

CONDUCTING SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS



SOUTH CAROLINA
ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

Local Leaders. Statewide Strength.™

Managing and Conducting
Meetings of Local
Governments

Institute of Government

October 28, 2026

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OUR AGENDA

Three Chapters

With breaks!

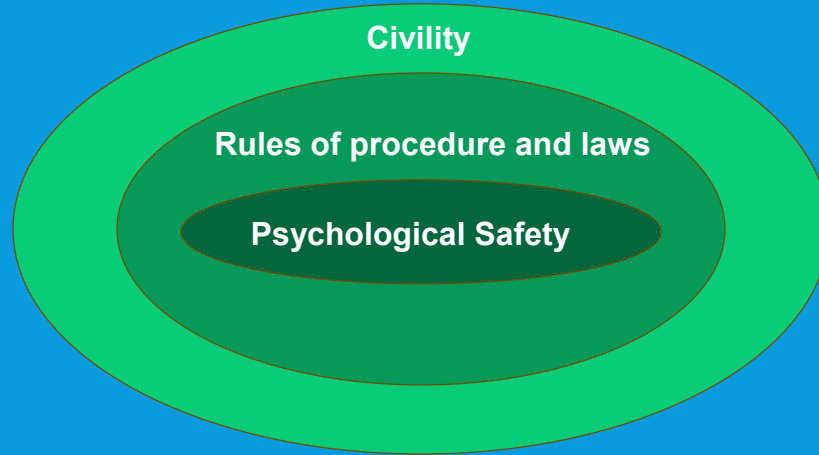
1. Psychological Safety
2. Rules of Procedure (Laws too!)
3. Civility

.... What they are & how they work
together

And Q&A too!

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DEFINITIONS

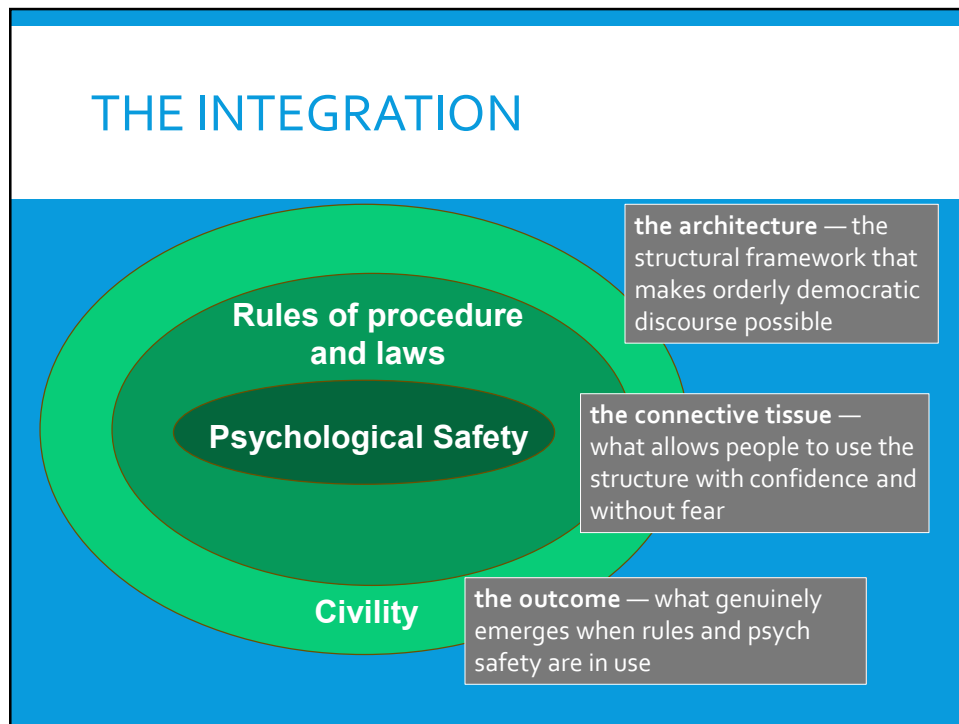


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DEFINITIONS



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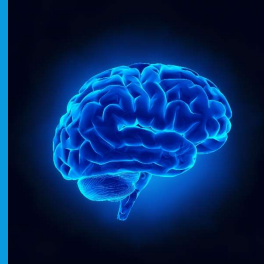
ABOUT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Speaking up puts your brain in a “threat state.”

