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In our view

County is learning FOIA laws can be complicated and a little frustrating

The Laurens County government staff reacted quickly to a judge's ruling that county boards, committees and county council itself had been in violation of the state's Freedom of Information Act and held a workshop for all of its board members this past Thursday at The Ridge at Laurens.

The county – we believe rightly – claimed that its bodies did nothing egregious and attempted to act within the spirit of the FOIA, but that didn't stop a local citizens' group from winning its case against the county.

Thursday's workshop was led by relatively new County Attorney Wes Meetze, who may be diving into FOIA for the first time in his legal career.

The irony was not lost on us that while the workshop involved members of boards that work with the county, no public notice was given prior to the workshop.

County leaders said they got legal counsel from the state Association of Counties that said no notice was required.

That differs from our opinion, and we would have suggested also speaking with South Carolina Press Association Attorney Jay Bender, who is arguably the state's foremost authority on FOIA and deals with it every day, and then making a decision.

One citizen who attended the meeting said it was informative and mostly on the mark, although he disagreed with some of the conclusions made there.

Like so many laws and ordinances, the state's FOIA law is not perfect. Perhaps too much is left to interpretation, so then it becomes a matter for the courts – as Laurens County and others before them have learned.

In another court, in front of another judge, the ruling against the county may have gone a different way. Again, matters of interpretation.

We believe it is important to attempt as best as possible to follow the spirit and letter of the law, and it was good to see the county make an effort.

But next time, just give us an email, a call or something.