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Are Executive Sessions secret?
Are e-mails between officials available to the public?
Can a board go into Executive Session to discuss “litigation?”
Are salaries of public employees available for scrutiny?

These questions and more will be answered by New York State’s premier expert on such matters, Robert J. Freeman, Executive Director of the New York State Committee on Open Government.

Freeman, a dynamic and informative speaker on Open Meetings and Freedom of Information Law, will field questions on these important laws.

WHO: Anyone interested in Open Government and Freedom of Information Law, including Town, Village and School Board members as well as zoning, planning and any other board or commission members, as well as the general public.

WHAT: Question and answer session on Open Meetings Law & Freedom of Information Law.

WHERE: Crawford Mansion, 122 North Ridge Street, Rye Brook.

WHEN: Tuesday, Oct. 28, 2008 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Refreshments will be served.

WHY: To promote more open town, village and school governments.

This important public information session is being sponsored by the Westmore News. Use of Crawford Mansion is being provided courtesy of the Town of Rye.

We invite your participation and welcome your feedback.



Richard Abel
Publisher



Jananne Abel
Editor

Please circulate this invitation to anyone you feel will benefit from this important discussion to make local government as open and accessible as possible.

What is the Committee on Open Government and who is Robert Freeman?

The Committee on Open Government is responsible for overseeing implementation of the Freedom of Information Law (Public Officers Law, sections 84-90) and the Open Meetings Law (Public Officers Law, sections 100-111). The Freedom of Information Law governs rights of access to government records, while the Open Meetings Law concerns the conduct of meetings of public bodies and the right to attend those meetings. The committee also administers the Personal Privacy Protection Law.

The committee is composed of 11 members, five from government and six from the public. The five government members are the Lieutenant Governor, the Secretary of State, whose office acts as secretariat for the committee, the Commissioner of General Services, the Director of the Budget and one elected local government official appointed by the Governor. Of the six public members, at least two must be or have been representatives of the news media.

The Freedom of Information Law directs the committee to furnish advice to agencies, the public and the news media, issue regulations and report its observations and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature annually. Similarly, under the Open Meetings Law, the committee issues advisory opinions, reviews the operation of the law and reports its findings and recommendations annually to the Legislature. When questions arise under either the Freedom of Information Law or the Open Meetings Law, the committee can provide written or oral advice and attempt to resolve controversies in which rights may be unclear. Since its creation in 1974, nearly 20,000 written advisory opinions have been prepared by the committee at the request of government, the public and the news media. In addition, several thousand oral opinions have been provided by telephone.



Bob Freeman has worked for the Committee since its creation in 1974 and was appointed Executive Director in 1976. He received his law degree from New York University and a BS in Foreign Service from Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

Mr. Freeman has addressed numerous government related organizations, bar associations, media groups and has lectured at various colleges and universities. He has also spoken on open government laws and concepts throughout the United States, as well as Canada, the Far East, Latin America and eastern Europe.

He is currently serving as adjunct professor at the Albany Law School and teaches the only course in an American law school on public access to government information.