

Florida League of Cities

Mock City Council Meeting For Elementary School Students

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OVERVIEW

A mock city council meeting is an interactive way to introduce elementary students to city government. This guide is designed for elected officials who wish to lead a mock city council meeting at the elementary-school level.

YOUR ROLE

Your role in this exercise is to work closely with your local teacher(s) to provide students with a lesson on city government, with an emphasis on how to run a city council meeting. Then, your role will be to lead students in a mock city council meeting.

CHOOSING A SCENARIO

When choosing a scenario, look at local issues. Additionally, look at issues that affect students at this age (i.e., the introduction of a new park).

RESOURCES/MATERIALS

- Large room (ideally with tables)
- Copies of the script
- Information that may be helpful to students, such as an overview of each role or a summary of the vote taking place
- Markers, pens, or pencils

PREPARATION

Before the meeting, work with your local teacher(s) to:

- Provide students with an overview of city government, with an emphasis on how to run a city council meeting and the roles of city staff in a council meeting.
- Helpful vocabulary related to city council meetings is located at the end of this document.
- Account for the number of students in the classroom to ensure there are enough speaking roles for each student.
- Share the scenario, and ask the teacher to assign roles.

Classroom set up:

- Place a table at the front of the classroom, facing the students, with chairs for the city council.
- Place a podium and gavel next to the council table.
- Student desks should be facing the council. Put students with similar roles together (Example: Place all the "residents" together.)

PROCEDURE

- On the day of the meeting, if needed, provide an overview of how the meeting will take place.
- Begin the city council meeting.
- After the meeting, invite students to the next city council meeting to be recognized.

STUDENT ROLES*

**Different scenarios may require different roles. Review your chosen scenario and determine what roles to cast. Provide descriptions of each role.*

Mayor – You were elected mayor of your city. Shortly, the Council will vote on a new law and you must decide to vote in favor or against it. Your role is to listen to the community and decide your vote based on what you think is best for your city. You also have the additional role of leading the meeting.

Councilmembers – You were elected as a councilmember of your city. Shortly, the council will vote on a new law, and you must decide to vote in favor or against it. Your role is to listen to the community and decide your vote based on what you think is best for your city.

General Public – You are a city citizen. What you think is very important to the members of the city council. Your role is to find out how the vote will affect yourself and other community members. Then, your task is to convince others, especially the city council, of your view. [This role may include more specific groups such as “parents” or “kids.”]

Business Owner – You own a business in the city. Your role is to find out how the vote will affect your business. Then, your task is to convince others, especially the city council, of your view.

Municipal Directors/Staff – May include police chief, parks & rec director, etc.

Community Groups – May be neighborhood associations, non-profits, etc.

SAMPLE SCENARIO

The City Council is considering building a new park in the downtown area. Since there are no parks in the downtown area, the council believes this will be a benefit to the residents in the area, especially because there is a large population of children. However, the only location big enough for a park is the main parking lot, where many residents park when they visit the local shops and businesses.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

I. Call to Order

- [Mayor]: "This meeting of the City Council will now come to order." [Mayor bangs gavel twice.]

II. Pledge of Allegiance

- [Mayor]: "Everyone please stand. We will now say the Pledge of Allegiance. [Lead the students in the Pledge.] 'I pledge allegiance...!'"

IV. Public Hearing

- [Mayor]: We will now move into the public hearing portion of the meeting.
- [Parks Director]: Today's discussion is whether the city should build a new park in the downtown area. The only area big enough for a downtown park is the main parking lot, which is very rundown.
- [Assistant Parks Director]: Since there are no other parks in the area, the benefit of the park would be that children in the area will have a place for healthy recreation. Plus, since the parking lot is rundown, it would make the downtown area look nicer.
- [Parks Director]: It is important to remember that even though the parking lot is rundown, a lot of residents and business owners use that parking lot when visiting or working in the area. Replacing the parking lot with a park would make parking space downtown extremely limited.
- [Recreation Director]: As the recreation director for the city, I see the rundown parking lot as a great opportunity to turn the old lot into something new. The children in the area would have greater access to outdoor activities, which will promote a healthier lifestyle.
- [Mayor]: It's now time to hear what the citizens have to say about the park. When I call your name, please step up to the microphone, and state your name and what group you are representing.
- [Mayor]: The "Neighborhood Association" can now step to the podium to speak.
- [Neighborhood Association]: Good morning, my name is _____, and I represent the downtown neighborhood association. We would love to see the park built downtown. We have over 100 children in our neighborhood, and there are no outdoor activities available for them in our neighborhood.
- [Mayor]: Thank you. The "Concerned Parents" can now come up to the podium to speak.

- [Concerned Parents]: Good morning, my name is _____, and I am a concerned parent. I worry that a park in the middle of the downtown area would be dangerous for my children. There is a lot of traffic in that area, and children walking to and from the park would have to be extremely careful.
- [Mayor]: Thank you. I would now like to invite the "Parents who Like the Idea" to step up to the podium to speak.
- [Parents Who Like the Idea]: Good morning, my name is _____, and I am a parent who likes the idea of the downtown park. The closest park to my home is 30 minutes away, and this park would be only five minutes away. Having this park closer to my home would save my family a lot of time.
- [Mayor]: Thank you. Would the "Business Owner" now come forward to speak.
- [Business Owner]: Good morning, my name is _____, and I am a business owner in the downtown area. I do not like the idea of the park because it will take away a lot of parking space. If customers have no place to park, they will not be able to shop in our stores. This park could hurt our business.
- [Mayor]: Thank you. The "Kids" are now invited to come up to the podium to speak.
- [Kid]: Hi, my name is _____, and I am a kid who likes the park. I am really interested in playing baseball, but I have nowhere to play. Building the park would give me the chance to practice and play with my friends.
- [Mayor]: Thank you.

