

**Cumberland freeholders to explain why they're going into private sessions**  
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BRIDGETON -- Starting this week, the public has more of an opportunity to know what's going on behind closed doors at bi-monthly Cumberland County freeholder board meetings.

The county freeholder board changed a policy beginning Thursday night regarding private executive sessions to provide a more detailed explanation concerning what's to be discussed outside of the public's eye prior to closing a meeting to the public.

Before Thursday, the freeholder board would precede an executive session by giving a vague explanation such as "litigation" or "personnel."

Going into executive session for property acquisition, for example, now requires the freeholder board to give a brief description of the property that is to be discussed.

"It's a more modern way of doing things," said county counsel Gary Wodlinger. "It provides the public with a clear idea of what we're going to be talking about."

He recommended the change after being made aware of an unreported Appellate Court decision suggesting "a better way to go about doing an executive session."

Most government business is required by law to be discussed in a public forum, but a government board is permitted to conduct business in executive sessions for matters such as on-going litigation, property acquisition or personnel-related matters.

Minutes of executive sessions must be made available at some point following a meeting. Government entities who violate rules governing a public's right to know can face fines.

John Paff, a public advocate for open government who raises legal issues with government bodies who violate right-to-know laws, said he was pleased Friday with the freeholder board's decision.

Paff recently contacted Cumberland County to request records of resolutions closing freeholder board meetings to the public.

He planned to take the county to task for their policies regarding

the announcement of executive sessions.

"Sometimes my requests themselves cause things to happen," Paff said.  
"This saves me a lot of paperwork."