

Florida League of Cities

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# Mock City Council Meeting For High School Students

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## OVERVIEW

A mock city council meeting is an interactive way to introduce high school students to city government. This guide is designed for elected officials who wish to lead a mock city council meeting at the high school level.

## YOUR ROLE

Your role in this exercise is to work closely with your local teacher(s) to provide students with a lesson on city government, with an emphasis on how to run a city council meeting. Additionally, once students are given the scenario and assigned their meeting roles, students will need time to research their role and the proposal. Your role can be to assist in these steps along with being present the day of the meeting.

## CHOOSING A SCENARIO

When choosing a scenario, start by looking at local issues. If possible, focus on issues that affect high school students (i.e., a citywide curfew.)

## RESOURCES/MATERIALS

- Podium and gavel
- Information that may be helpful to students: resources and data on the scenario, overview of each student's role, or meeting language (ex: how to call a meeting, etc.)
- Large room (ideally with tables)

## PREPARATION

Before the meeting: Work with your local teacher(s) to

- Provide students with an overview of city government, with an emphasis on how to run a city council meeting.
- Additional option: Invite students to attend a council meeting prior to the date of their mock meeting.
- Share the chosen scenario and the meeting roles. Ask the teacher to assign roles. (Additional option: Students can hold an election prior to the meeting to select their Mayor and Council.)
- Students should research the proposal and how it affects their assigned role. For example, Council Members should review available data and be prepared to ask city staff questions. City staff should understand how the proposal will affect city operations and be prepared to present their findings. Community groups should research how the proposal affects them and be prepared to present their findings and whether they support or oppose the proposal.

- Helpful vocabulary related to city council meetings is located at the end of this document.

Classroom set up:

- Place a table at the front of the classroom, facing the students, with chairs for the city council.
- Place a podium and gavel next to the council table.
- Student desks should be facing the council. Put students with similar roles together (Example: Place all the "residents" together.)

## PROCEDURE

- On the day of the meeting, if needed, provide an overview of how the meeting will take place.
- Begin the city council meeting.
- After the meeting, invite students to the next city council meeting to be recognized.

## STUDENT ROLES\*

*\*Different scenarios may require different roles. Review your chosen scenario and determine what roles to cast.*

**Mayor** – The Mayor is an elected official who may, depending on the charter, have specific duties and responsibilities. The Mayor's role is to analyze the situation, ask questions of the city staff and those on his council, get input from other community groups and decide what is right for the community. The Mayor also presides at the council's meetings.

**Council Members** – Council Members are the legislative and governing body of the city. The councilmember's role is to analyze the situation, ask questions of the city staff, get input from other community groups and decide what is right for the community.

**City Manager** – The City Manager is an official appointed by the city council to administer the city's operations (i.e., daily management roles such as hiring, purchases and finances). The City Manager's role is to prepare the agenda, make recommendations to the council and call upon department directors for input on the issues.

**City Clerk** – The City Clerk is the recordkeeper for the city. The City Clerk's role is to take minutes of the meeting including what special interest groups are attending the meeting, what each group spoke about and how each Council Member votes.

**Department Directors** – The individual in charge of the [insert name] department. The department director's role is to report each department's findings to the city council and answer questions when called upon.

**Resident** – City residents are the consumers of city services. The resident's role is to review how the proposal will affect residents and inform and persuade the city council of his or her view. [This role may include specific groups such as "concerned parents" or "high school students."]

**Chamber of Commerce** – The chamber of commerce promotes the businesses of the community. The chamber’s role is to find out how the proposal will affect businesses and work to inform or persuade the city council of their view. [This role could be a specific business instead of the chamber.]

**Community Groups** – These may be neighborhood associations, nonprofits, etc. The community group’s role is to find out how the proposal will affect their group and inform/persuade the city council of their view.

## SAMPLE SCENARIO

The city council is considering a proposal that would establish a 10:00 p.m. curfew for all residents under the age of 18. Any resident under 18 seen traveling on a street after 10:00 p.m. would be subject to 30 hours of community service. Students with jobs would be exempt, and during special occasions – such as school sports game – the city would lengthen the curfew.

Over the last year, 50 car accidents involving teenagers occurred between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. (all due to distracted driving or DUIs). This was a 30 percent increase in teenager-related car accidents during this time from the prior year. Four percent of the accidents resulted in a fatality. Ten percent of the accidents were at the fault of a driver over 18.

## SAMPLE AGENDA

Agenda – [ *enter date here* ]

City of [ *enter name here* ]

Regular City Council Meeting

[ *enter starting time* ] – Adjournment

[ *enter place of meeting: room and school name* ]

Presiding: Mayor [ *insert name* ]

### I. Call to Order

- [Mayor]: “This meeting of the City Council will now come to order.” [Mayor bangs gavel twice.]

### II. Invocation

### III. Pledge of Allegiance

### IV. Public Hearing

- [Mayor]: “At this time, we will have a public hearing on the new curfew proposal.