V. New Business

- [Mayor]: We will now move into the New Business portion of the meeting. At this time, the councilmembers will ask city staff questions about the downtown park. They will keep in mind everything that was said during the public meeting.
- [Council Member #1]: I have a question for the finance director. How is the city going to pay for the downtown park?
- [Finance Director]: The downtown park will cost \$500,000. Funds for the park will come out of the General Fund and we will host a city event to encourage residents to donate to the construction of the park.
- [Council Member #2]: I have a question for the police chief. Do you have any safety concerns with the project?

- [Police Chief]: I have a few safety concerns due to the high traffic in the area. We will have to speak with the children and parents on how to safely enter and exit the park and review the rules on how to safely use the sidewalks.
- [Council Member #3]: I have a question for the fire chief. What safety concerns do you have?
- [Fire Chief]: I have no concerns. The materials being used to build the playground are durable and safe.
- [Council Member #4]: I have a question for the planning director. Why did you recommend this location for a new park?
- [Planning Director]: The downtown neighborhood has been growing the past five years and increasing in the number of children. We think the downtown park will give the children a safe place to play and encourage more residents to visit the downtown businesses.
- [Councilmember #5]: I have a question for the city attorney. Are there any legal issues the city needs to think about?
- [City Attorney]: A major concern is if someone gets hurt in the park. However, we do have insurance to cover these claims. It will be important for our city to train the children on how to safely use the park.
- [Mayor]: Are there any other questions from the Council?
- [All Council members]: No.
- [City Clerk]: At this time, we will take a vote on the downtown park. The deputy city clerk and I will keep the count. Councilmembers, all those in favor of the proposed downtown park please raise your hand.
- [Deputy city clerk counts all those in favor.]
- [Deputy City Clerk]: All those not in favor of the proposed downtown park please raise your hand.
- [City clerk counts all those not in favor.]
- [City Clerk]: Myself and the deputy city clerk will discuss the vote count before announcing if the park proposal was passed or defeated.

- [Count those in favor versus those not in favor. A majority vote is needed to pass.]
- [City Clerk]: The downtown park passed (or failed); with _____ yes votes and _____no votes.

VI. Adjournment

- [Mayor]: This meeting of the City Council is now adjourned. [Mayor clicks the gavel twice.]
- [Mayor]: Before we leave today's meeting, there are a few reporters who have questions about the vote today.
- [Reporter #1]: I have a question for Council Member #1. What will this vote mean for the children in downtown area?
- [Council Member #1]:
 - [If the park proposal passes]: The downtown park will give the kids in the area a great place to exercise and play.
 - [If the skate park proposal fails]: This may not be the right time for a new park. We can use the money for improving other areas of the city.
- [Reporter #2]: Council member #2, why did you vote (for/against) the skate park?
- [Council Member #2]:
 - [If Council member #2 voted yes]: I voted yes because I think this will be a benefit to the downtown area businesses. With the addition of the park, more residents will visit and shop in the stores.
 - [If Council member #2 voted no]: I voted against the park because of the safety concerns due to the high traffic in the area. I would not want a resident to get hurt because the park is too close to a main road.
- [Reporter #3]: Council member #3, do you feel you have represented the citizens of our city and their concerns today?
- [Council Member #3]: Yes, I feel that I have represented the citizens' concerns by listening to everyone who came forward today. I weighed the options, and I believe my vote represented what is best for our community.
- [Mayor]: This concludes our Mock City Council meeting. Thank you all for participating.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOCABULARY

Budget: A government's annual financial plan. The budget is based on anticipated revenues and expenditures for a given year.

Charter: Similar to a constitution; written and adopted by the citizens. It defines the city's boundaries, form of government and powers.

Citizen: A resident of a city, state or nation; a consumer of public services.

City: See municipality. Although many people think a city is a large town, in Florida there is no legal difference between towns, villages and cities.

City attorney: Represents city in legal matters and gives legal advice concerning city affairs.

City clerk: Record-keeper for the city. Keeps the official city seal; maintains city council minutes and other records.

City council: The governing body of a city.

City hall: A city's main government building, usually including the offices for the mayor, the city council members and a council meeting room.

City manager: An official appointed by the city council to administer such city business as hiring, promotions, purchases and finances.

Code: A set of ordinances arranged by subject matter.

County: A subdivision of the state set up to carry out certain state laws; it also functions as a general-purpose local government.

Grant: Money provided by the state or federal government for local government projects. Grants are often designated for specific uses or projects.

Home Rule: A constitutional provision that allows municipal governments to exercise any power for municipal purposes except when it is expressly prohibited by state law. That is, as long as it is not specifically prohibited by state or federal law, municipal officials may pass any ordinance on behalf of the city.

Incorporated area: The land within a municipality. The boundaries are set by the city charter.

Infrastructure: The physical framework or facilities of government, such as roads, bridges, buildings and sewer lines.

Mayor: An elected municipal official who may, depending upon the charter, have specific duties and responsibilities.

Municipality: The legal name in Florida for a city, town or village.

Ordinance: A law enacted by a city or county affecting local affairs such as traffic, noise and animal control.

Tax: Money that a government levies and collects from people or organizations within its jurisdiction. Taxes are used to pay for government services.

Town: See municipality. Although many people think a town is a small city, in Florida there is no legal difference between towns, villages and cities.

Unincorporated area: The area of the county not in any city. Area may be rural, agricultural or heavily populated and suburban in nature.

Village: See municipality. Although many people think a village is a small town, in Florida there is no legal difference between towns, villages and cities.

Zoning: Dividing a community into zones for different types of uses, such as commercial, residential, subdivisions and agricultural.

Source: My City, I'm Part of It, I'm Proud of It