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Minutes

Minutes are the written record of all actions in a meeting, including city council meetings. Meetings held by any governmental agency or committee of the governmental agency require minutes to ensure that these agencies or committees follow the law.

As the person recording the minutes, you fulfill a critical role of governmental transparency at your city.

Content of Minutes

At a minimum, minutes should include:

- The day and time of the meeting.
- Where the meeting is held.
- The type of meeting.
- The names of any members present at the meeting, including elected officials and city staff.
- Any late arrivals.
- A description of each action item, motion, or any other proposal (such as a resolution).
- The identity of anyone making and seconding a motion, along with the name of each person voting for or against each proposal. Note: This information **must** be included as a requirement of Georgia law [OCGA 50-14-1(e)(1)(2)].
- Any points of order or appeals.
- Any notes about complying with specific legal procedures.
- Any recesses.
- Any councilmember who leaves the meeting early, and the time he or she leaves.

Format of Minutes

While no required format for minutes exists, you may want to organize minutes based on your typical agenda outline such as:

- Call to Order
- Invocation
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Awards and Presentations
- Approval of Minutes
- Public Hearings
- Ordinances and Resolutions
- Bids, Contracts, Expenditures, and Agreements
- Local Funding and Requests
- Boards and Commissions
- Reports
- Public Comment
- Adjourn

Resources

[City of Commerce, Summary Minutes \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Minutes-Commerce-Summary-Minutes.pdf\)](#)
[City of McDonough, Meeting Minutes \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Minutes-McDonough-Meeting-Minutes.pdf\)](#)

If you use agenda and meeting management software, you can customize the software to accommodate any agenda and minutes structure that fits the needs of your city.

Summarizing Discussion of Motions

When governing body members discuss motions, do your best to write down what they say. You should summarize what they say enough so that it's sufficient in case someone comes back later with a question about that person's comments.

Tip: Lean on the side of summarizing discussion in more detail, rather than less. It's better to edit down from a lot of notes rather than miss key information from taking too few notes.

Capturing Public Comments

Usually, your agenda will include a portion of time when citizens can come to the podium and address the governing body about any non-agenda item. Citizens cannot engage in debate with the governing body, and they have a limited timeframe in which to address the Council. In the minutes, you can either summarize citizen comments or record them verbatim depending on your city's requirements.

Actions

The government agency can take the following actions with motions or proposals:

- Approve
- Disapprove
- Amend
- Withdraw
- Table

Votes for Proposals, Against Proposals, and Abstentions

All votes, including abstentions and votes against proposals, must be made in public unless noted below. Unless the minutes reflect the name of the persons voting for the proposal, against the proposal, or who abstained, it will be presumed that a governing body member approved an action if they were in attendance.

Executive / Closed Sessions

You must take minutes for executive sessions, but they are not open to the public. Some cities do not allow the city clerk into closed sessions (executive sessions). Minutes must still be taken for such sessions and such minutes can only be taken by someone present in the closed session. Specify each issue discussed but leave out the substance of attorney-client discussions. Executive session minutes can only be viewed by order of a court. A new law requires that you keep minutes of these "executive sessions" in writing so that a court can examine them should a legal dispute about the propriety of the closed session arise.

The minutes must state the specific reason for closing the meeting, note present governing authority members, and record who voted to close the meeting. You may make these particular details available to the public. In addition, a notarized, executed affidavit (see below) by the presiding governing body officer (or by all governing body members if city policy dictates) must accompany the minutes. This affidavit designates the reason for the closed meeting as provided in the law.

Resource

[Sample Affidavit, Closed Meeting \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Sample-Affidavit-closed-meeting.pdf\)](#)

Note that only the following votes may be taken in executive / closed sessions:

- Authorize settlement of any matter relative to the attorney-client privilege per Georgia law [OCGA 50-14-2(1)]
- Authorize negotiations to acquire, dispose of, or lease property
- Contract to purchase, dispose of, or lease property
- Enter into an option to purchase, dispose of, or lease real estate

However, no vote to acquire, dispose of, or lease real estate or to settle a claim is binding until subsequently voted on in an open meeting.

Emergency Meetings

For meetings held ⁽¹⁾with less than 24 hour notice, describe that a notice was given and note the reason for the emergency meeting.

Preparation of Summary Minutes

Within two business days of the meeting, you must prepare and make available to the public a written summary of the subjects acted on and a list of the officials attending the meeting. This summary does not need to be very detailed. Often, city clerks take the agenda from the meeting and add a line or two next to each item on the agenda to summarize what occurred.

Resources

[City of McDonough, Summary Minutes for Posting \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Minutes-McDonough-Summary-Minutes-For-Posting.pdf\)](#)

[City of Woodstock, Summary Minutes for Posting \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Minutes-Woodstock-Summary-Minutes.pdf\)](#)

[City of Gainesville, Summary Action for Posting \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Minutes-Gainesville-Summary-Minutes.pdf\)](#)

Approval of Minutes

At the next regular meeting of the agency, the governing agency will approve and adopt the minutes after any additions or corrections are noted. Most cities have approved minutes signed by the presiding officer and attested by the city clerk with the city seal. An approval by the governing agency makes the minutes official.

You can post and distribute draft minutes before they are adopted as long as they are noted as “draft” on the minutes.

Amending Minutes

Some municipalities require another vote on amended minutes if substantial information is added. In some cases, municipalities may not require any amendment to the minutes for typographical or scrivener errors. Check with your city's particular rules and procedures.

Distribution of Minutes

After official approval, you will repost the minutes onto the city website to replace the draft minutes. Clearly label the official minutes as “official” or “approved.” Likewise, while the minutes are being worked on in draft form and before approval, label such minutes as “draft.” If the city receives any open records request for the minutes before they are approved, they will, thus, be marked as “draft.”

Archiving and Indexing Minutes

Keep the original signed minutes in the official minute book as a permanent record of the city. The use of electronic archiving or creating minutes through a meeting management software system will allow easy access for retrieving specific information found in the minutes. Even if you use this kind of software, you may still want to keep a paper copy of the minutes in addition to an electronic copy.

Requests for Minutes

If you receive a request for a certified copy of the minutes from a particular meeting, you can use or model your response on the sample certification form included below. People may send you an email, visit you in person, or send a note in the mail in order to request minutes. It's easier and friendlier not to make people fill out an open records request to obtain a copy of the minutes. To potentially make your work easier, consider referring people to your city's website to obtain a copy. If you send a copy of the minutes through email, consider converting the Word document into a PDF file before sending.

Resource

[Sample Wording for Certifying Copy of Minutes \(/GeorgiaCitiesSite/media/PDF/clerks/Minutes-Sample-Wording-for-Certifying-Copy-of-Minutes.docx\)](#)

[← Council Meetings \(/Resources/GMA-Handbooks-Publications/City-Clerk-Handbook/Council-Meetings.aspx\)](#) [Public Records Management \(/Resources/GMA-Handbooks-Publications/City-Clerk-Handbook/Public-Records-Management.aspx\)](#) [→](#)

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