

New Officer Training & Orientation

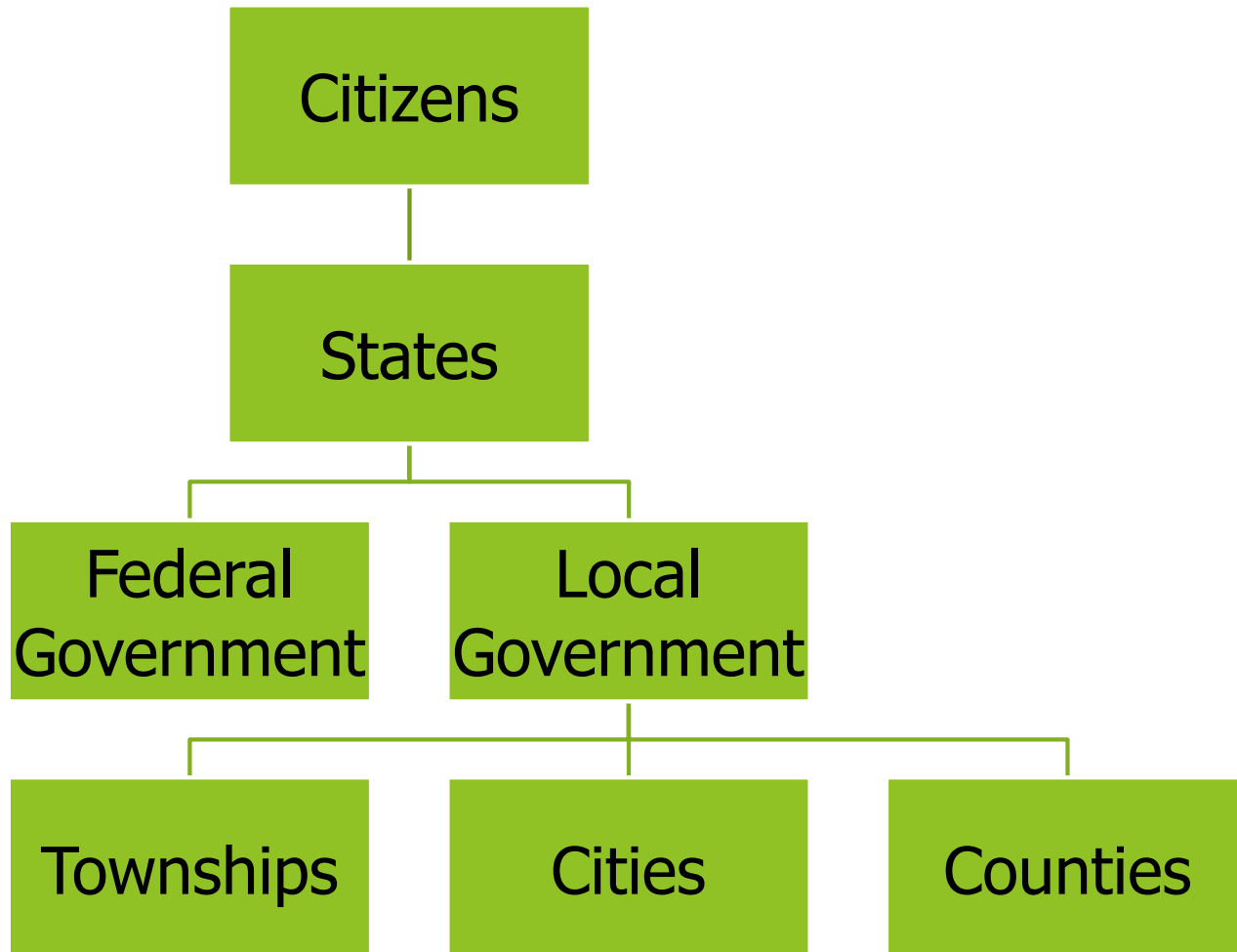
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Minnesota Association of Townships

