

#AI 15: Continue Zoom public meeting format

City staff and councillors,

I'm pleased to see that city staff are recommending that City Council approve continuing our in person/virtual public participation meeting via Zoom format.

There are only advantages for the electorate to this approach:

We have significant numbers of elderly, family focused and working people who cannot physically attend meetings but who do wish to stay informed and interact via Zoom with their insights and perspectives in real time.

The disadvantages to everyone (including staff and council) of returning to pre technology meetings are considerable:

- An exclusively in-person only format will require a police presence if council are offended by free speech and wish to eject speakers. This is further complicated by recent first amendment legal jeopardy challenges to councils who chose to curtail public comment

<https://www.citymanagerunfiltered.com/e/did-aransas-pass-tx-expose-itself-to-a-public-comment-first-amendment-lawsuit-ep-36/>

- It is far easier to cut short comments council find offensive by ejecting participants from Zoom than having police remove people from the room
- The City of Sebastopol has historically had issues with voter participation in council meetings and keeping up to date with council decision making, further complicated by the various perspective blogs written by councillors and citizens, plus the various rumor mill sites such as FaceBook and NextDoor.

Restricting real time interaction to evening meetings in the chilly, uncomfortable community center will arguably only increase this challenge, particularly as there is no public wifi to look at agenda items

- In the unhappy event of disasters such as this weekend's storm, fires, earthquakes, pandemics etc people may not be able to travel to meetings and will therefore have no access to important decisions being discussed by city staff and council.

I therefore urge council to heed city staff guidance and continue our Zoom virtual meeting format.

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