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IN A MINUTES NOTICE

Part two

Public dismissed from fewer public meetings in 2016

Editor's Note: This is the second story in an *Observer* series titled "In a Minutes Notice." These articles highlight important information in meeting minutes and other public notices in newspapers. Part two details frequency and length of executive (closed) sessions of the Yankton City Commission, Yankton County Commission, Yankton School Board, and other local governments.

The Yankton City Commission, Yankton County Commission, and Yankton School Board held fewer executive sessions last year, compared to 2015 and other recent years.

In 2016, the three Yankton-based government bodies combined for 32 executive sessions with a combined length of 22 hours. That is 13 fewer than the 45 closed meetings held in Yankton in 2015, and 28 fewer than the 60 secret sessions among the three entities in 2013.

Executive sessions are allowed by South Dakota Codified Law 1-25-2 for board members to discuss limited issues such as employee performance and competence, litigation and contractual items, labor negotiations, pricing strategies, and student matters.

The 2016 Yankton School Board had five executive sessions in 16 meetings, or two fewer than the seven closed sessions held in 2015. Topics were personnel (twice), litigation/contractual (twice), and negotiations (once).

Five executive sessions is a five-year low for the Yankton School Board, which typically has 10 or fewer. An outlier was 2013 with 16 executive sessions.

School boards generally have fewer executive sessions, in part because they hold only one regular meeting per month. Most city and county boards in S.D. maintain a schedule of two or more regular meetings per month.

Yankton School Board's five executive sessions in 2016 totaled 4.5 hours. The longest was an April 18 meeting with nearly two hours of discussion about contract negotiations. The shortest was a 12-minute breakout on March 14 to discuss a personnel issue.

The 2016 Yankton County Commission had 14 executive sessions in 33 meetings, or eight fewer than the 22 closed sessions at the Yankton County Government Center in 2015. Topics were a mix of personnel issues, contractual items, and poor relief requests.

The 14 County Commission executive sessions lasted a combined total of 4.25 hours, making an average public shutdown 20 minutes long.

Yankton County Commission's longest closed-door session was 40 minutes at a Feb. 24 special meeting to discuss personnel issues. The shortest was a 10-minute timeout on March 14 to discuss a personnel issue that resulted in an employee's termination.

Yankton County's 14 closed meetings in 2016 were less than half of the 29 executive sessions called by the 2013 county board.

The 2016 Yankton City Commission had 13 executive sessions at its 24 regular meetings, down from 16 times behind closed doors in 2015. Topics were an



even split of personnel and contractual matters.

The City Commission's 13 closed sessions consumed 12.8 hours, and grew longer as the year went on. In the first half of 2016, there were six executive sessions that averaged 22 minutes of private time. In the second half of the year, there were seven executive sessions that lasted an average of 91 minutes each.

City of Yankton's longest executive session was August 8. It started at 7:38 p.m. and ended at 10:06 p.m. - two hours and 28 minutes of discussion about personnel and contractual issues. The City's shortest was a 10-minute private talk on June 13 about a contractual matter.

Yankton City Commission's 13 hours in closed sessions were more than the Yankton County Commission and Yankton School Board combined in 2016, but much lower than two years earlier. In 2014, the city board met for a combined 52 hours, with 22 hours in executive session.

The 2016 Gayville-Volin School Board had 11 executive sessions in 16 meetings. Topics included student matters, contract negotiations, and personnel issues. The longest was April 11 from 6:11 p.m. to 9:08 p.m. - two hours and 57 minutes about a student issue.

The 2016 Tabor Town Board had three executive sessions in 13 meetings to discuss personnel issues (twice) and employee incentives (once).

The 2016 Volin Town Board had 12 regular meetings and two executive sessions to discuss personnel issues.

The 2016 Mission Hill Town Board had 14 meetings and one executive session to discuss a personnel issue.

The 2016 Gayville Town Board had 12 regular monthly meetings and no executive sessions.

The 2016 Lesterville Town Board had 13 meetings and no executive sessions.

The 2016 Utica Town Board had 12 monthly meetings and no executive sessions.

Sources: Meeting minutes of the Yankton City Commission (2012-2016); Yankton County Commission (2012-2016); Yankton School Board (2012-2016); Gayville-Volin School Board (2016); Gayville Town Board (2016); Utica Town Board (2016); Volin Town Board (2016); Lesterville Town Board (2016); Tabor Town Board (2016) and Mission Hill Town Board (2016).