2019 Spring Short Course

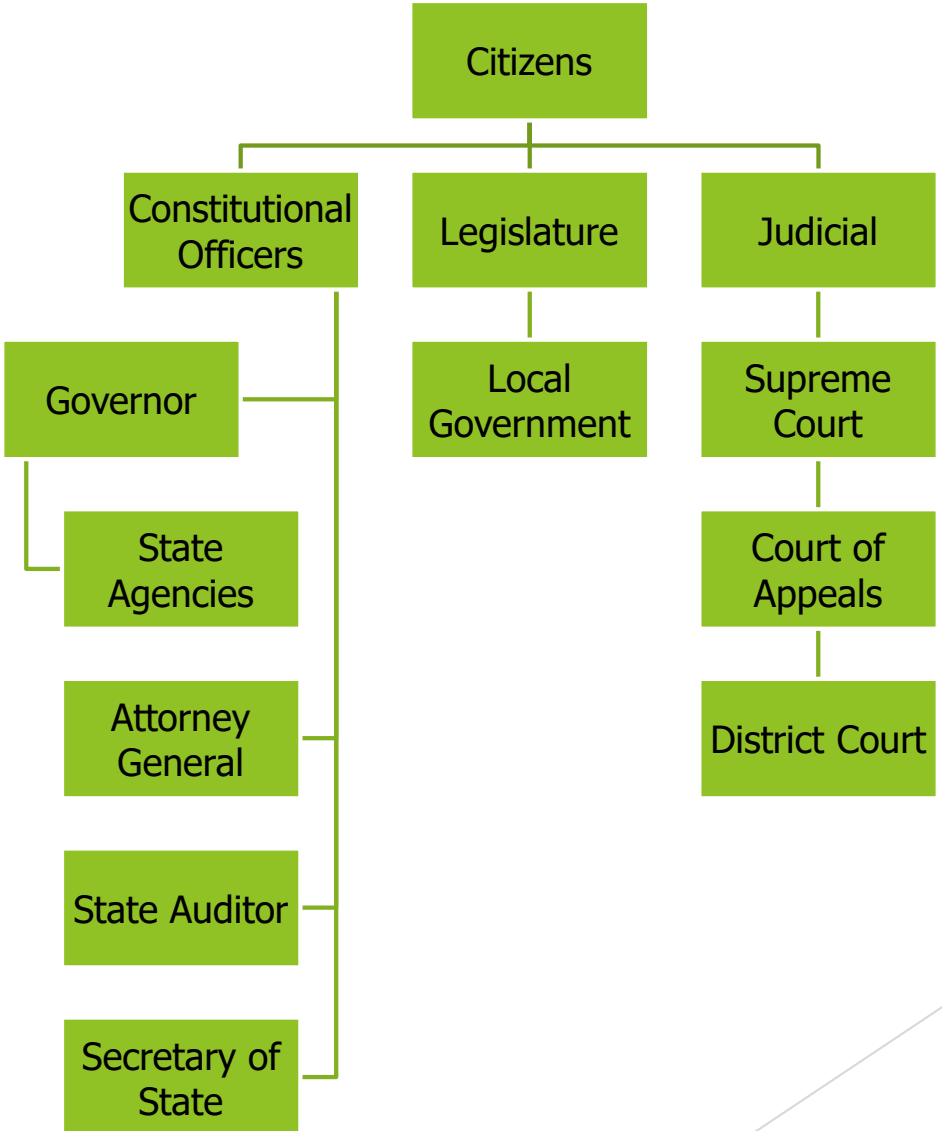
NATURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Organization



NATURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Separation of Powers



MUNICIPAL POWERS

- ▶ All powers come from the legislature through statute
- ▶ No inherent powers except those necessarily arising out of expressed powers

Town Electors	Town Board	Town Electors & Town Board
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MUNICIPAL POWERS

- ▶ Powers are limited by statutes, court decisions, and the constitutions
- ▶ Must follow the procedures associated with exercising the power, or it is as though you acted without authority
- ▶ Spending Money
 - ▶ Public purpose doctrine - Public funds may only be expended for purposes that are (1) authorized & (2) public

POWERS OF OFFICE

- ▶ Interpreted by the Courts
- ▶ Give Meaning to statutes adopted by Legislature
- ▶ If the record is adequate, courts will usually defer unless decision is “arbitrary and capricious”

HOLDING PUBLIC OFFICE

- ▶ Why is it important to understand the nature of public office?
 - ▶ Civil and criminal penalties
- ▶ Properly entering office
- ▶ Public Trust
 - ▶ Incompatible positions
 - ▶ Conflicts of interest

HOLDING PUBLIC OFFICE

- ▶ Public Trust (cont.)
 - ▶ Duty to report violations of the trust

Whenever a public officer “discovers evidence of theft, embezzlement, unlawful use of public funds or property, or misuse of public funds by...any person authorized to expend public funds, the employee or officer shall promptly report to law enforcement and shall promptly report in writing to the state auditor a detailed description of the alleged incident or incidents.”
Minn. Stat. § 609.456, subd. 1.

