

## VENTURA COUNTY CITIES COUNCIL MEETINGS

### INTRODUCTION

There are ten incorporated cities in Ventura County. All function under a city council/city manager mode of government. Council members are elected at large and the city manager serves at the will of the council. The Grand Jury visited regular city council meetings in each city to determine if they operated as effective governing bodies.

### INQUIRY

Over a period of several months the Grand Jury attended the following regular city council meetings.

Camarillo	Port Hueneme
Fillmore	San Buenaventura
Moorpark	Santa Paula
Ojai	Simi Valley
Oxnard	Thousand Oaks

The Grand Jury wanted to know if proper notice of meetings was given and if a complete agenda was prepared and used as a plan for meetings. Council operations were observed with respect to timeliness, responses to public dissent, adherence to adopted procedures, and openness as required by the Brown Act.

### FINDINGS

All council meetings were properly noticed in accordance with legal requirements.

Council meetings were generally convened on time and deliberations were conducted in accordance with adopted procedures.

The published and posted council agendas were complete and the matters listed were covered, though not necessarily in the order given.

Councils gave citizens an open and uninterrupted opportunity to express their views on matters before the councils. Council members showed respect for each other and members of the public. There was a difference in the apparent tolerance of divergent views among the various cities.

The councils as governing bodies generally seemed to be focused on their governing responsibilities rather than political advantage.

Some councils tried innovative ideas to promote interest in local government, particularly among youths.

Most councils had some diversity in political perspective and those that didn't seemed to be less tolerant of public dissent.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Councils too frequently use the consent agenda to expedite business and close off public debate.

Although political diversity can be both an aid and a hindrance to governance it should be embraced, recognized, respected, and tolerated.

Councils are generally well run and productive but appear to have difficulty finding a consensus on contentious issues.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Participation by young people and the general public in city council activities should be encouraged.
2. Council members would do well to visit other city council meetings to get a feel for how others solve problems.
3. When contentious issues arise council members should remember they are there to govern and do the people's business.
4. Special public forums on contentious issues would help build consensus, both in city councils and in the public.
5. Each council should develop a code of ethical conduct, including guidelines for working together.
6. Councils would do well to take more time to describe the responsibilities of government and better explain why certain actions have been taken.
6. Future Grand Jury members should attend at least one city council meeting at each of the ten cities in Ventura County.

**RESPONSE REQUIRED**

City Councils of:

- Camarillo
- Fillmore
- Moorpark
- Ojai
- Oxnard
- Port Hueneme
- San Buenaventura
- Santa Paula
- Simi Valley
- Thousand Oaks