The brain interprets social threats as dangerous as physical threats. When you:

- Challenge others’ ideas
- Question assumptions
- Point out problems
- Take an opposing view
- Add to the friction, even if it’s to offer an alternative

You can feel like you’re being personally attacked!



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1ST: PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Typical reactions when...

- An elected official takes an unpopular position
- One board member respectfully disagrees publicly with another member
- A staff member questions a board member’s request
- A citizen nervously approaches a public microphone



Self-censor



Put on “armor”



Have courage

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ABOUT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



All involved

Board, especially Chair, most responsible, to help each other feel safe to engage and be rewarded for being vulnerable

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PSYCH SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES

Board Chair and Members

- Make an effort to get to know one another
- Role model conducting successful meetings:
 - Commit to “standing rules”/meeting guidelines*
 - Follow laws and rules, including parliamentary procedure*
 - Practice civility*
- Regulate the nervous systems to stay calm

* Covered today

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PSYCH SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES

Staff

- Manages room, including temperature and sight lines
- Sets up process for public comments and provides tips – and mics too
- Arranges for any online viewing
- Available to answer questions from Council Board and Members
- Help manage public comments

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PSYCH SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES

Public – in person

- Pays attention
- Follows rules for speaking, when comments are allowed
- Practices civility toward each other, Council members and staff

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QUESTIONS: PSYCH SAFETY?

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2ND: RULES OF PROCEDURE & LAW



The structure that:

- Governs:
 - Member conduct during meetings
 - Actions between members
 - Relationships between members and the public
- Provides for fair exchange of information
- Introduces and resolves issues and procedures necessary to execute the Council's business

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WHO ESTABLISHES THE “RULES”

- *State Statute: State law may require bodies to follow certain rules or allow the body to adopt their own rules:*
 - County Council: Section - 4-9-110 of the Home Rule Act requires county council to enact its own rules.
 - Local Boards/Commissions - Local ordinances or state statute may also dictate rules to be followed
 - Bodies not specifically authorized to create rules don't have inherent power to create rules
- *State Statutes may preempt a local rule:*
 - *Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)* : SC Code 30-4-10 et seq.
 - *Ethics Act*: SC Code 8-13-10 et seq.

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WHO ESTABLISHES THE “RULES”



Meeting Guidelines (Standing Rules)

- Operational guidelines, such as seating plans and time limits for discussion
- Degree of formality, especially for boards of ≤12



Procedural Rules for conducting meetings

- Agenda, quorum, motions, voting, reports, bylaws, etc.

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ADOPTING YOUR BODY'S RULES OF PROCEDURE

