

Town Board Statement, June 17, 2008

(Subject: Open Government)

My name is Susan Siegel and I'm speaking on behalf of Citizens for an Informed Yorktown.

As you know, I've used the Courtesy of Floor portion of the agenda to address the board on more than one occasion. Unlike some towns which limit courtesy of the floor comments to items on the agenda, Yorktown has traditionally been much more accommodating to its residents. We can use our three minutes to talk about anything. For this privilege I sincerely thank you and all past boards who have set this precedent.

My comments tonight deal with open government, a primary issue for CIY. Open government means many things, including conducting the town's business in an open and transparent way.

Which is why I'd like to bring to the board's attention some recent actions that at least on the surface appear to be less than transparent.

The first has to do with the way board resolutions are presented to the public. The board's April 1st agenda, for example, included the following cryptic notation under the heading personnel: approve upgrades for: and then it listed four names. Usually, these type of resolutions indicate, at a minimum, the department and the position that the employees are being promoted to.

And then, two weeks ago, you approved a resolution that extended the contract for the human resources consultant. That resolution wasn't even listed on the agenda – and when you voted on it, there was no explanation of what was in the contract. It was only in response to questions during the final courtesy of the floor that Councilman Bianco and Supervisor Peters provided some information.

Were these examples of careless omissions – or a conscious effort by the board to say as little as possible about potentially sensitive issues? I don't know.

But what I do know is that when the board found it necessary to vote on both issues again, it chose a time when there would be the least possible public oversight of its actions.

Specifically, you voted on these issues at open meetings that were reconvened after closed executive sessions and on at least one occasion, after the public had gone home thinking the board had been concluded its public business for the evening.

On May 13th, you rescinded the four promotions. No one from the public was there to ask any questions.

And on June 10th, you rescinded the HR consultant's contract. But this time, three regular board watchers who belatedly learned the virtues of patience waited an hour and 20 minutes for the board to reconvene the open meeting so they were on hand to see the vote. And after the meeting, ask Supervisor Peters some questions about the vote.

Was what the board did was legal? Absolutely. Was it transparent? Absolutely not.

Which is why, CIY respectfully makes the following requests: Please include more information about resolutions in the agenda, please explain the resolutions in greater detail before they're voted on, and unless timing is absolutely critical, please do not vote on issues after closed sessions but instead wait until the next regularly scheduled public board meeting.

Thank you.