledge and approval of the City Council as a whole. This is necessary to protect staff from undue influence and pressure from individual Councilmembers, and to allow staff to execute the priorities given by management and the Council as a whole without fear of reprisal. Undue influence exercised by Councilmembers may result in censure.

**Council roles:** The full City Council retains power to accept, reject, amend, influence, or otherwise guide and direct staff actions, decisions, recommendations, service levels, workloads and schedules, departmental priorities, and the performance of City business. If a Councilmember wishes to influence the actions, decisions, recommendations, workloads, work schedule, and priorities of staff, that member must prevail upon the Council in accordance with the Brown Act, preferably in open session, to do so as a matter of Council business.

Should a Councilmember become dissatisfied about a department, he/she should always talk it over with the City Manager and/or the Assistant City Manager, not the department head. Concerns about a department head must be taken to the City Manager only.

To assist the City Manager in his/her ability to monitor the flow of information, requests for information are best tracked if submitted in writing, either in memorandum form or through email. And to ensure proper responsiveness, Councilmembers are asked to "cc" both the department head and the City Manager on all correspondence with staff.

**Staff roles:** The Council recognizes the primary functions of staff as serving the community, executing Council policy and actions and keeping the Council informed. Staff is obligated to

take guidance and direction only from the Council as a whole or from the appropriate management supervisors. Staff is directed to report to the City Manager any attempts by individual members of the Council to unduly direct or otherwise pressure them into making, changing or otherwise influencing recommendations.

City staff will make every effort to respond in a timely and professional manner to all requests made by individual Councilmembers for information or assistance; provided that, in the judgment of the City Manager, the request is not of a magnitude, either in terms of workload or policy, which would require that it would be more appropriately assigned to staff through the direction of the full City Council. If a request by an individual Councilmember is determined by the City Manager to take one hour or more of staff time to complete, that request may be included on the formal Council agenda for full Council discussion.

## **Dissemination of Information**

In cases where a staff response to an individual Councilmember request involves written materials that may be of interest to other Councilmembers, the City Manager will provide copies of the material to all other Councilmembers. In making this judgment, the City Manager will consider whether the information is significant, new, otherwise not available to the Council or of interest to the Council.

## **Staff Relationship with Advisory Bodies**

Staff support and assistance is typically provided to commissions and task forces. However, advisory bodies do not have authority over City employees. While staff may work closely with advisory bodies, staff members remain responsible to their immediate supervisors and ultimately the City Manager and City Council. The members of the commission/ board/committee are responsible for the functions of the advisory body, and the chairperson is responsible for committee compliance with City policies and practices.

Staff support often includes preparation of an agenda and its posting in compliance with the Brown Act. Staff may also prepare reports providing background on the issue, alternatives, a recommendation, and appropriate backup materials, if necessary. Advisory body members should have sufficient information to reach decisions based upon a clear explanation of the issues. The assigned staff person may serve as secretary, taking minutes as needed. Staff members are to assist the advisory body chair to ensure appropriate compliance with state and local laws and regulations.

It is important that advisory bodies wishing to communicate recommendations to the City Council do so through approved Council agenda procedures. In addition, if a commission wishes to correspond with an outside agency, that correspondence will be prepared by staff for review by the City Manager and possible approval by the City Council. Individuals who would like staff to perform research or for the commission to review a particular issue must gain the approval for such a request from the full City Council before any work is planned or done.

# Support Provided to City Council

## Staff Support

General administrative support to members of the City Council is provided through the City Manager's Office. Secretarial services including scheduling of appointments, receipt of telephone messages, and word processing are available as needed. Sensitivity to the workload of support staff members in the City Manager's Office is appreciated. Should requested tasks require significant time commitments, prior consultation with the City Manager is requested.

## Office Equipment

To enhance Councilmembers' ability to communicate with staff and the public, the City Council office is equipped with a computer and telephones with voicemail. The Council can also receive and send faxes.