- ▶ “Unlawful” versus “disagree with”

CONDUCTING PUBLIC BUSINESS

- ▶ Who makes decisions?
 - ▶ A quorum of the supervisors or council members
 - ▶ By majority vote of those present, unless law specifically requires otherwise.

CONDUCTING PUBLIC BUSINESS

Running a Meeting

- ▶ Parliamentary procedure (e.g., Robert's Rules) helps to keep things organized and maintain order, but it is not a legal requirement
- ▶ Clerk maintains minutes, which are the official record of the meeting

CONDUCTING PUBLIC BUSINESS

Running a Meeting

▶ Public Comment

- ▶ Not required by law
- ▶ Can't have rules that are based on viewpoint
- ▶ Rules should be uniformly applied

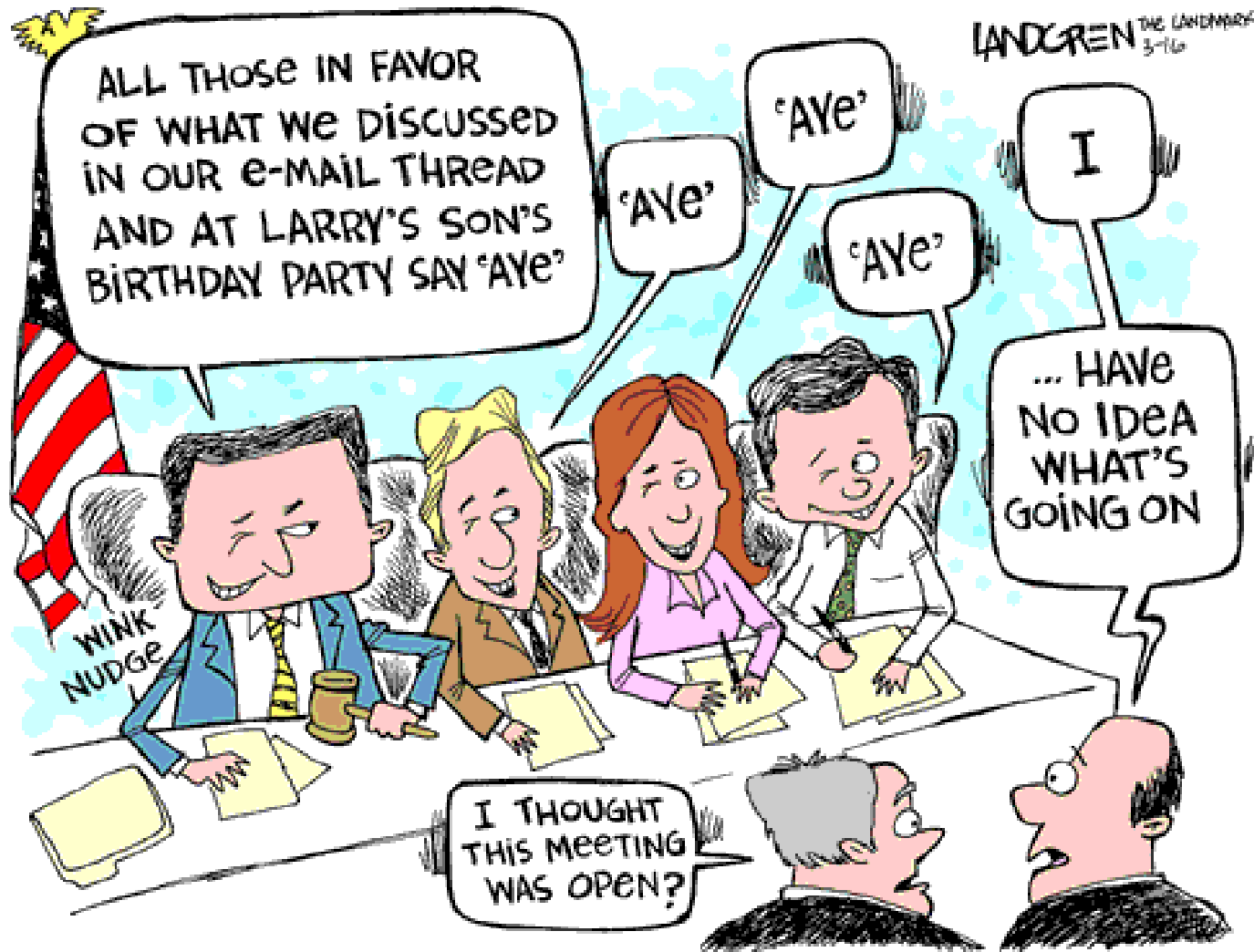
▶ Public Hearings

- ▶ Are required by law
- ▶ Public does have a right to speak
- ▶ Governed by statute that requires hearing

Open Meeting Law

- ▶ Minn. Stat. 13D.01: “All meetings . . . Must be open to the public.”
- ▶ Intent is so that the public can be informed of decisions and considerations those decisions are based upon
- ▶ Courts rule in favor of public and allow public to be FULLY informed.

Avoid This



Open Meeting Law

Quorum

- ▶ OML applies to quorum of any group appointed by governing board:
 - ▶ Elected Officials
 - ▶ Planning Commission
 - ▶ Advisory Commission
- ▶ OML does not apply to private groups
 - ▶ Church Board
 - ▶ VFW
 - ▶ Ad Hoc Citizen Group

Open Meeting Law Discussion

- ▶ Includes all Exchange of ideas.
NOT ONLY THE FINAL DECISION!
 - ▶ Talking
 - ▶ Phone calls
 - ▶ Emails

Open Meeting Law

Public Business

- ▶ Only discussions of public business trigger OML.
- ▶ Chance or social meetings do not trigger OML
- ▶ Training events allowed

Open Meeting Law Exceptions

▶ Closed Meetings

- ▶ Public is excluded.
- ▶ Be able to point to the statute that allows closed meeting.
- ▶ Check with town attorney about keeping minutes, but record if required by law

Open Meeting Law Exceptions

- ▶ Emergencies - Require immediate consideration
 - ▶ Protect public peace, health, or safety.
 - ▶ Be able to explain why OML couldn't be met.
 - ▶ Courts defer to governing body but be careful.

