



**CITY OF ELK GROVE
CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT**

AGENDA TITLE: Consider policies for returning to in-person public meetings in the Chamber

MEETING DATE: June 9, 2021

**PREPARED BY
DEPARTMENT HEAD:** Jason Lindgren, City Clerk

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends the City Council receive a report to consider policies for returning to in-person public meetings in the Chamber.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

At the May 26, 2021, regular City Council meeting, Mayor Singh-Allen requested, and received City Council consensus, for staff to return a report to consider policies for returning to in-person public meetings in the Chamber.

Executive Order N-29-20 was issued on March 17, 2020, and Executive Order N-35-20 was issued on March 21, 2020, by the Governor of the State of California, allowing local agencies to conduct public meetings by remote teleconference, as long as the local agency provided a means to receive public comment. With the announcement of the June 15, 2021, reopening plan, the Governor's Office has noted that it will not be immediately repealing the temporary authority allowing local agency bodies to hold remote meetings. The Governor's Office has indicated that it will work to provide notice in advance of rescission of Executive Order N-29-20 to allow time necessary to meet statutory and logistical requirements. Until a further order issues, local agencies may continue to rely on N-29-20 and hold remote meetings after June 15, 2021.

The City implemented procedures to receive public comment and requests to utilize the display of the City audio / visual equipment for agendized items continued to be provided in accordance with pre-existing policy (such submittals needed to relate to a specific agendized item and needed to be received 24-hours in advance). All written comments received before 4 p.m.

the day of the scheduled meeting were redacted to remove personal contact information and posted to the City website (for comments). Any comments sent after that 4 p.m. timeframe were forwarded to the full City Council and staff. The City Council then had the option to direct the City Clerk to read or display any public comment received prior to the meeting.

During the various transitions in teleconference technologies, staff adjusted the methods of fielding external calls. With the transition to Zoom, speakers in the online environment could utilize the “raise hand” feature to enter into a speaker queue and would then be un-muted to provide their comments when recognized. Phone call participants could utilize the “raise hand” feature by pressing *9 on their phone.

The City continued to broadcast the meeting online via Granicus and with the assistance of Metro Cable. The broadcast of the meeting typically has a time delay, and the broadcasts since March 2020 have been the Virtual Meeting interface of the teleconference environment.

For any changes to teleconference or in-person meetings of the City Council, similar practices have been implemented for meetings of other City commissions and committees as well.

ANALYSIS:

Staff evaluated strategies for returning to in-person public meetings in the Chamber and has identified areas of consideration regarding 1) safety in the physical, built environment of the Chamber, 2) the method to broadcast the meeting for viewers and participants, 3) the methods for speakers to participate in the meeting, and 4) timing to commence in-person meetings.

Safety Considerations in the Physical, Built Environment of the Chamber

The guidelines from the State of California will provide guidance on any public health requirements (regulations for masks, social distancing, etc.). The City has adopted variations of set-ups by reducing public seating to adhere to social distancing requirements, and providing markings for queues as necessary.

Plastic shielding remains in place at public service counters at City Hall, and staff would anticipate having plastic shielding at the support desk (stationed by the Assistant City Clerk) to assist participants with questions during the meeting and receive speaker cards. Staff envisions the speaker podium microphone would remain the same for fielding attendee speakers.

Staff would not anticipate a need for plastic shielding between members of the City Council or staff, unless under direction by state guidelines. For larger City commissions variations of seating arrangements can be implemented to provide for distancing between members and staff.

Broadcasting the Meeting

Meetings of the City Council are recorded utilizing the audio / visual equipment of the Chamber, and monitored by Metro Cable staff. The meeting is broadcast live via the City's website, but does have a slight playback delay.

The audio/visual equipment is able to receive participants from an established teleconference environment (like Zoom), so speakers can continue to be fielded from a teleconference environment and those comments would broadcast on the meeting video. The teleconference environment itself (so, what remote participants would view in the Zoom teleconference environment) would not have video display visuals of speakers, but it would have audio and any presentation materials shared via Zoom would also display.

Methods to Participate

Currently under the Zoom teleconference model, speakers can be fielded and queued for speaking in the live teleconference environment. Speakers that attend in-person would be called per prior practice (logged into the speaker queue by the Assistant City Clerk), and in-person speakers would likely be easiest to call first, then staff would review the teleconference speaker queue and receive those speakers.

Timing for implementation

Numerous public hearing notices have been issued identifying the June 23, 2021 regular meeting as a teleconferenced meeting. With the summer recess scheduled for first meeting in July, the July 28, 2021 regular meeting would be an ideal transition point to synchronize public hearing notices for that meeting with clear directions on how to participate in the meeting. Staff would also provide orientations for new members of the City Council on utilizing the Chamber systems.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends focusing the transition to return physically into the Chamber meeting space on July 28, 2021, subject to the following conditions:

1. Provide shielding for public service areas (the support desk) and implement distancing guidelines as required;
2. Broadcast the Granicus / Metro feed of the meeting (for members of the public utilizing the Zoom teleconference environment that medium would be audio and any visual displays shared via Zoom);
3. Receive public comment from attendees in the audience (who could sign up via speaker card to the Assistant City Clerk), and also field speakers participating in the Zoom environment. The City Clerk would prompt participants in the Zoom environment to start using the “raise hand” feature to queue for the item, and with the opening of the public comment opportunity, speakers physically in attendance would be received first, and then remote speakers would be received. In addition staff would no longer post comments received online, but make them available in the Chamber and upon request; however, the City would continue to receive any format of submittal (written, audio, and/or video comments);
4. The hybrid in-person / Zoom environment would be monitored by staff for efficiency and effectiveness and would be subject to change to adjust to circumstances. The hybrid in-person / Zoom environment is intended for a transitional period, with the intent that the City would eventually return fully to in-person meetings only.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:

The City Council could continue to hold meetings in a teleconference environment only until the Governor’s Executive Order is rescinded. Other hybrid options could be considered including limiting public participation and attendance to the teleconference environment with staff and Council in the Chambers or other alternatives that the Council may wish to consider.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Returning to in-person public meetings in the Chamber would have no substantive changes to costs for staffing meetings. Additional cleaning supplies and any protective shielding would incur minimal facilities costs.

ATTACHMENTS:

None.