Most common set of “rules” is Robert’s Rules of Order



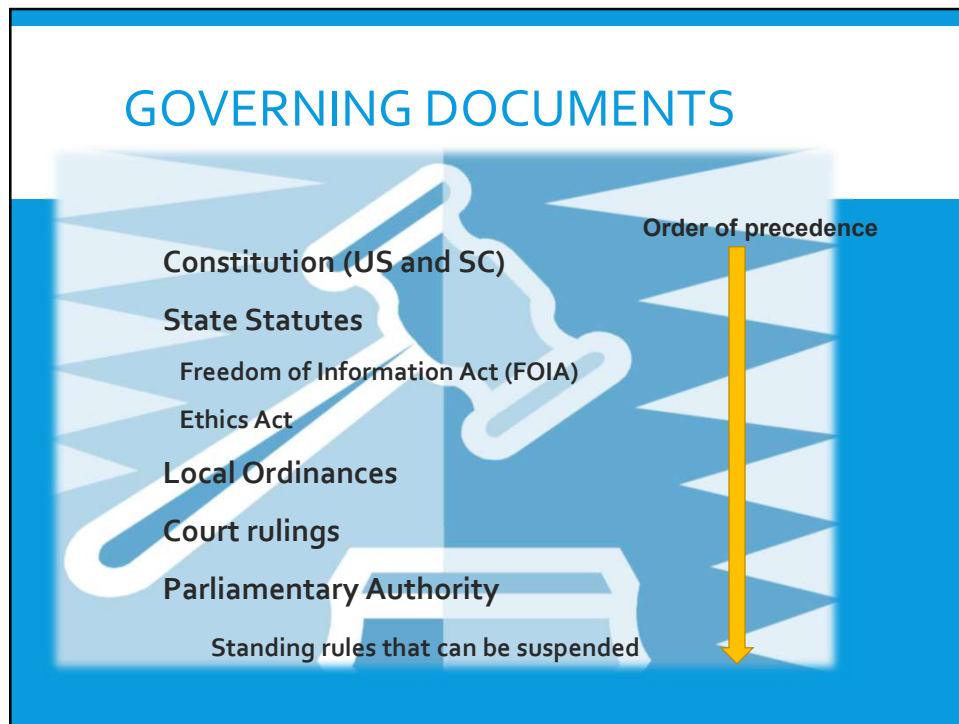
- Brig. Gen. Henry M. Robert
- Born in Robertville, SC
- U.S. Army 1857-1901
 - Chief of Engineers
 - Buried at Arlington National Cemetery
- Created Robert’s Rules of Order to bring order to his church meetings

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OTHER RULES

2. *Mason’s Manual of Legislative Procedure*:
 - South Carolina and US House of Representative uses Mason’s
3. *Jefferson’s Manual (Manual of Parliamentary Practice for the Use of the Senate of the United States)*:
 - Written by Thomas Jefferson in 1801; considered to be the first published book on legislative procedure
 - Still used as part of the US Senate’s rules of procedure today
 - SC Senate uses it as a guide in interpreting their own rules

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MEETING OPTIONS

- In person
- Other options:
 - If Council or other body has authorized alternative methods by ordinance or rule that covers all units of the county government
 - Also must be easily available to the public – generally meaning a telephone line
 - May also provide additional video streaming, such as Zoom, Facebook Live, YouTube (*Note: some services require the public to register and track information.*)

NOTE: If you're using the recording for minutes preparation, you must save the recording for a minimum of 2 years

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SC LEGAL REQUIREMENTS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

- Must follow all statutes & rules of procedure that apply to in-person meetings
- Must have ability to hear and be heard
 - A.G. opinion: Town of Tega Cay
- For handling quasi-judicial hearings, need a system for:
 - Presenting evidentiary documents via screen share
 - Questioning witnesses

NOTE: Implications for Due Process and Equal Protection issues

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VIRTUAL MEETINGS: HARDWARE/SOFTWARE ISSUES

- Computer hardware and software should allow **participants and public** the ability to hear/see simultaneously
- **Members and staff** should be able to interact with everyone equally
- **Public attendees** should be able to access information discussed during the session

NOTE: The Body is not responsible for the quality of public internet/telephone connection; however, software needs to minimize risks of hacking, hijacking, and other interferences by 3rd-parties

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PARLIAMENTARY BASICS FOR ALL TYPES OF MEETINGS

1. Meeting notice
2. Quorum
3. Motions
4. Discussion or debate
5. Voting
6. Majority rules – with exceptions that generally reduce or restrict rights
7. Records of actions taken

Reviewed next...