Open Meeting Law Notice

▶ Regular Meetings

- ▶ Schedule adopted at organizational meeting
- ▶ Clerk keeps on file

▶ Special Meetings

- ▶ Posted notice of time, date, place and purpose of meeting
- ▶ Mail or deliver notice to those who've filed request
- ▶ Posting or delivery must be "at least three days before the date of the meeting"
 - ▶ Three days doesn't really mean three days
 - ▶ If last day is Weekend or Holiday that day is omitted.

▶ Continued Meetings

- ▶ Announced - specific time and specific place

Open Meeting Law

Penalties

- ▶ Action may be brought by any person.
- ▶ Official personally liable.
 - ▶ \$300
 - ▶ Three violations = loss of office.
- ▶ Court may award attorney fees up to \$13,000 per party.

CONDUCTING PUBLIC BUSINESS

Making Decisions

- ▶ You are a Servant of the Public
- ▶ Act in a timely fashion (e.g., 60-day rule)
- ▶ Approve motion, resolution, or ordinance
- ▶ Publish, file, and record documents in appropriate place
- ▶ No Individual Authority!

Municipal Contracting Law

- Purpose:
 - A uniform and orderly contracting process,
 - Protect public funds by increasing the likelihood of the best price being obtained, and
 - Reduce the potential for fraud and abuse by public officials
- Applies to contracts for the sale or purchase of supplies, materials, equipment or the rental thereof, or the construction, alteration, repair or maintenance of real or personal property.

Municipal Contracting Law

Contract Levels

- ▶ Contracts over \$175,000 - must be let on **sealed bid**
- ▶ Contracts over \$25,000 to \$175,000 - either sealed bids or by receiving at least two **written quotes**
- ▶ Contracts under \$25,000 - **direct negotiation**, no need for bids or written quotes

Municipal Contracting Law

Contract Specs

- ▶ Sufficiently definite to afford basis for a bid
- ▶ Not so restrictive as to keep process from being fair and competitive - not to exclude or give advantage
- ▶ Okay to consult with vendors and experts
- ▶ Bonds - bid, performance, payment, etc.
- ▶ File town road contract specs with clerk before soliciting bids Minn. Stat. §160.17

