

## Virtual Meetings During a Pandemic

Now more than ever, many members of the public feel isolated from local government and the decision-making process. Transparency in government is vital to giving the public confidence and ensure they understand the technology and have the ability to weigh in on actions taken.

While the Village adapted well in a short period of time, virtual meetings aren't ideal:

- At a July 2020 Council meeting, with critical agenda items of great interest to the public, the zoom and phone-in limits were both exceeded and some residents were denied the ability to speak during public comment. Gratefully the problem was fixed before the next council meeting.
- There has not been a well-defined and written policy approved by Council as to limitations related to public attendance at Council meetings. Who is allowed to attend besides the council and limited staff?
- Often people want to speak via Zoom or by phone during public comment but cannot understand the technology
- When meetings are attended live, via Zoom or by phone, the public may decide to speak during public comment as a result of the real time discussion. However, for those who must use the option of emailing their public comment, it must be received by 9 a.m. the day before the meeting.
- Emailed comments are not read, so while considered public, the public doesn't hear the comments and can't be sure the council reads the emails. Public comment should serve to education both the Council and other members of the public.
- The public (and Council) is not informed as to the number of emails received and whether they are for or against an issue.
- Often public comment generates discussion or questions. When emailed public comment is not read at the public meeting, no action is likely.
- The same public record rules apply to committee meetings – emailed the day before regarding agenda items. However, typically no agenda is available on the website for committee meetings.
- While the public sees the council and staff, speakers from the public are not shown.
- While Zoom has the capability to allow all participants to see the number of people in attendance, the public cannot see that statistic when attending by Zoom.
- While at live meetings the public can provide documents related to their comments, that does not happen with virtual meetings unless done via email the day before the meeting.
- For quasi-judicial public hearings, some opponents must provide their arguments more than 24 hours in advance if by email. The emails are provided to the applicant giving the applicant time to prepare counter arguments, an advantage not available with live meetings.