The proposal will create a 10:00 p.m. curfew for residents under the age of 18. Any resident under 18 seen traveling on a street after 10:00 p.m. would be subject to 30 hours of community service. Students with jobs would be exempt and special occasions – such as school sports game – will lengthen the curfew on the night of the special occasion. The members of the public who wish to speak will be called up one at a time. When you reach the podium, please state your name and what organization or group you are representing for the city clerk to record. You will have two minutes to share your comments."

- [Mayor calls each group up one at a time.]

#### V. New Business

- [Mayor]: "We will now move into new business. At this time, the city council will ask the City Manager questions about the proposal. The council will keep in mind what was said during the public hearing."
- [Council Members ask questions to the manager.]
- [City Manager]: "Are there any other questions from the council?"
- [City Council]: "No."
- [City Manager]: "With no other questions or concerns being voiced, the issue is now ready for a vote on the proposed curfew."
- [City Clerk]: "At this time, we will take a vote on the proposal to create a 10:00 p.m. curfew for residents under the age of 18. The deputy city clerk will keep the count. Council Members, when I call your name, all those in favor of the curfew say 'aye' and all those not in favor of the curfew say 'no'."
- [City Clerk calls each Council Member with the mayor voting last, and deputy city clerk records their answer.]
- [City Clerk]: "The proposal for a citywide curfew has been passed/defeated."

#### VI. Adjournment

- [Mayor]: "This meeting of the City Council is now adjourned." [Mayor clicks the gavel twice.]

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOCABULARY

**Ad valorem tax:** A property tax set according to the value of the property.

**Annexation:** Extending a city's boundaries by adding land from adjoining unincorporated territory.

**Authority:** A special-purpose public corporation set up by government to provide a specific function or services, such as hospital care or public housing.

**Budget:** A government's annual financial plan. The budget is based on anticipated revenues and expenditures for a given year.

**Charter:** Similar to a constitution; written and adopted by the citizens. It defines the city's boundaries, form of government and powers.

**Citizen:** A resident of a city, state or nation; a consumer of public services.

**City:** See municipality. In Florida, there is no legal difference between a city, town or village.

**City attorney:** Represents city in legal matters and gives legal advice concerning city affairs.

**City clerk:** Recordkeeper for the city. Keeps the official city seal; maintains city council minutes and other records.

**City council:** The governing body of a city.

**City hall:** A city's main government building, usually including the offices for the Mayor, the City Council Members and a council meeting room.

**City manager:** An official appointed by the city council to administer such city business as hiring, promotions, purchases and finances.

**Code:** A set of ordinances arranged by subject matter.

**County:** A subdivision of the state set up to carry out certain state laws; it also functions as a general-purpose local government.

**Grant:** Money provided by the state or federal government for local government projects. Grants are often designated for specific uses or projects.

**Growth strategies:** Planning for future population growth, resource use and development.

**Homestead exemption:** A reduction in property tax for the taxpayer who owns and lives on property being taxed.

**Home Rule:** A constitutional provision that allows municipal governments to exercise any power for municipal purposes except when it is expressly prohibited by state law. That is, as long as it is not specifically prohibited by state or federal law, municipal officials may pass any ordinance on behalf of the city.

**Incorporated area:** The land within a municipality. The boundaries are set by the city charter.

**Infrastructure:** The physical framework or facilities of government, such as roads, bridges, buildings and sewer lines.

**Land-use plan:** A plan on how land can be used. The plan divides a city or county into zones and specifies the purposes for which land in each zone can be used.

**License fee:** A fee required of a specific business in order to control the effects that the business might have on a community.

**Local option:** Allowing citizens of a county or city to vote on whether a particular law or practice will apply in their community.

**Mayor:** An elected municipal official who may, depending upon the charter, have specific duties and responsibilities.

**Municipality:** The legal name in Florida for a city, town or village.

**Ordinance:** A law enacted by a city or county affecting local affairs such as traffic, noise and animal control.

**Privatization:** The use of a private business to deliver a government service.

**Property tax:** A tax based on the value of real property (a house or land) and on personal property (car or boat). Also known as ad valorem tax.

**Revenue:** A government's income from taxes, grants, fines, fees and licenses.

**Tax:** Money that a government levies and collects from people or organizations within its jurisdiction. Taxes are used to pay for government services.

**Tax digest:** The record showing the total taxable value of property in a city or county.

**Town:** See municipality. In Florida, there is no legal difference between a town, city or village.

**Unincorporated area:** The area of the county not in any city. Area may be rural, agricultural or heavily populated and suburban in nature.

**User fee:** A charge made to persons for using a governmental service such as water.

**Village:** See municipality. In Florida, there is no legal difference between a town, city or village.

**Zoning:** Dividing a community into zones for different types of uses, such as commercial, residential, subdivisions and agricultural.