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## Vancouver school board meets with minimal public notice

By Susan Parrish, Columbian education reporter **12** 

Some wonder if district violated spirit of open meetings law

When Vancouver Public Schools

Published: October 13, 2014, 7:54 PM

called Monday's special board meeting

of ways. First, the Monday morning meeting was announced via an email issued at 8:36 on Sunday morning. Second, the

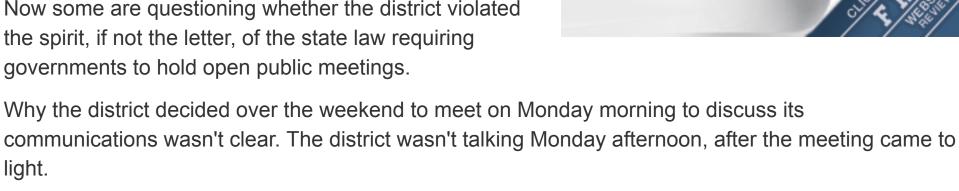
to discuss communications, it was unusual in a number

meeting venue was not at the school district's administrative offices, nor at any of its more than 20 schools, but at the home of a school board member. Now some are questioning whether the district violated the spirit, if not the letter, of the state law requiring

governments to hold open public meetings.

meeting apparently lasted for four hours.

Washington's public meetings law."



"Scheduling last-minute board meetings at an elected official's house, with one weekend day's notice, isn't really conducive to transparent government," said Eric Stahl, media and intellectual property lawyer with the firm Davis Wright Tremaine in Seattle. "It certainly isn't consistent with the spirit of

The board work session began at 8:30 a.m. at the home of Mari Greves, 4506 Oregon Drive. The

Stahl's clients include The Columbian and other media organizations. The Open Public Meetings Act allows for special meetings with 24 hours' notice. But the agency has to comply strictly with the notice requirements, the notice has to specify the business to be transacted, and board members can't take final action on anything not in the notice.

district offices are closed?

of the public who wanted to attend this work session was welcome."

The district did not return phone calls from The Columbian asking for an explanation. Tom Hagley Jr., the district's chief of staff, sent an email response: "Vancouver Public Schools complied with the 24-hour notice requirement to advertise special meetings of the board of directors. The work session topic was board communication and was part of ongoing professional development

So what was so urgent that forced officials to announce a meeting on a Sunday morning, when

for the board and the superintendent. The discussion focused on how they can communicate more effectively with one another as members of a governance team. Periodically in the past, work sessions of a similar nature have been held at the homes of individual board members. Any member

However, it was unlikely that many of the public knew about the meeting in advance.

prominently display the notice on the main entrance of the agency's principal location or the meeting site if it is not held at the agency's principal location; and post the meeting agenda on the district's website. Such notice must be delivered or posted, as applicable, at least 24 hours before the time of such meeting, as specified in the notice. The district did post the special meeting agenda on its website, although it is unclear when. It is unclear whether the district posted the meeting notice on the door of the district office and on Greves' front door.

Among the requirements of the state law regarding special meetings, the district must notify parties

on file with the governing body, which in Vancouver's case includes The Columbian; the district must

a few specific cases, and a specific reason must be cited as to why the discussion was held in executive session. In response to a follow-up email asking for more clarity about the meeting, Hagley responded that district administrators were very busy on Monday.

"Among other commitments for today, we are hosting two researchers from the Urban Institute. They

are writing a case study about our (Family and Community Resource Centers) and our partnership

with Vancouver Housing Authority. We are one of three cities in the U.S. to be spotlighted at a

He did not say why busy administrators would also schedule a four-hour special school board

national summit meeting in February," Hagley wrote.

Also Monday, a closed-door executive session was held regarding real property. It is unclear whether

the district followed the letter of the law. Real property can be discussed in executive session only in

meeting on the same day. The school board next meets at 4 p.m. Tuesday for a work session in the Jim Parsley Center board room, 2901 Falk Road, and at 5:15 p.m. for a regular meeting at the Bates Center for Educational Leadership, 2901 Falk Road.

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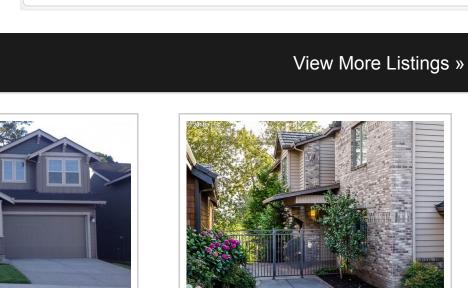


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What really surprises me is that the story is about how little notice was given, but there is no information about the



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meeting. Why? Because, despite the fact that the Columbian could easily deduce that something was off with the timing, no one was sent to report on it. And no one was there to report today either, where this issue was further discussed in an open meeting that's been on the calendar for months. That's a serious problem. This is an issue I've been dealing with for quite awhile with this district, but there is no real reason for the district to change because no one attends school board meetings to hold them accountable. (Although, it seems worth noting the VEA has been consistently sending Representatives for the past couple months and has committed to continue to do it! Go TEACHERS!)