Municipal Contracting Law

Opening Bids

- ▶ Public opening at time and location in notice
- ▶ Review bid before awarding contract
 - ▶ Responsive - Whether the bid meet the specs
- ▶ Changes or Errors in bid - material and substantial

Municipal Contracting Law

Lowest Responsible Bidder

- ▶ A contract let on bid must be let to the lowest responsible bidder. (Minn. Stats. §365.12 & §412.311)
- ▶ “A town officer who violates this . . . is guilty of a misdemeanor and must leave office.” (Minn. Stat. 365.37)
- ▶ Contract made in violation of this requirement is void
 - ▶ Municipality still responsible for paying for completed work
- ▶ Challenge can be brought by losing bidder or any tax payer of the jurisdiction
 - ▶ Losing bidder can recover costs of preparing bid

Municipal Contracting Law Exceptions

- ▶ State Contract - Cooperative Purchasing Venture
- ▶ Joint Powers Agreements - only one has to follow procedural requirements; specify which member
- ▶ County road contract - towns may agree to the terms of an existing county contract on an adjacent road
- ▶ Purchases between local governments or with the Federal government or the State
- ▶ Emergencies
 - ▶ Imminent threat to health, safety or welfare of community
 - ▶ Not reasonably foreseen in time to follow law

Purchasing Municipal Property

- ▶ No officer or employee shall sell to any other *officer or employee* any property owned by the municipality except pursuant to specific conditions
- ▶ Property not needed for public purposes, may be sold to an *employee* of the municipality after reasonable public notice at a public auction or by sealed response
 - ▶ The employee cannot be directly involved in the auction or process pertaining to the administration and collection of sealed responses
 - ▶ Exception for things sold to the general public in the normal course of business
- ▶ A person violating the provisions of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor (Minn. Stat. § 15.054)

Conflicts of Interest

- ▶ Generally it's when a person has a personal financial interest in a decision in which they have a vote or substantial influence regarding the decision
- ▶ Two Types - Statutory (contracts) & Common Law (non-contract situations)

Conflicts of Interest

Common Law

- ▶ No black and white line on when a person is disqualified
- ▶ Factors to consider:
 - 1) Nature of the decision
 - 2) Nature of the financial interest
 - 3) Number of interested officials
 - 4) Need for interested officials to make decision
 - 5) Other means available to ensure public interest
- ▶ Solve by abstaining - don't vote
- ▶ Decision still valid if the result would have been the same without the interested member voting

Conflicts of Interest

Statutory

- ▶ Except as specifically authorized, “a public officer who is authorized to take part in any manner in making any sale, lease, or contract in official capacity shall not voluntarily have a personal financial interest in that sale, lease, or contract or personally benefit financially therefrom. Every public officer who violates this provision is guilty of a gross misdemeanor.”

(Minn. Stat. §471.87)

- ▶ Can't avoid the problem by abstaining from voting
- ▶ Most common exception is contracts that don't require competitive bids, but proper process must be followed

Liability

Municipal

- ▶ Procedural / Decision Making Claims
 - ▶ Allegation that did not follow statutory procedures, violated legal rights, or made arbitrary decision
- ▶ Property Damage / Personal Injury
 - ▶ Trespass, crash on roads, flood land, fall at park
 - ▶ Employee injured within course and scope of their position with the municipality

Liability

Personal

- ▶ Indemnification requirements and liability limitations
- ▶ Civil liability
 - ▶ Exceed authority, violate open meeting law
- ▶ Criminal liability
 - ▶ Failure to follow certain statutory procedures, breach public trust, other “standard” criminal offenses

Data Practices

Minn. Stat. Chapter 13

- ▶ Governs public access to government data
- ▶ Simple rule is that all data is public unless there is an exception - over 100 pages of exceptions, plus federal law
 - ▶ Presumption is reversed for personnel data
- ▶ Must have written access policy and Responsible Authority responsible for collection, use and dissemination of data - usually clerk
- ▶ Willful violation is a misdemeanor

Data Practices

Minn. Stat. Chapter 13

- ▶ Only applies to urban townships in Twin Cities area, but all towns should make public information reasonably available
- ▶ Towns not covered by Data Practices Act, should have the Town Board affirmatively vote to release data.

“Once you start destroying relationships, you can’t move forward”

Mayor Bill Spitzer, St. Charles, MN

On the importance of cities and townships working together