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PUBLIC NOTICE FOR MEETINGS

- Rules must conform to *FOIA* Section 30-4-80
- Annual notice of regularly scheduled meeting calendar
 - HRA Section 4-9-110 – County Council must meet at least **once each month**
- 24-hour minimum notice of individual meetings to public & media
 - Posting of notice and agenda; also include:
 - Physical location of meeting
 - Media requesting notice and
 - County website if regularly maintained

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NOTICE: AGENDA & AMENDMENTS

- Must conform to FOIA Section 30-4-80
- Agendas are required at all public meetings
- Council has limited ability to add items to the agenda once posted!
 - **Before the meeting**
 - Items may be added IF a new 24-hour notice is provided
 - If less than 24 hours – delay the meeting or wait until meeting begins
 - **Once the meeting has begun**
 - An item for which action can be taken may be added with a 2/3 vote
 - Final action item added must have 2/3 vote and a finding by the chair that an emergency or exigent circumstance exists.
 - Per SC Supreme Court - emergency must be out of the body's control or influence

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QUORUM

- FOIA Section 30-4-20(e) provides at a minimum a quorum is a simple majority of members – 50% plus 1
- No official action can be taken without a quorum present
 - Acts are null & void absent a quorum
 - *Anderson County v. Preston* (2019)
- Without a quorum—Actions you can take
 - Adjourn
 - Take up unofficial items (awards, public comments, presentations)
 - Recess and try to get a quorum
 - "Fix the time to adjourn"—that is, "Schedule the next meeting"

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MOTIONS

Create motions in the affirmative, not the negative

- Ex: “move to deny” rather than “move to not approve”
- **Substantive motions (main/principal)**
 - Puts a question before the Council
 - Only **one** main motion at a time
- **Subsidiary motions**
 - Acts upon a substantive (main/principle) motion
 - Multiple subsidiary motions at the same time
 - Order of precedence
- **Also incidental & procedural motions**

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MOTIONS: AMENDMENTS

- 3 types of amendments
 1. Strike out
 2. Insert
 3. Strike out and insert
- Limit of 2 amendments at one time
 - An amendment to the main motion
 - Amendment to the amendment
- Amendments are limited to the pending motion and must be germane
- Once body votes on an amendment, a member can make another amendment – as long as it’s germane

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MOTIONS: AMENDMENTS

- May have multiple motions on the floor – main motion with subsidiary motions
- Order of debate and voting: Board considers and votes on the motions in the **reverse order** they were proposed—
 - That is, first, you discuss the highest-ranking subsidiary motion and vote on it
 - Second, then all the others
 - Third, finish up with the main motion -- if it's still on the floor

Note: "Friendly amendment" is a myth; all amendments need a 2nd and a vote, either formal vote or approved without objection

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AMENDMENT DEMONSTRATION

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AN ORDINANCE LIFECYCLE

ORDINANCE NUMBER: 2026-_____

POLICY TO REQUIRE EMPLOYEES TO WEAR COUNTY BRANDED DEPARTMENTAL CLOTHING DURING WORKING HOURS ON THE JOB:

Based on research data, the Council Board Members know that when employees are wearing a badge that identifies them as county employees that they respond to the public with a more positive attitude and more complete service. And they achieve improved outcomes with fewer public complaints.

The badge for County employees is a laminated card that individual employees can attach to their clothing or wear on a lanyard. The badge needs to be worn or displayed in such a manner that any member of the public can read the name and department during any encounter in which the employee is at work and encounters members of the public.

If out of compliance: Employees failing to wear their personal badge as required shall be sent home promptly. Any employees who are sent home and do not return within one hour (60 minutes) wearing their badge shall be docked a day's pay.

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WHAT ACTIONS CAN YOU TAKE

1. Make the policy more explicit.
2. Weaken the policy.
3. Determine where to get the badge and/or who will make it.
4. Determine whether the badge serves any other purpose or function.
5. Clarify the policy—conform to title.
6. Set a penalty for loss of badge if it also opens doors.
7. Set penalty for failure to return when employment ends.
8. Other actions?
9. Bring discussion/debate to a close.

