



Yucaipa City Council Pursues Enhanced Transparency

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Yucaipa, CA – Looking to promote transparency, accountability, and public trust in local government by providing increased access to public information, meaningful public engagement, and adherence to ethical principles, the Yucaipa City Council, at its March 27th meeting, voted unanimously to approve the “Yucaipa Sunshine Ordinance.”

60 years ago, a landmark law opened the work of government to the people of California. Enacted in 1953, that law carried the name of its author, the Ralph M. Brown Act, or “Brown Act.” The Brown Act aimed to build trust in government by opening its actions to public input and scrutiny.

According to City Manager Chris Mann, “Although the Brown Act provides the public with critical access, it is really a minimum standard. Aiming to do better, many cities and counties have passed what are commonly referred to as ‘Sunshine Ordinances’ to go beyond the basic requirements of state law.”

“Government is supposed work the people. For the people to hold government accountable, they need to know what’s going on,” said Mayor Pro Tem Bobby Duncan. “The Yucaipa Sunshine Ordinance will go beyond state law to arm the people with the information they need to keep the City working for them.”

Since the Brown Act took effect six decades ago, technology has changed the world. The Brown Act requires local governments to hold open meetings and share documents upon request. But it does not require cities to broadcast meetings or make records available online. With its new ordinance, the City will use technology to make its business easier to access.

The Yucaipa Sunshine Ordinance

Hundreds of people access City Council meetings through audio broadcasts and recordings. One provision of the Ordinance is to add video to the live broadcast. A video feed will provide the public a more complete experience of City Council meetings.

The Ordinance requires staff to post all labor agreements, resolutions and MOUs online. This includes employment agreements, like the City Manager’s contract. Salaries and benefits for management employees will also be posted.

Planning applications may spark intense public interest because of their potential impacts. To let the public learn about projects before public hearings, the Ordinance requires staff to post applications and related documents online during the public review period.

According to the Ordinance, Brown Act provisions will apply to City committees discussing potential changes to the General Plan or zoning code. This aims to involve the public in discussions about important land use decisions as early as possible.

State law mandates regular ethics trainings for public officials. The Ordinance invites the public to take part in these trainings.

The Ordinance also directs the City Manager to develop a communications plan. The plan will work increase stakeholder engagement and community understanding of City initiatives and services.

The City Council must vote on new ordinances twice. The first vote is the most consequential and the source of greatest deliberation. The Yucaipa Sunshine Ordinance will return for final adoption (referred to as “second reading”) at the April 10th meeting. Assuming that it once again passes on second reading, the Ordinance will then go into effect on July 1, 2023.

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