

Meeting minutes are lost cause at SC County

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Meeting minutes are lost cause at SC County By Kathleen Vandervoet

Minutes of the weekly meetings of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors stopped being approved or made available to the public nearly three years ago, and it is unclear when the process will return.

It is also unclear why none of the three members of the board, Rudy Molera, Manuel Ruiz or John Maynard, have urged action to reverse the situation during the ongoing minutes blackout that dates to Feb. 19, 2009. Speaking for this story, Molera said he'd like to see board minutes approved and posted, but was vague on a time frame.

Minutes are an official copy of what was voted on during a meeting and state law requires counties and towns to maintain them. Cities and towns, by law, must provide a written version of the minutes within three days or post a recording of the minutes on their website in the same time limit. The City of Nogales, for example, posts video recordings of council meeting on its YouTube page and links them to its website.

Counties, however, aren't subject to the time restriction.

Melinda Meek, clerk of the board of supervisors, takes minutes at each meeting. If she's unavailable, another county employee substitutes during regular meetings or special meetings.

The Nogales International asked Meek why the minutes haven't been approved by the board in a timely manner of several weeks for the past three years. In an email reply, she said, "There is no requirement that meeting minutes be posted on the website during that timeframe. Due to budget reductions and the elimination of a position in the board's office, we got behind in preparing the minutes. We are working diligently to bring them current."

Meek said that anyone who asks about the minutes is able to "receive a copy of the recording of the meeting."

Molera, currently serving as chairman of the board, said the absence of the minutes is "due to cuts. Something had to suffer."

He said the county "has hired a part-time employee to bring us up to date." Molera said he would like to see the minutes prepared and brought back to the board for approval "in a timely manner, like in two to four weeks."

When asked when the board will again have approval of meeting minutes on their weekly agenda, he said he didn't know. "Personally, I'd like to see it in the next month or two."

Maynard said in an email response that he had asked former County Manager Greg Lucero about the situation with the minutes "a few years ago," but Maynard didn't remember what the answer was. Lucero was fired from his position in September 2010.