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Many 'special' meetings held

By ALICE COLLINS

The regular council sessions held once or twice a month in the villages of Beverly Hills, Franklin and Bingham Farms are only the tip of an iceberg of special, study and committee meetings held to carry out the business of the public.

In an Observer & Eccentric survey, officials in these communities and in Southfield Township were asked about the public's access to the many special gatherings.

The answer: Almost all meetings are open to the public, but the public would have to make special efforts to find out when and where they are to be held.

Franklin

FRANKLIN—Although there are only 12 regularly-scheduled council meetings a year in the village, there are at least as many more special sessions.

"Except when litigation or personnel matters are to be discussed," said village president W. C. Pearson, "all of these are open to the public as spelled out in the Franklin Village Charter."

Regular meetings begin at 8 p.m. on the second Monday of the month, sometimes preceded by a public hearing at 7:30 p.m.

Franklin, however, does not have a special village meeting chamber, and may hold its sessions at the Franklin Community Church, the Franklin Elementary School, the village office or the library.

As for special meetings, not only the locations, but nights and times may differ. Residents desiring to attend any of these sessions must make regular checks at one of the four locations where clerk Helen Steckley posts meeting announcements.

As to calling special meetings, the charter stipulates that the president or two trustees may call one on 24-hour written notice to such member. However, if all members of the council attend a special meeting, it is legal for all purposes, without such written notice.

Mrs. Steckley says she has members of the police department deliver the written notices to council trustees and posts notices of the meetings at the library, village office, the church and the Franklin Post Office.

During the last fiscal year, according to records, the council met 12 times in special sessions, sometimes holding two extra meetings a month.

"The only time we hold a closed council study session," said Thomas, "is when litigation or personnel matters are discussed. If it doesn't fit into that category, then it's not a study session, but an open meeting."

The village charter also provides that any person may have access to the minutes or records of all public meetings at any reasonable time. These are located in the clerk's office.

Other public bodies in Franklin that meet on a regular basis are the planning commission, the historic commission, the library board and the zoning board of appeals.

The planning commission meets at 8 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month in the library. In addition, it held five special meetings between February, 1974 and February, 1975. All were open to the public.

The historic commission meets at 8 p.m. on the first Monday of the month in the library. Special meetings—six between January, 1974 and January, 1975—were called and posted.

The library board meets on the first Thursday of the month at 8:30 p.m. in the library, and the zoning board of appeals meets only when there are issues for consideration.

All meetings are in the council chambers at the municipal building, 1890 West Thirteen Mile Road. Beverly Hills has a full open meeting policy for gatherings of the council, including study sessions and even pre-meeting administrative gatherings, according to council president Thomas Kauchek and village manager Kauchek Good.

In actual practice, however, the public is not informed or specifically invited to any council gatherings other than the regular or specially-called meetings where minutes are recorded and official actions taken.

Council members and officials meet in private sessions for approximately one half hour before opening the regular council meeting. These gatherings are held in a little room adjacent to the council chambers.

"We've never invited the public to these," Kauchek said, "but they're not really closed. We just meet to decide which council member is going to introduce which item on the agenda. And if anyone else should come to the door and want to come in, I'm sure they'd be welcome."

The same goes for the study sessions where more background information and in depth discussions take place on items that will come up in regular meetings, said Kauchek.

Study sessions, according to village clerk Charles Ferguson are not posted for the public. They are usually held on off-meeting Mondays, but can be scheduled for another night of the week. They may begin anywhere from 7 to 8 p.m., Ferguson said.

Chairman W. C. Pearson said planning board study sessions that precede the regular meetings of that body are not open to the public.

Regular planning board meetings begin at 8:15 p.m. on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month on a "fairly regular basis" in the municipal building council chambers and are open to all, he added.

The village zoning board of appeals meets in the council chambers on the second and fourth Mondays when there is business before it. There is no special posting of the meetings, however, persons involved in cases coming before the board are notified by letter.

Minutes are taken only at regular and special meetings of the governmental bodies, and are open for public inspection. Persons wishing to see the minutes may ask in the office of the village clerk.

Bingham Farms

"We don't really publicize council study sessions," said village president Loren Riley, "but like our regular meetings, they are always open to the public."

Regular meetings of the council begin at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Monday of each month and are held in the basement of the Security Bank and Trust building on the southeast corner of Thirteen Mile and Telegraph roads. Times and dates of study sessions differ.

"We try to avoid having study sessions if at all possible," said Riley, "and we didn't use to have them. But because of our sewer and water construction projects, we've been having about one extra session a month."

Clerk Virginia Ashley notifies village council trustees and officials of special meetings by mail about a week in advance.

Except in cases of public hearings or other instances where publication of legal notices are required by law.

there are no postings of any village meetings. Bingham Farms does not have a village office. Therefore, a resident wishing to find out about an upcoming meeting may contact Mrs. Ashley or another official.

The Bingham Farms planning commission usually meets monthly, beginning at 7:30 p.m. on the first Monday of the month.

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