

SUNSHINE LAW WORRIES SURFACE AT REDINGTON SHORES MEETING

ATTORNEY WARNS OFFICIALS ABOUT PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS BEFORE KEY VOTE

BY: Carlos Moncada

REDINGTON SHORES—An otherwise mundane discussion about rejoining a regional advocacy group began with concerns about a potential violation of Florida's open meetings law during the April 8 town commission meeting.

The concerns, raised by Commissioner CJ Hoyt, prompted a warning from the town attorney and a reminder about the limits of private discussions among elected officials.

The issue surfaced as the commission debated reinstating its membership in the Suncoast League of Cities, a topic previously discussed and returning for final action.

Before deliberations began, Hoyt said conversations about the matter occurred outside a public meeting, which would be a violation of the state's Government-in-the-Sunshine law. The law, among other things, requires elected officials to conduct public business in the open.



Town Attorney Nancy S. Meyer warned commissioners about the limits of private discussions among elected officials. Photo from Clearwater Bar Association.

"My concern is that there was discussion outside of commission meetings on this," Hoyt said. "We're not supposed to be talking about things ... outside of meetings that we could maybe be voting on again."

Town Attorney Nancy S. Meyer quickly cautioned the board, noting that any alleged violation would not be handled by the commission but instead by the Pinellas-Pasco

State Attorney's Office.

"If someone has violated the sunshine law, it would be investigated by the attorney's office if reported by somebody," Meyer said.

She also warned commissioners that even casual admissions — such as acknowledging a private conversation over coffee about a pending matter — could expose them to scrutiny.

"You are obviously opening yourself up to someone investigating that at a later date," she said. "If you did it, don't do it. Remember not to do it. It's hard, I understand that. And I'm not saying anyone did. But a reminder: don't talk, except in a meeting."

After the warning, the commission continued its discussion and ultimately voted unanimously to rejoin the Suncoast League of Cities, which lobbies on behalf of its 27 member governments in Tallahassee.

Hoyt did not identify which colleagues may have been involved, and attempts to reach her after the meeting for additional details were unsuccessful.

The sunshine law prohibits elected officials from discussing matters that may come before them outside of publicly noticed meetings, including one-on-one conversations,



Commissioner CJ Hoyt said colleagues discussed a pending matter outside a public meeting, potentially violating state law. Photo from Town of Redington Shores.

phone calls or indirect communications through intermediaries.

In other business, commissioners agreed to place proposed town charter changes before voters in November.

The measures would extend commissioner terms from two to three years and move town elections from March to November. They also would shorten the mayor's 2027 term to two years to help realign the election cycle.

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