Councilmembers may be connected from their home to the City's computer network. Information Technology staff will provide initial assistance in setting up necessary software and hardware. While staff will maintain those computer applications related to City affairs, staff cannot provide assistance for personal computer applications. When individual Councilmembers have completed their term of office, any installed software and City equipment must be returned to the City.

These technologies facilitate efficient communication by Councilmembers. However, their use also raises important legal issues to which Councilmembers must pay special attention. First, the Brown Act prohibits members from using "technological devices" to develop a concurrence by a majority regarding an action to be taken by the Council. "Technological devices" under the Brown Act include phones, faxes, computer email, public access cable TV and video. Councilmembers should not use email, faxes or phones for communicating with other Councilmembers in order to develop a majority position on any particular issue that may come before the full Council.

Second, be aware that most emails sent by Councilmembers probably are public records under the Public Records Act. Even though it does not create paper, sending email is more similar to mailing a letter than placing a telephone call. The information in the email is stored on the computer network until deleted, and may continue to exist on the network's back-up systems even after being deleted. As a result, emails can become records of the City maintained in the course of business, and thus available for public disclosure under the Public Records Act.

Finally, the City's email system is intended for the conduct of official business, and not for personal or political reasons. See Chapter 7 for a detailed discussion on the prohibition against using City property and funds for personal or political purposes.

## Meeting Rooms

Conference rooms are available in the City Manager's Office for shared use by members of the City Council. Councilmembers can also reserve larger meeting space for use by contacting the City Manager's Office staff.

## **Mail, Deliveries**

Members of the City Council receive a large volume of mail and other materials from the public, private interests and staff. The City Manager's Office staff maintains a mailbox for each member. Members are encouraged to return unwanted reports and documents to staff for distribution to the public or for recycling.

# Financial Matters

## Council Compensation

State law and the City Code provide for modest compensation to members of the City Council. State law limits an increase in City Council salaries to 5 percent per year, effective only following the next election after adoption. Currently, Councilmembers receive a monthly stipend. Councilmembers are also eligible for participation in group insurance benefits including retirement, medical, dental, vision, and life insurance plans available at the level provided to management employees.

## Expenditure Allowance

The annual City budget includes limited funding for members to undertake official City business. Eligible expenses include travel for attendance at conferences or educational seminars, and the purchase of publications and annual subscriptions. Donations to organizations are not eligible nor are meals for individuals other than Councilmembers.

## Expenditure Guidelines

It is important to note that any expense must be related to City affairs. Public property and funds may not be used for any private or personal purpose. Courts have ruled that this prohibition includes personal political purposes. For example, reimbursement could not be allowed to pay for meals at a meeting designed to discuss political or campaign strategies. It is also inappropriate for City funds to pay for a meal or other expenses of a private citizen.

City budgetary practices and accounting controls apply to expenditures within the City Council budget. Reimbursement requests should be made through the City Manager's Office monthly with receipts. Expenditure records are public information.

# Conflicts & Liability

## Conflict of Interest

State laws are in place to prevent an action by a Councilmember that would or may constitute a conflict of interest. The purpose of such laws and regulations is to ensure that all actions are taken in the public interest. At any time a Councilmember believes a potential for conflict of interest exists, he/she is encouraged to consult with the City Attorney or private legal counsel for advice. Staff may also request an opinion from the City Attorney regarding a member's potential conflict. Laws that regulate conflicts are very complicated. Violations may result in significant penalties including criminal prosecution.

There are two primary laws that govern conflicts of interest for public officials in California: the Political Reform Act and Government Code section 1090. In general terms, the Political Reform Act prohibits a public official from having a financial interest in a decision before the official; section 1090 prohibits a public official from having a financial interest in government contracts.

The Political Reform Act prohibits public officials from making, participating in, or in any way attempting to use their official position to influence a governmental decision in which they know, or have reason to know, that they have a financial interest. Therefore, if a public official has a conflict of interest, the official must disqualify himself or herself from acting on or participating in the decision before the City.