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SIMPLIFIED CHART OF MOTIONS

Motion	Debatable	Amendable	Vote
Adjournment	No	No	Majority
Recess	No	Yes	Majority
Lay on the table	No	No	Majority
Close debate	No	No	2/3
Limit/close debate	No	No	2/3
Postpone definitely	Yes	Yes	Majority
Refer to committee	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend amendment	Yes	No	Majority
Amend main motion	Yes	Yes	Majority
Main motion	Yes	Yes	Majority

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DISCUSSION/DEBATE

- The Chair is responsible for controlling the flow of debate and ensuring that all members have the opportunity to speak
- Order of Debate
 - Person who raised the issue speaks first
 - First-in-line v. alternate viewpoint
 - Maintain decorum/courtesy/civility
 - Limits on # of times a person may speak
- Should the Chair participate in debate?
 - Another member should preside temporarily
- Ending debate
 - by motion of a member
 - Can't interrupt a speaker
 - 2/3 vote to cutoff debate
 - By the chair when debate exhausted



ELMO (Enough!
Let's Move On!)

And **Ditto**

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VOTING – GENERALLY

- Common method - by voice/show of hands
- Required for passage
 - Majority (simple-majority): 1 more than the other side
 - Positive Majority: majority of all the body's members
 - Total includes absentees or abstentions
 - 2/3 -- 2/3 of members present and voting
 - S.C. Code may require that 2/3 of the members be present to support
 - Actions affecting rights of members: amend the agenda; call the question; postpone to a certain time
- Tie votes – considered to have failed, retains the status quo
- When and how does the Chair vote?

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VOTING METHODS: VIRTUAL MEETINGS.



Use these methods

- 1. Without objection**
- 2. An electronic platform**
- 3. Roll call**

Avoid voice voting

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PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS



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PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS

- Different from Public Hearings
- Public bodies are not required to provide public comment periods at legislative/business meetings
- Bodies may enact reasonable rules for public comments at any meeting as well as provide civility tips for speaking
 - Content Neutral! - Prohibits viewpoint discrimination
 - Can prohibit abusive language/actions
 - Requirements for notice, and reasonable limits (time, # of speakers, order, etc.)
 - Rules may allow for removal for conduct that's so disruptive as to render the meeting unable to continue – a "last resort" action
 - Can set up separate mics – pro, con and questions to the chair

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HANDLING DISRUPTIONS DURING PUBLIC COMMENT PERIODS***

- Free speech implications exist for protecting the public during public comment periods. Free speech does not include profanity or direct assertions of criminal behavior.
- Rules should be adopted addressing public comments and applied evenly.
- An individual speaking can and should be admonished for not adhering to the rules set forth by Council.
- Arguments with the public should be avoided.
- Law enforcement should be requested to remove any person or persons who are acting inappropriately.
- Council should be in control of the sound & video systems during the meeting.

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PUBLIC HEARINGS: HOW THEY DIFFER FROM PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Statutorily required for certain actions
 - Personal & property notice
- Goal is for members of the body to receive information
 - Council Members need to refrain from personal comments or remarks to speakers
- Publicly announce rules for public input
 - Time limits; speaking order; attendance limits/overflow
- Follow the posted agenda
- Maintain decorum and public safety
 - Don't allow speakers to attack other speakers or members

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MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

- Citizen recording - FOIA permits any person to record the meeting by video or audio
- Removal of a member of the body from a meeting
 - *Lockaby v. City of Simpsonville* – SC Ct. Appeals June 2023
 - Discipline is a legislative function granted to the body
 - 2016 WL 3355910 (S.C.A.G.) Ms. Miriam Hair
 - Prior A.G. opinion suggests removal is limited in time and scope
 - Should avoid the appearance of 1st Amendment viewpoint discrimination
 - Can't alter the term of office
 - *Houston Community College System V. Wilson*, **142 S.Ct. 1253 (2022)**
 - Discipline of a member with censure and discussion of free speech issues

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ROLE OF THE CHAIR

- Set agenda and ensure materials are distributed to members
 - Rules should provide a process for members to add items to an agenda
- Preside at meeting/hearings
 - Keep the meeting from “*going off the rails*” while not “*controlling*” it
- Maintain order and decorum
 - Extends to public and members
- Rule on points and motions
- Recognize speakers

