

It's the Law

The Foxfire council's recent purchase of new desks for the town hall meeting room—*costing \$3,465*—has raised serious concerns about transparency in local council. While the decision to upgrade the meeting room itself is *not* the issue, the process by which this decision was made has left residents with unanswered questions. What council meeting was this purchase discussed in? Which council members voted for or against it? Were all council members involved in the discussion, or was this decision made by only a select few? We just don't know.

Residents have seen the council carefully deliberate over expenditures as small as \$500—so why was a purchase of this scale not deemed significant enough to warrant discussion during a public meeting?

Adding to my frustration, I made three requests for public information, including a copy of the purchase order for the desks. The process was unnecessarily difficult—it took four days, required two separate requests, and cost me 25 cents for a single copy. To retrieve the document, I had to drive to the townhall. Really? While these actions may technically comply to be within their legal rights, they do little to promote confidence in the council's commitment to transparency. One has to wonder—why make it so difficult?

As highlighted in my previous posting from the N.C. Open Government Coalition, North Carolina's Open Meetings Law (OML) mandates that public bodies conduct their business openly. This includes notifying residents of meetings, deliberating and voting in public, and maintaining meeting minutes as a record. Yet, this decision to allocate taxpayer funds appears to have been made behind closed doors, raising serious doubts about compliance with these transparency laws.

With elections approaching, voters are emphasizing the need for clarity and accountability from their elected officials. This situation serves as a stark reminder of the importance of open governance and the public's right to know how their tax dollars are spent.

