



August 14, 1998

Members of the Grand Jury
County of Ventura
800 Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Re: Report of the 1997-98 Grand Jury regarding the Public Records Requests to the Oxnard City Clerk's Office.

Dear Members of the Grand Jury:

This letter is in response to the Grand Jury report regarding public records requests for the City of Oxnard's minutes from the City Clerk's Office. On September 15, 1998, Mr. Hernandez, a member of the Ventura County Grand Jury, called the City Clerk's Office requesting the approved minutes of the August 26, 1997 meeting. Mr. Hernandez was informed that these minutes had not been processed and forwarded to the City Council for approval. However, he was advised that audio tapes and draft copy of the requested minutes were available for review. He stated he would wait for the final approved minutes. Mr. Hernandez was provided a draft copy of minutes of August 26, 1997 on October 15, 1998. Subsequently, copies of the minutes of August 26, September 9, 16, 23, and 30 were hand-delivered to the Grand Jury's Office on November 26, 1997.

This office processes more than 130 sets of minutes a year for the following agencies: City Council, Housing Authority, Community Development Commission, Redevelopment Agency and Industrial Development Financing Authority. The average time to approve minutes by the agencies has been four to five weeks. Unfortunately, there have been occasions due to work load, staffing, and scheduling when this average has been exceeded. Although this office officially is only required to prepare action minutes, past practice has been to provide action minutes as well as summaries of comments made at the agencies meeting. This practice has lengthened the time for a body to receive and approve minutes.

The City Clerk profession has a reputation of being very helpful to the public and any agency requesting information. Providing public information has been a duty that City Clerks take very seriously. The Oxnard City Clerk's staff has done an excellent job of providing information to the public as well as performing all other duties of the City Clerk's office. This office successfully processes hundreds of internal and external public records requests a year. In the spirit of constant self improvement, this office appreciates your agency's efforts for trying to improve services to the community. However, this effort should be made in a complete and consistently fair manner.

The findings of the Grand Jury did not entirely reflect services provided by this office to the public or the Grand Jury's request, including (1) the immediate response to Mr. Hernandez's initial verbal request, (2) office personnel presenting alternatives to Mr. Hernandez' request, (3) the policy and practice of responding to all written requests for information within ten days of the request, and (4) the delivery of all information requested the day after the September minutes were approved by the City Council.

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In addition, to obtain a more complete overall assessment, your study may have also considered the following:

1. the type of minutes prepared by each city (action, verbatim).
2. average length of each city's meetings.
3. number of minutes per year processed by each city.
4. number of staff available to prepare minutes.
5. the amount of staff time required to prepare minutes.
6. a broader, more extended examination period.

Again, this office appreciates your comments and strives to resolve any possible future misunderstandings. The Oxnard City Clerk's office has also re-examined current procedures and will continue to work to improve the service it provides to the public.

Sincerely,



Daniel Martinez
City Clerk

cc Oxnard City Council
Edmund F. Sotelo, City Manager