**Fort White 'Emergency' Shredder Meeting Collapses Amid Sunshine Law Warnings – The After-Meeting Was Worse**

A rushed "emergency" meeting of the Fort White Town Council fell apart in less than 12 minutes Wednesday night after Town Attorney Leonard Ireland warned council members they were breaking Florida's open-government Sunshine Law.

Mayor George Jacob Thomas called the 5:30 p.m. meeting with only about three hours' notice to the public and zero notice to the news media. The agenda gave just four vague words—"Town staff emergency action" — and listed High Springs' contact information in the fine print. Thomas said he called the meeting because maintenance worker Earl Jenkins found bags of shredded paper hidden at the bottom of Town Hall's trash cans.

Speaking over a static-filled phone line, Ireland warned that shredded paper is not a true legal emergency, the vague notice failed to tell citizens what the meeting was about, and taking action could bring criminal charges. Ignoring standard meeting rules, council members talked over their attorney and asked whether Town Clerk Kelly MacPherson could tell temporary assistant clerk Christy Thompson not to come to work the next day. Realizing they could not legally vote, the council abruptly adjourned without allowing public comment.

> ***"Number two, you could be subject to criminal sanctions.***
> ***So, it's not a thing to play around with."***
> ***— Fort White Town Attorney Leonard Ireland***

What happened afterward was even messier. After Councilmen Dennis Rivera and Bill Koon quickly left, a majority of the council — Mayor Thomas, Vice Mayor Monica Merricks, and Councilman Alex Veiga — stayed behind around the trash bag Jenkins had carried inside. Telling the reporter not to take photos, Merricks untied the bag and dug through leftover lunch trash and shredded paper, while Veiga tried to piece paper strips together as Thomas watched.

The after-meeting activity raised another question: whether officials continued public business after the formal meeting had ended.

When Thompson arrived for work Thursday morning, Town Hall's locks had been changed. Sitting in her car, MacPherson told Thompson she had been let go the day before — though Thompson said later that afternoon her temp agency still had not contacted her. Another special meeting is reportedly planned for Monday night, though no public notice had been posted yet.