

# **CITIZEN ORIENTATION CHECKLIST**

*This checklist is designed to help you get to know the city or county you call home and to understand your legal rights as a resident. The checklist below outlines what you're entitled to expect from your elected officials, and how to hold them accountable when those expectations aren't met. Here's what you can generally expect:*

## **General Information:**

- Collect key staff contact information (e.g., fellow elected officials, city manager/clerk, department directors).
- Collect key dates for the year such as council meetings, retreats, workshops, advisory board meetings, conferences, special events and training opportunities.
- Familiarize yourself with municipal terminology. Tip: Check out the League's City Government 101 Glossary of Terms.
- Review the organizational chart of your municipality, including boards and committees.

## **Key Documents:**

Review the following key documents or ask your elected official for a copy of the following:

- City Charter. Pay attention to your city's form of government, the responsibilities of the council/commission and other charter offices.
- Comprehensive plan.
- Map of city and county boundaries (with voting districts, if applicable).
- Budget book, annual audit and annual financial report.
- Strategic plan.

## **Familiarize Yourself With the Following Procedures:**

- How to request background documents for agenda items
- How to request a public record (for yourself and when a citizen asks)
- How citizens can file a complaint (e.g., pothole, garbage pick-up)
- The process for appointing boards and committees
- Reimbursement of city expenditures policy
- Reporting requirements (state law and other) for gifts or financial disclosure
  - How citizens can provide public input at council/commission meetings
  - Guidelines for talking to the press

## **Intergovernmental Relations:**

- Familiarize yourself with the names of area and regional officials, such as county commissioners, state legislators, congressional delegation, water management district, special district boards, school board, local or regional league of cities, etc.
  - Utilize your statewide association, the Florida League of Cities, for training and other resources.
- If applicable, use the National League of Cities.

## **Open and Noticed Meetings:**

- You should expect that all meetings of public boards and commissions, including advisory boards, will be open to the public. This means you have the right to attend.
- Meetings must be given reasonable public notice, typically including the date, time, location, and a summary agenda. Seven days is generally the minimum accepted notice, except for emergency meetings.
- Minutes of meetings must be taken and made available to the public. These can be summaries or notes.

## **Access to Public Records:**

- What is the policy in your state re: all state, county, and municipal records are open for personal inspection and copying by any person.
- Make sure providing access to these public records is a duty of each department.
- Your representatives and city staff should be able to explain how to request a public record.
- Even if records are kept electronically, access to them should not be diminished. Your city should strive to provide remote electronic access where feasible.

## **Representative Conduct and Knowledge:**

- Decision-Making Process: Elected officials are part of the "decision-making tree". This means they are expected to understand how decisions are made, including how their body evaluates information, makes suggestions, or weeds through candidates for other positions.
- Prohibited Private Communications: You should expect that board members will not use private communications (such as phone calls, emails, or texts) to discuss city business among themselves. This is a core aspect of the Sunshine Law. Your representatives are also expected to avoid the *appearance* of impropriety in their communications.
- Familiarity with City Operations: Your representatives are expected to be familiar with:
  - Key city staff and other elected officials.
  - Important city dates, including council meetings, workshops, and advisory board meetings.
  - Municipal terminology and the city's organizational chart.
  - The city's Charter, which defines the form of government, city rules and laws and responsibilities of officials.

- Review Key documents such as the comprehensive plan, budget book, annual audit, financial reports, and strategic plan

- Your representatives should be aware of and facilitate how citizens can provide public input at council or commission meetings. They should also know how citizens can file municipal service requests (e.g., for potholes or garbage pickup).

- Ethics and Compliance: Elected officials are expected to be familiar with state laws and other reporting requirements for gifts or financial disclosure, and to complete required ethics training. Violations of the Sunshine Law can result in consequences ranging from civil infractions and fines to misdemeanor charges, including imprisonment for intentional violations.

- Intergovernmental Awareness: They should be familiar with other officials at county, state, and regional levels to help address broader community issues. Ask your rep or elected official if s/he is going to special task force meetings, chamber meetings, and/or legislative breakfasts.