

Administrative Manual of Operating Procedures

Procedure #: 12.12	Procedure Title: Open Meetings		Revision #: 1.0
Original Issue Date: 10/16/2025	Revised Issue Date: N/A	Next Review Date: 10/16/2027	Responsible Department: Office of Corporation Counsel
Statutory References: Wis. Stat. §§ 19.81–19.98		Ordinance References: N/A	
Appendices: Appendix A – Wisconsin Open Meetings Law Compliance Guide Appendix B – Public Records and Open Meetings in Wisconsin Slide Deck Appendix C – FAQs on Wisconsin’s Law on Open Meetings		Forms: N/A	

1. OBJECTIVE:

This policy ensures that all meetings of Milwaukee County governmental bodies comply with Wisconsin’s Open Meetings Law (Wis. Stat. §§ 19.81–19.98). Milwaukee County is committed to conducting its business transparently and ensuring that residents have meaningful access to the decision-making process.

2. DEFINITIONS:

- A. Governmental Body. Includes the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, as well as any other board, committee, standing committee, subcommittee, special committee, commission, or task force created by statute, ordinance, resolution, rules, or order.
- B. Meeting. A convening of a Milwaukee County governmental body for the purpose of conducting governmental business, regardless of whether action is taken or if the body has decision making power, with a number of members of the body sufficient to determine its course of action for any governmental business under discussion. (Wis. Stat. § 19.82(2)).
- C. Negative Quorum. If a particular governmental action requires more than a majority of the body to act, the number of people necessary to block the action.
- D. Public Places Likely to Give Notice. For meetings of Milwaukee County governmental bodies, the Clerk’s Office, bulletin boards in areas of the courthouse open to the public, and other areas the Clerk’s Office may designate are public places likely to give notice to those impacted.
- E. Quorum. A majority of the members of a body unless otherwise defined by law, ordinance, or by-laws.

3. OVERVIEW:

It is the policy of Milwaukee County that the business of governmental bodies be conducted openly, with closed sessions used only when authorized by law. Any member of a County governmental body who knowingly violates the Open Meetings Law may be personally subject to civil penalties under Wis. Stat. § 19.96.

4. PROCEDURE:

- A. Public Notice Requirements
 - i. Timing: Notice of every County governmental body meeting must be provided at least 24 hours in advance, except where good cause exists, in which case notice may be provided as little as 2 hours in advance.
 - ii. Content: Notice must include the time, date, location, and subject matter, described in

sufficient detail to inform the public. If the chief presiding officer anticipates entering closed session on any item, that should be noticed. Part of adequately noticing the location is providing instructions for accessing the meeting electronically if there is a virtual option.

iii. Posting Requirements:

- a. Notice must be provided to three groups as follows:
 - i. To the public by choosing one of the following:
 - a. Posting in three public places likely to give notice to those impacted.
 - b. Posting in one public place likely to give notice and electronically on the governmental body's Internet site, such as the Milwaukee County Legislative Information Center ([CLIC](#)) website.
 - c. Paid publication in a news medium likely to give notice to those impacted.
 - ii. To news media who have filed a written request for such notices by sending them an email with the notice.
 - iii. To a news medium likely to give notice by sending them an email with the notice.
NOTE: this portion of the notice requirement does not require the County to pay for any publication.

B. Open Session Requirements

- i. All Milwaukee County governmental body meetings shall be publicly held in places reasonably accessible to members of the public and shall be open to all citizens at all times.
 - a. Meetings should be held in a public place in Milwaukee County. Meetings may only be held in private places if there is a specific reason for doing so and the public's access is not compromised.
 - b. Meetings must be in a room reasonably calculated to be large enough to accommodate all citizens who wish to attend. If held remotely, the applicable software must be able to accommodate all citizens who wish to attend.
 - c. Offering remote options is allowable and beneficial but offering only remote options may not always satisfy open meetings requirements. If the only public access to a meeting is by remote options, appropriate accommodations must be provided for people without internet access, and people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - d. Persons with functional limitations must at a minimum be able to enter, circulate, and leave a meeting location with assistance to comply with open meetings law. Other reasonable accommodations must be provided to comply with federal ADA requirements.

C. Closed Session Procedure

- i. A governmental body may convene in closed session only for purposes specifically authorized under Wis. Stat. § 19.85, including:
 - a. Deliberations concerning judicial or quasi-judicial hearing before the governmental body.
 - b. Considering dismissal, demotion, licensing or discipline of a public employee or person licensed by the governmental body. Unless the subject of the meeting requests an open meeting.
 - c. Considering employment, promotion, compensation, or performance evaluation data of any public employee over whom the governmental body has jurisdiction.
 - d. Considering applications for probation, extended supervision, or parole, or considering strategies for crime detection or prevention.
 - e. Deliberating or negotiating the use of public funds when competitive reasons require a

- closed session.
- f. Considering financial, medical, social, personal histories, or disciplinary data, of a specific person; or *preliminary* considerations of personnel problems or charges against a of specific person when public discussion of such would have an adverse impact on the reputation of the person discussed.
 - g. Conferring with legal counsel concerning strategy to be adopted by the body with respect to litigation in which it is or is likely to become involved.
 - h. Considering requests for confidential written advice from the election commission, ethics commission, or county ethics board.
 - i. Deliberations related to unemployment insurance and/or workers' compensation insurance in a meeting at which all employee members of the council are excluded.
 - j. Deliberations under Wis. Stat. § 157.70 if the location of a burial site, as defined in Wis. Stat. § 157.70(1)(b) is the subject of such deliberations and if discussing the location in public would be likely to result in disturbance of the burial site.
- ii. . Process for entering closed session:
 - a. If the chief presiding office of the body reasonably anticipates a closed session will be called, it must be in the meeting notice.
 - b. The chief presiding officer must announce to those present the nature of the business to be discussed in closed session and the specific statutory exemption(s) authorizing the closed session.
 - c. A motion must be made and carried by a majority vote in open session before the body may move into closed session.
 - d. Discussion and action must be limited strictly to the announced purpose.
- D. Records and Minutes
- i. The motions and roll call votes of every meeting of a governmental body must be recorded, preserved, and open to public inspection. A governmental body's records should provide the public with a reasonably intelligible description of the essential substantive elements of every motion made, who initiated and seconded the motion, the outcome of any vote on the motion, and, if a roll-call vote, how each member voted.
 - ii. The Milwaukee County Clerk shall maintain official records of the County Board and its committees. Other governmental bodies shall designate a recording secretary.
 - iii. Open session minutes shall be promptly available on governmental body's website, such as the Milwaukee County Legislative Information Center ([CLIC](#)).
 - iv. Closed session minutes shall be kept but remain confidential as allowed by law.
- E. Public Participation
- i. Members of the public may attend and observe open meetings.
 - ii. Public comment periods may be provided at the discretion of the governmental body chair or as required by ordinance.
 - iii. Speakers will be subject to established County rules of decorum.
 - iv. The public may record the meetings so long as they do not disrupt the meeting.
- F. Training and Compliance
- i. All County Supervisors, elected officials, and appointed members of boards, commissions, and committees shall receive training on Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law at onboarding and periodically thereafter.
 - ii. The Office of Corporation Counsel shall serve as the primary source of legal guidance on

open meetings compliance.

5. REVISION HISTORY:

Rev. #	Summary of Changes	Date of Change	Author
1.0	New release	10/16/2025	SBP & OCC