

Editorial: Daily Journal (Vineland, New Jersey)

December 10, 2008

Transparency makes for good government

Democracy works best when the public is informed and has access to government information.

An open government is transparent, which allows citizens access to public meetings and public records to find out how elected and appointed officials conduct business and spend taxpayers' money.

An agreement amicably reached between the Buena Vista Township Committee and the New Jersey Libertarian Party will help make the actions of the elected officials more transparent and will help the public hold them accountable.

John Paff, a Libertarian party official and chairman of the party's Open Government Advocacy project, made it clear the township wasn't doing anything deliberately wrong. The committee's former practice of just listing on the agenda that it was going into executive session and nothing else is a common practice in governments around the state.

It was good to hear Mayor Chuck Chiarello say that changing that practice wasn't a problem. For the past few meetings, the agenda has included more information on the items in closed-door meetings called to discuss personnel, litigation or contracts. For example, if litigation were being discussed, information on whether a suit has been filed would now be included as public information.

Paff said other towns are fighting his group's efforts to make government more open and transparent and to make sure they are following the Open Public Records and Open Public Meetings acts.

Buena Vista Township isn't one of them. And because the municipality is conscientious about fulfilling its responsibilities concerning public records and meetings, citizens will be better informed and more light will be shined on how the municipality conducts the people's business.

Other governments should take a look at how they are handling such agendas. Buena Vista's example would be a good one to follow. After all, it is the law.