

Easy Reader

Manhattan Beach City Council OKs remaining open gov't initiatives

[Easy Reader Staff](#) | October 2, 2013

After months of hanging low on the Manhattan Beach City Council's meeting agenda, the city's open government initiatives were adopted in full Tuesday following deliberations that resulted in several amendments.

The Public Records Protocol Act was one of the six remaining initiatives that came before the council. Guided by the California Public Records Act, which establishes the public's right to access records concerning the "conduct of the people's business," the protocol dictates a set procedure for city staff handling public record requests.

"I'm only too happy to sign this," City Manager Dave Carmany told the council.

The Act stems from the 2011 settlement agreement in *McKee v. City of Manhattan Beach*. The [late Richard McKee](#), founder and director of watchdog group Californians Aware, won a lawsuit that April against the city over Brown Act violations in connection with former City Manager Geoff Dolan's departure, requiring the city to draft and adopt such a protocol. Mayor Pro Tem Amy Howorth and Mayor David Lesser, both fresh council members at the time, formed an ad hoc subcommittee to oversee the process and gather community input.

Under the Act, the public may submit a request to obtain a public record to the city clerk's office by letter, email, fax, phone or in person and has the right to review a record during regular City Hall hours. Within 10 days of receiving a request, the city clerk must record it in the Public Records Protocol Act Log, correspond with the appropriate department head and respond to the request with the estimated date and time for gathering the record. Under unusual circumstances, the city clerk and city attorney have the authority to extend the request for up to 14 days.

Other initiatives adopted Tuesday include proper notice of special meetings. The Brown Act requires at least 24 hours' notice to the public about special meetings held by City Council. Mayor Pro Tem Amy Howorth made a motion to take it a step further, requiring at least a week's notice on council workshops, budget study sessions and strategic planning sessions.

Council also discussed the preferred format of City Council minutes, or records of regular meetings – "in action", which timestamps each speaker, or "in summary", which briefly describes the speaker's content. Resident Bill Victor, noting that minutes are currently available only as archived videos that are often lost, urged council to do more.

The city currently uses a contractor to record these minutes, Carmany said, and summary minutes would cost the city an additional \$2,000 per meeting, nearly \$50,000 per year.

Councilman Mark Burton, who noted this format is “always the most accurate,” suggested a six-month pilot period of providing summary minutes in a motion passed unanimously and directed staff to return then with cost analysis.

The council decided to stay with the current practice of drafting staff reports, for which residents have requested for an opportunity to give input prior to publication. As for future open government initiatives, council members unanimously decided to dissolve the ad hoc subcommittee and address them at the full council level.

“I think we just need to choose a platform and move on,” Mayor David Lesser said. “There’s a lot of important work to do substantively and it’s time to get going ... Let’s live by our words and practice it as we encounter the substantive issues of the city.”