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POSTPONING/TABLING MATTERS BEFORE THE BODY

- **Motion to Postpone/Carry-over/Defer** – RONR, 12th ed. §14
 - time certain (2/3 vote)
 - No-limit (majority vote)
 - Debatable, amendable, can be reconsidered
- **Table/Lay on the table/Defer** – postpones until a later time – RONR, 12th ed. §17
 - With table, the question dies if not taken from the table by the end of the next meeting – RONR, 12th ed. §17.8

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REVIVING A PREVIOUS MATTER

- **Motion to Reconsider** – reconsider an action made at the same or the next meeting – RONR, 12th ed., §37.10 – 34.
 - *Motion must be made by member voting on the prevailing side of issue*
 - *Potential conflict with FOIA §30-4-80(A)*
- **Reintroduction of a question previously voted down**
 - *A question previously voted on and disposed of can't be reintroduced in the same session of the body – RONR, 12th ed., §10.26*
 - *What is a session? RONR, 12th ed., §6.25(a) & 8.2.2*
 - *A question can be "reintroduced" if it has been sufficiently changed in language that it is considered a new question – RONR, 12th ed §38.1*

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REQUESTS AND INQUIRIES

- **Point of Inquiry:** directed and answered by the chair only – clarify rule or procedure
- **Point of Order:** directed to the chair to raise issues of meeting order/conduct
- **Point of Information:** directed to or through the chair seeking information relevant to the current issue
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** directed to the chair to address council or make a presentation

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EXECUTIVE SESSIONS: MUST BE ON THE AGENDA

FOIA (Sec. 30-4-70) specifically provides for executive session **BUT ONLY** to Discuss one or more of the following:

1. Discussion of employment related matters (specific employee/position)
2. Discussion of contractual negotiations, receipt of legal advice, specific legal claims.
3. Discussion regarding the development of security personnel or devices.
4. Investigative proceedings regarding allegations of criminal misconduct.
5. Discussion of matters relating to the proposed economic development projects

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EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

Nancy Miramonti v. Richland School District 1 – SC Ct. Appeals
January 4, 2023

- School Board moved to go into Executive Session to address a parental complaint re: ESOL School location
 - No Executive Session was noticed on the Agenda
 - Motion did not provide sufficient reason for the Executive Session
- In Executive Session, the members approved allowing the chair to respond to the parent by letter
 - FOIA statute expressly prohibits polling, voting or actions that commit the body “to a course of action” while in executive session

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RECORDS

- The organization must maintain
 - Records of meetings - MINUTES
 - Records of financial transactions - AUDIT & BUDGET
 - Records of elections & appointments
- Permanent vs. time limited retention & microfilming for security
- County Retention Schedule

[https://scdah.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/Records%20Management%20\(RM\)/Schedules/cotxt.pdf](https://scdah.sc.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/Records%20Management%20(RM)/Schedules/cotxt.pdf)

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FOIA: MINUTES

- Section 30-4-90 requires that minutes be kept for all meetings of a public body. The **minimum** content of these is:
 - 1) the date time and place of the meeting
 - 2) recording of the members present and absent
 - 3) the substance of all matters proposed, discussed or decided
 - 4) a record of votes taken
 - 5) any other information requested to be included by a member
 - January 2022 A.G. opinion – *Anne Marie Green* - cannot be subjected to a majority vote requirement, but may be subject to exemptions from “public records” in the act or other state law.
- 2-year retention of official recordings used to development minutes

