

Take a look at the law

The Orange County Planning Commission is in open and obvious violation of the Code of Virginia.

At a meeting June 2, the commission took two votes by secret written ballot during an open and public session. Paragraph 3 of Virginia Code Section 2.1-343 specifically bans voting by secret or written ballot in any public meetings.

The ban on secret voting is part of the Freedom of Information Act contained in the Code of Virginia. This act protects your right to see the working of your government.

Commission Chairman Bill Speiden told the audience at the June 2 meeting that written ballots are allowed under the by-laws of the Orange County Planning Commission. Obviously, the commission's bylaws are flawed.

By conducting votes in direct violation of the Code of Virginia, the planning commission has placed itself in a potentially embarrassing, and expensive, position. The Freedom of Information Act allows the local courts to impose fines on public officials who knowingly violate any provision of the act.

Chances are, however, the members of the commission were not aware that they were violating the law. The members of the planning commission and the county board of supervisors, the commission's parent organization, obviously need to take a close look at the commission's bylaws and at the laws of the Commonwealth.

From now on, the planning commission should be more careful.