



Don't Confuse Kindness With Weakness: How to Handle Disruptive Public Meetings

League of California Cities
Annual Conference and Expo
Long Beach, CA

October 17, 2024

Presented by: David Lim – Richards, Watson & Gershon

Goals of the Course

- Review and Discuss Ways to Implement Existing Law Regarding Meeting Disruption
- Review Common Sense Tips to Avoid having to Implement Existing Law Regarding Meeting Disruptions



Goals of the Course

- Role Play Common “Real-World” Scenarios Regarding meeting Disruptions
- Share Best Practices to Defuse and Handle Meeting Disruptions



Qualifications

- Former Alameda County Prosecutor – 1999 to 2019
- Former San Mateo City Councilmember – 2009 to 2017
- City Attorney, Fairfield & Millbrae – 2022 to Present

Are you
qualified?

Qualifications

- 7th Grade World History Teacher
Los Angeles Unified School District



Goals of the Course

- Focus of this presentation: COMMON SENSE TIPS
- Heavy on common sense, light on law
- **If in doubt, consult your City Attorney!!!!**



Brown Act

"Open and Public"

- "All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, except as otherwise provided in this chapter."

- Government Code, Section 54953(a)

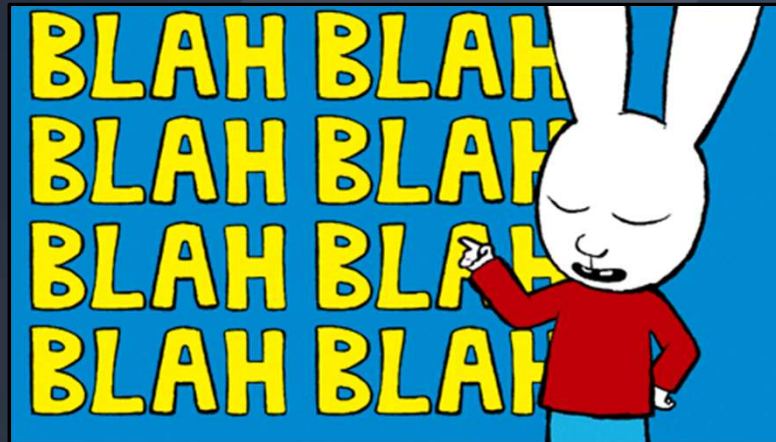
“Public Comment”

- “Every agenda for regular meetings shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address the legislative body on any item of interest to the public, before or during the legislative body’s consideration of the item, that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body, provided that no action shall be taken on any item not appearing on the agenda...”

- Government Code, Section 54954.3

Common Sense Tip #1

- It is almost always better to let people speak, then to cut them off, no matter how offensive the content of the speech may be.



Handling Meeting Disruptions

“Clearing the Meeting Room”

“In the event that any meeting is willfully interrupted by a group or groups of persons so as to render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible and order cannot be restored by the removal of individuals who are willfully interrupting the meeting, the members of the legislative body conducting the meeting may order the meeting room cleared and continue in session.”

- Government Code, Section 54957.9

“Removing a Speaker”

“The presiding member of the legislative body conducting a meeting or their designee may remove, or cause the removal of, an individual for disrupting the meeting. Prior to removing an individual, the presiding member or their designee shall warn the individual that their behavior is disrupting the meeting and that their failure to cease their behavior may result in their removal. The presiding member or their designee may then remove the individual if they do not promptly cease their disruptive behavior.”

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Common Sense Tip #2

- Removing a member of the public should always be your **LAST RESORT**



Disruptors want nothing more than for you to “break the glass”

Common Sense Tip #2

Understanding the Mindset of a Disruptor

- Disruptors are seeking attention and trying to create chaos.
- They WANT you to react to them.
- They WANT you to be shocked and offended.
- They WANT you to lose your cool.

Common Sense Tip #3

- “How to listen without getting upset.”



Look like this



While thinking of this . . .

Script for Offensive/Racist Comments Via Zoom

Mayor's Script for Offensive, Racist Comments Made Via ZOOM

During any comment period (public comment, or a comment on an agenda item), if a speaker on ZOOM begins to make offensive comments of a racist, homophobic, or other nature that is NOT related to any agenda item, the Mayor has the discretion to say the following:

MAYOR: Please mute the speaker.

[Staff should mute the speaker]

MAYOR: Dear Speaker, please be aware that your comments do not cover any subject within the jurisdiction of this City Council and so is out of order. I am going to ask you to please speak on matters within the jurisdiction of this City Council or you will be cut off from further comment.

Please unmute the speaker and resume the clock.

[If speaker continues to be offensive after 10-15 seconds]

MAYOR: Please mute the speaker.

[Staff should mute the speaker]

MAYOR: Dear Speaker, you were admonished that your comments do not cover any subject within the jurisdiction of this City Council and so is out of order. At this point I am cutting off your comments for discussing matters not within the jurisdiction of this City Council and so your comments are out of order for this meeting. You are hereby cut off from your remaining time.

Please mute the speak and do not allow them further comment.

Check with your
City Attorney
before using!

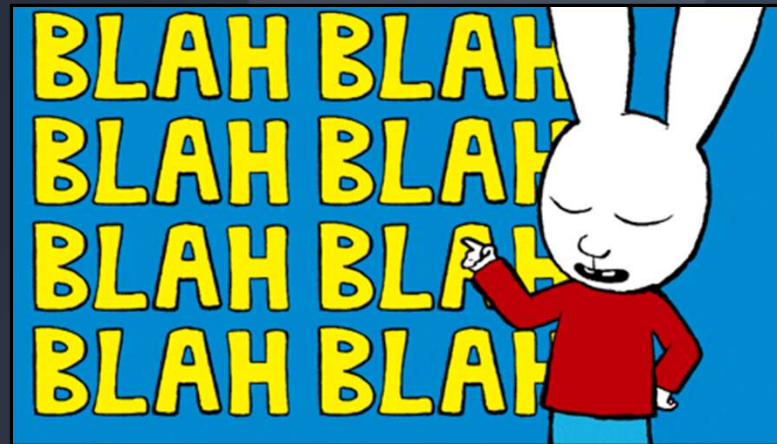
Important Exceptions to the Rule

- Safety of the Public, Staff or City Council
- Follow the Directions of your Police Department!



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Thank you for your participation!

David Lim
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