



Memorandum

TO: RULES COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Matt Mahan
Mayor Sam Liccardo
Vice Mayor Chappie Jones
Councilmember Sergio Jimenez
Councilmember Pam Foley

SUBJECT: Hybrid Public Meetings

DATE: May 6, 2021

APPROVED:

RECOMMENDATION:

As part of the City Manager's COVID-19 Update in June 2021, direct the City Manager to:

1. Return to the City Council with a plan for hosting hybrid public meetings that allow both in-person and virtual public participation with special consideration for:
 - a. Start date and timeline for transition,
 - b. Pros and cons of including standing and ad-hoc City Committees and Commissions in the new meeting protocols,
 - c. Pros and cons of allowing members of Council, City Committees and Commissions to participate remotely under certain circumstances,
 - d. Potential modification of certain Commissions' and Committees' requirements that meetings be held in person in different parts of the city given the City's new ability to facilitate virtual public participation from any location,
 - e. Staffing capacity and needs of the various City departments involved in completing the transition and providing ongoing support services,
 - f. Cost breakdowns for both required and potential support services, including staff time, language translation and expansion to city commissions and boards,
 - g. And success metrics for public participation that would allow Council to assess the effectiveness of the new model over time, to include which model most advances civic engagement, such as equitable access, unique participants, and overall experience for residents providing input and feedback on council items
2. Seek Council direction during the June 2021 presentation on final adoption of the transition plan prior to the July 2021 legislative recess.

BACKGROUND:

We want to thank the many city staff members who quickly and effectively managed the City's transition from in-person to virtual meetings in response to COVID-19. These efforts have made our city government more accessible and accountable to the public, whose participation in public meetings has happily increased over the past year.

City staff, through a team consisting of staff from the City Manager's Office, IT, City Clerk's Office and the Department of Public Works (DPW), have begun planning a transition to hybrid in-person/virtual Council meetings with an August 2021 start date in mind. They have discussed how best to return to in-person meetings physically in City Hall while also following COVID-19 safety protocols and maintaining a virtual option for public participation through Zoom and audio-only calls.

It is imperative that Council and the public have an opportunity to provide feedback on staff's developing plans for the transition period and post-Covid environment. Questions that need to be answered include, but are not limited to the following:

- Which, if any meetings should retain a purely virtual participation model and which should convert to the hybrid model?
- Is the public interest served by allowing members of Council, Committees and Commissions to also participate remotely under certain circumstances?
- What are the staffing, technology and funding needs to make the various options and service levels work?
- What other requirements should we anticipate given pending state-level legislation, such as AB 339 sponsored by our local State Assemblymember Alex Lee, and existing legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990?
- What lessons can we learn from other public entities that have already switched to a hybrid model, such as the City of Laguna Beach?

Council should have an opportunity to understand and discuss different approaches and associated pros and cons as we look to build upon the recent progress we've made in making public meetings more accessible.

We urge our colleagues to place this item on a future agenda for consideration coinciding with the June 2021 City Manager's COVID-19 Update. Thank you all for your consideration.

The signers of this memorandum have not had, and will not have, any private conversation with any other member of the City Council, or that member's staff, concerning any action discussed in the memorandum, and that each signer's staff members have not had, and have been instructed not to have, any such conversation with any other member of the City Council or that member's staff.