

Feb. 18, 2025

To Mayor Jenny Taylor and members of the Stevenson City Council,

We are writing to ask you to continue the current city practice of recording City Council and Planning Commission meetings and posting the videos promptly to YouTube.

As small journalism organizations working to share relevant local information with residents of Skamania County, the ability to attend public meetings via Zoom has been a game-changer. It extends our ability to stay informed and thus keep others informed. But posting meeting videos promptly is an even more vital tool.

Our small staffs cannot always come to meetings at the appointed time. And even when we do come in person, having the ability to review video to double-check our notes allows us to more accurately convey not only what you as elected officials are doing, but how you view problems and solutions, how you express yourselves, and how you frame and discuss issues and decisions that directly impact residents lives.

Videos aren't perfect. Sometimes it's hard to tell who is talking, and they don't capture things happening off screen.

But stopping sharing video would hurt public knowledge, government transparency and accurate information.

For example, imagine that someone hears a rumor about something that was said at City Council. Or sees a clip from a conversation at a meeting. Without a readily available, publicly accessible video record, rumors simply grow.

It is possible that viewers attending remotely could make their own recordings, although creating a video of a Zoom session you aren't hosting is not always possible. But why put that burden on individual citizens anyway?

Overall, we are not clear what problem ending the posting of videos would solve. We are absolutely sure that such a move would create problems for transparency and make it harder for people to know what's going on.

We urge you to continue the practice of recording City Council and Planning Commission meetings and posting the videos promptly to YouTube. We'd be happy to help you if there are ways we can.

Thank you for discussing this issue, and thank you for considering this view.

Yours sincerely,

Frank DeVaul

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