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ETHICAL ISSUES & MEETINGS

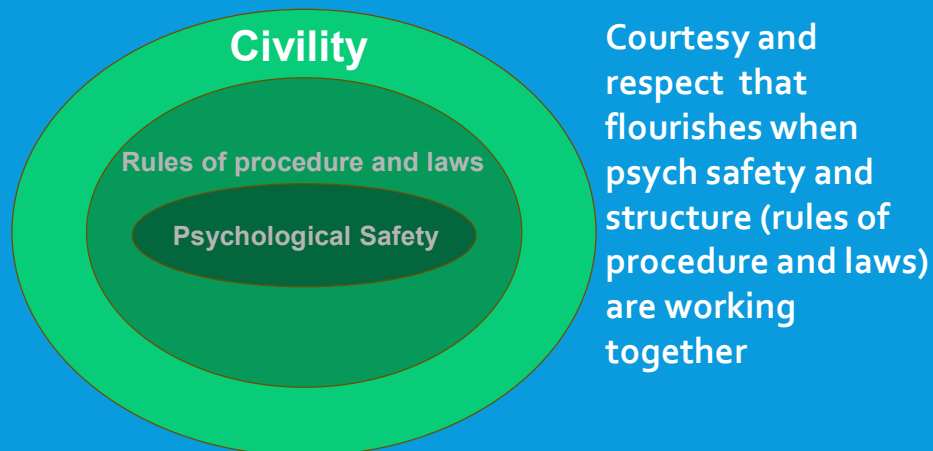
- SC Code 8-13-700: Member can't use their office to obtain an economic benefit for the member, family, or business/associates
 - Must file a conflict letter with the chair – published in the minutes
 - Can't take any part in debate or vote
 - *avoiding the perception of participation*
- Quorum issues after *Preston*
 - *Anderson County v. Preston*: If the *court* disqualifies a vote cast – it does not count towards a quorum
- Difference between **Conflict** and **Bias**
- Social Media and the Press
 - *O'Connor-Ratcliff v. Garnier* – US Supreme Court 23/24 Term

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QUESTIONS: PROCEDURE/RULES?

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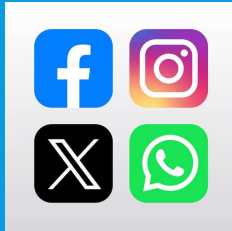
3RD: CIVILITY



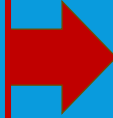
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TODAY'S CHALLENGES FOR CIVILITY

National politics seeping into local governance and causing civic dysfunction



Culture war topics contributing to greater polarization



How we tend to react:



Suppress feelings; being "polite" because it's not safe to be yourself



Try to restrain ourselves and hold mutual regard for others



Feel punished rather than rewarded for showing up authentically

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WAYS TO SUPPORT CIVILITY

Board members role model :

- Listening to each other plus the public during comments
- Being kind and polite to each other, staff and the public
- Avoiding interrupting each other and the public
- Using first names to show everyone has the same status
- Introducing different perspectives on topics, as appropriate
- Taking breaks/recesses *before* any conversations get heated

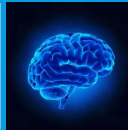
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WAYS TO SUPPORT CIVILITY

Specifically with the public:

- Be clear about the public's role in participating
- Make it easy for members to sign up to speak
- Request that everyone stay quiet when the meetings are in session; no cheering, booing or clapping of any speakers, including board members
- Consider having mics for "pro," "con," and "questions" on controversial topics
- Provide tips for public speaking

Avoid uncertainty as it's perceived as a threat



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CIVILITY IN COMMUNICATION

3 practices for board members to support civility

1. Adopt the 3 "S's" to improve clarity
 - Be succinct
 - Be specific
 - Be sincere
2. Combine inquiry and advocacy; that is, do a mix of asking questions and pushing your point of view
3. Follow the "Rule of 3"
 - If an issue is still unresolved, confusing, heated or whatever, after 3 exchanges via text, email, voice mail, etc. it's time to talk in real time.
 - By talking via the phone, video-conferencing or in person, you can clear the air, reset, and determine next steps.

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ANY OTHER CIVILITY PRACTICES?

- Any civility practices that you're using successfully?
- Any other effective civility practices you've heard about or seen in action?

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QUESTIONS: CIVILITY?

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IN CLOSING

Thank you for your attention and participation!



Now let's use this framework to make democratic participation safe, civil and effective!