\$359,500

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**Heather Beaupre Lindberg** · \* Top Commenter

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Reply · Like · October 14 at 7:17pm **Bruce Samuelson** ⋅ ★ Top Commenter ⋅ Vancouver, Washington And when we get behind closed doors...

If this were the county commissioners the whole community would be up in arms!

commissioners, Madore and Mielke, if you hadn't noticed:-)

Carolyn Crain · \* Top Commenter · John Adams High School

Ridiculous. This just smells like there's something brewing in the background. "ongoing professional development..." - wonder if someone had to get some professional dev hours logged in a very quick manner..? Reply · Like · d 1 · October 13 at 9:01pm **Nick Ruark** ⋅ ★ Top Commenter ⋅ Vancouver, Washington ⋅ 134 followers

telephones by the pupil transportation department to dispatch the district's fleet of school buses? Just curious. Perhaps someone at the Columbian could make an inquiry as to the Districts' policy on this to verify whether the policy complies with Washington State laws regarding the use of cellular telephones while operating a motor

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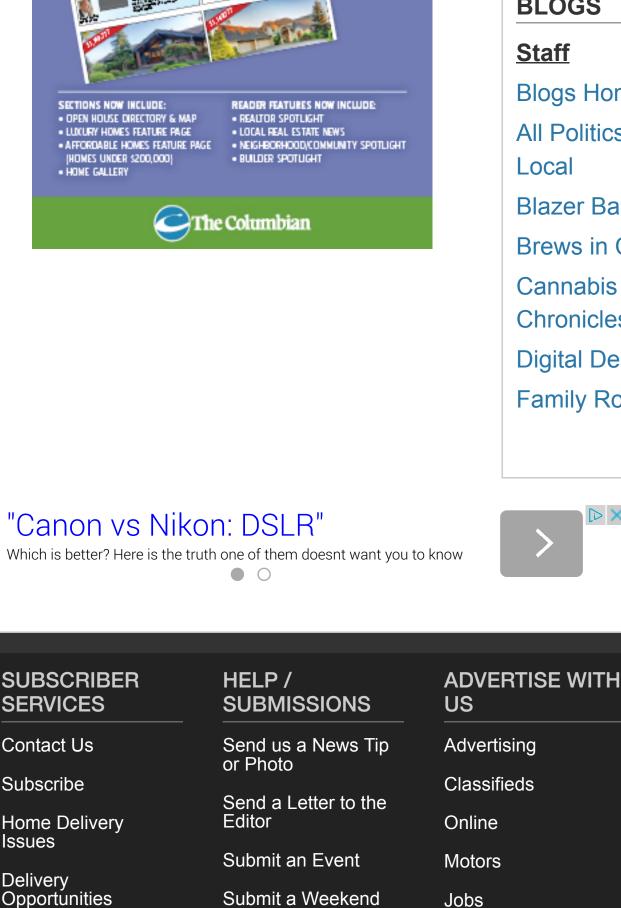
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I wonder if any discussion took place on another form of communications, specifically, the use of cellular

Carolyn Crain@@there are plenty of citizens up in arms over the antics of our current county

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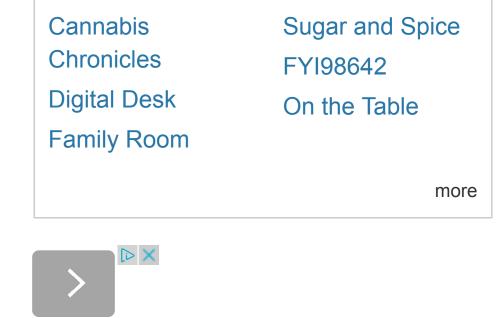
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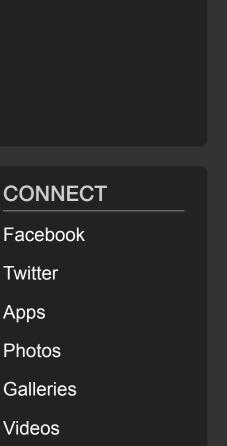
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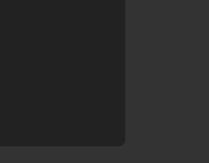
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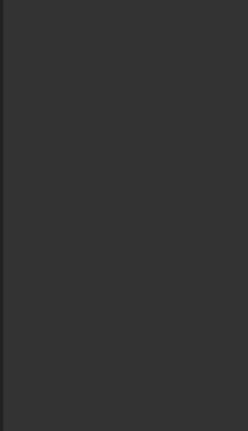
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