

6 B/ Virginia

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Woman wanted agendas of informal meetings, too  
SLOVIC.

By Dick Hammerstrom  
The Free Lance-Star

RICHMOND - Randy Slovic began attending City Council meetings about a year ago when she moved here from Maryland.

As a state officer of the Sierra Club, she liked to keep up with government activities, particularly those involving the environment.

She asked the city to notify her of all meetings and even had agendas sent to her.

But after a while, Ms. Slovic said, she became a bit mystified at how fast the meetings went.

"There was no discussion," she said. "They just whipped right through everything."

Then she read a reference in The Richmond Times-Dispatch to an executive session that the council had. She didn't recall one at the meeting and found no mention of it in the agenda.

She began making inquiries and later found out about what the city calls its "City Council Informal Meeting."

Such meetings are usually held at 3 p.m., before the regular Monday night meetings.

"This is where all the work is done," Ms. Slovic said, "where everything is hacked out." But it is the night meeting, Ms. Slovic said, that the public is notified about and that is televised on the public access channel.

Virginia's Freedom of Information Act makes no distinction between informal and formal meetings of public bodies, and says that notice of any meeting should be made to anyone who asks.

Ms. Slovic asked to be notified of the afternoon meetings, but the city would not notify her.

Finally, on Sept. 17, Ms. Slovic took her complaints to a public hearing of the General Assembly's Freedom of Information study committee.

There, with a Richmond assistant city attorney in the audience, Ms. Slovic told her story.

Clearly, the committee members told Ms. Slovic, she was being wronged.

The assistant city attorney stood only long enough to say that her request must have gotten lost and it would be investigated.

Since then, Ms. Slovic said, the city has added a single line to its regular meeting agenda. It simply says that an informal meeting will be held at 3 p.m.

It has taken a year for Ms. Slovic to get that one-line mention in the agenda.

"I guess they can now argue that they are in compliance," Ms. Slovic said.

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