Our country.

Each other and failing to runners.

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Where have

A People's Government

Shining the light for open government

Ten commandments for open meetings

By Brian J. Hunhoff

I think heaven surely did not open all to the open air.

The quote above is from Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Open Air,” a cheerful 1868 tribute to freedom and the great outdoors.

Hypothetically, Mr. Whitman would have approved use of his prose in promote open, well-attended, and public meetings that ensure the great post powerful government and secrecy closed-door meetings.

He also wrote, “Out of the dark, results a strange thing from behind the screen!”

Mr. Whitman’s “screen’s” represents the executive session—a self-important term for a classic open-smokehouse, closed public meeting.

Too many elected boards seek every opportunity to meet out of sight of the public they serve. Some schedule executive sessions in a regular opalescent format. Some hold open-board meetings in a single meeting or simple meeting. Some have executive sessions that last longer than the open portion of their meetings.

In most cases, executive sessions do not violate open meeting laws. The closed-door discussions are often suggested or encouraged by an elected board’s legal counsel.

But legality and necessity are two different things.

Consider the following list on Fourth Estate counsel to meetings. He also wrote, “Out of the dark, results a strange thing from behind the screen!”

EIGHT: Do not make a habit of whispering or passing notes at meetings. You were elected to speak for us. Tell us what you have to say out loud and proud!

NINE: Allow public input at every meeting. Include it on every agenda.

TEN: Be as transparent as possible. Do not hold executive sessions simply because counsel advised it is “legal,” to do so. Ask yourself: “Is it absolutely critical we discuss this privately?”

That should be the test because legality and necessity are two different things.

We appreciate our local commissioners and board members. They serve for a munificent compensation. They make tough decisions. They sometimes lose friends and make enemies. Their dedication to community is admirable.

We simply ask elected officials to think twice before kicking the public out of public meetings.

Streets for less. Less is a rare occasion, not a habit.

Brian Hunhoff writes for the Camano Island Observer in South, Blendon Beach, Ilwaco.

Editor’s note

March 12-19 was Sunshine Week. The above editorial appeared about the importance of open government. What should expect from public representatives, not to target any particular group. — Kathy Boyd

Ten commandments for open meetings

ONE: Do not gather as a quorum outside of regular meetings, and do not hold special meetings without giving at least 48 hours public notice.

TWO: Do not hold public meeting sessions about controversial issues when private interpretation is needed. Consider the following list our Fourth Estate counsel to meetings.

THREE: Do not hold executive sessions simply because counsel advised it is “legal” to do so. Ask yourself: “Is it absolutely critical we discuss this privately?”

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