



City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: May 14, 2024

Prepared By: Melissa Thurman, City Clerk

Approved By: Gabriel Engeland, City Manager

Subject: Discuss and provide direction on a potential policy related to public comments from a remote platform for public meetings

COUNCIL PRIORITY AREA

- Business Communities
- Circulation Safety and Efficiency
- Environmental Sustainability
- Housing
- Neighborhood Safety Infrastructure
- General Government

RECOMMENDATION

Discuss and provide direction on a potential policy related to public comments from a remote platform for public meetings.

FISCAL IMPACT

Not applicable.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Not applicable.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

On July 11, 2023, the City Council held a Closed Session meeting to discuss recent incidents of “Zoom bombings” throughout the state of California during public meetings. Zoombombing refers to the unwanted or hate-filled speech during the public comment period of remote speakers during a publicly held meeting. The City Council directed staff to pause remote participation during public meetings and to bring the item back for discussion in 2024.

BACKGROUND

The Ralph M. Brown Act (Government Code Sections 54950 et seq.) requires that the City Council conduct business in open, public, and noticed meetings. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, all City Council meetings were held in person only and there were no options for remote public participation, including remote public comment. During the pandemic, the use of software was enabled to allow for remote public participation, including remote public comment.

DISCUSSION

Currently the public may provide feedback to the City Council in the following ways:

- Emailing the City Council with comments prior to the meeting. These comments are included in the official record of the meeting and are received by the City Council as they are submitted.
- Attend meetings in person and provide verbal comments.

In March 2024, the City Clerk collected survey data to other public agencies throughout California, to determine whether remote public participation during public meetings was utilized in those agencies. 83 agencies responded and the results are as follows:

- 10 agencies allow a hybrid format with limitations.
- 26 agencies allow remote public comments.
- 47 agencies discontinued remote public comments.

Whether in person or remote, members of the public may participate from anywhere in the world and are not required to live in the City of Los Altos to speak on any item on the agenda, or on items not on the agenda. Applicable law would not allow the City to impose restrictions upon remote participants, such as residency restrictions or restrictions on speech made during public comment periods.

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR COUNCIL

1. Does the City Council want to allow remote public comments during Council meetings or to discontinue the practice?
2. If remote public comment is allowed, does the City Council wish to place any restrictions on time allotted for individuals making comments or move this agenda item to a different place/order on the agenda?

ATTACHMENTS

1. Remote Participation Survey