Government Code section 1090 is similar to the Political Reform Act, but applies only to City contracts in which a public official has a financial interest. The financial interests covered by section 1090 are different from those in the Political Reform Act. A Councilmember having an interest in a contract may preclude the City from entering into the contract at all. In addition, the penalties for violating section 1090 are severe. If a Councilmember believes that he or she may have any financial interest in a contract that will be before the Council, the Councilmember should immediately seek advice from the City Attorney or the Councilmember's personal attorney.

There are a number of other restrictions placed on Council actions that are highlighted in the League of California Cities' *Guide*. Such restrictions include prohibitions on secrecy and discrimination as well as assurance that all city funds are spent for public purposes. Violations of these restrictions may result in personal liability for individual Councilmembers.

## City Attorney Advice

The City Attorney has an affirmative duty to protect the City and City Council from conflicts of interest wherever possible. It is critical to note that while the City Attorney can render advice on the interpretation of State laws and regulations on conflict matters, such advice is solely an interpretation of the law. The only authority that can provide binding interpretations on such matters is the State Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC). Councilmembers or the full Council may also solicit opinions on such matters directly from the FPPC; however, such opinions often take time to develop and may not readily respond to urgent matters. It is

important to note that the City Attorney does not represent individual members of Council, but the City Council as a whole.

## **Conflict of Interest Forms**

An annual disclosure statement (known as a “Statement of Economic Interest” or FPPC Form 700) must be filed by all Councilmembers, designated commissioners and senior staff which lists potential conflicts of interest including sources of income, ownership of property and receipt of loans and gifts. Councilmembers and the City Manager often serve on the governing board of other agencies as a result of their positions. These agencies also require submittal of disclosure forms.

## **Liability**

The City is a large institution offering a variety of services and may occasionally find itself subject to legal actions through lawsuits. For example, those involved in automobile accidents sometimes choose to take actions against the City since the accident occurred on a City roadway. The City must always approach its responsibilities in a manner that reduces risk to all involved; however, with such a wide variety of high-profile services all risk cannot be eliminated. The City belongs to a joint powers authority with other governments to manage insurance and risk activities.

It is important to note that violations of certain laws and regulations by individual members of the City Council may result in that member’s being personally liable for damages which would not be covered by the City’s insurance. Examples may include discrimination, harassment or fraud. Depending on the nature of alleged misconduct, the City may or may not have a duty to defend or indemnify a Councilmember named as a defendant in a lawsuit relating to official duties.

# Additional Training & Resource Materials

## League of California Cities

The League is an association of virtually all cities in California. It provides many services including the production of educational conferences for local officials, publication of various newsletters and the monthly magazine *Western City*. The League has lobbyists on staff to represent the interest of cities before the state legislature and federal government and supports committees having local officials as members that are organized to address issues as they arise. The League's website at [www.cacities.org](http://www.cacities.org) provides a variety resources for public officials. The City of Oxnard participates in League activities through the Channel Counties Division.

## Local Government Commission

The Commission is a California-based organization that focuses largely on planning and resource conservation issues. It conducts workshops, offers periodic seminars, and publishes newsletters. See its website for more information: <http://www.lgc.org/>.

## International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

ICMA is a professional association of local government chief executives/city managers. The association has an extensive list of publications to assist local officials that can be found at its website: <http://icma.org>.

## Other Resources for Reference Material

Open Government (including *Open & Public V: A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act*)

<http://www.cacities.org/Resources/Open-Government>

Institute for Local Government: <http://www.ca-ilg.org/>

Elections information: <http://recorder.countyofventura.org/elections/>

Political Reform Act: <https://oag.ca.gov/conflict-interest>

Fair Political Practices Commission: <http://www.fppc.ca.gov/>

City of Oxnard City Code: [http://www.amlegal.com/codes/client/oxnard\\_ca/](http://www.amlegal.com/codes/client/oxnard_ca/)

California Legislative Information: <http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov>

Rosenberg's Rules of Order: [https://www.cacities.org/Resources/Open-Government/RosenbergText\\_2011.aspx](https://www.cacities.org/Resources/Open-Government/RosenbergText_2011.aspx)