



## **Virtual Meeting Policy**

**(Council, Boards, and Committees)**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for conducting meetings for the City of Watertown's Council, Boards, and Committees that include in-person participation with optional virtual participation. This policy ensures transparency, accessibility, and orderly conduct while maintaining in-person quorum and participation. The policy supplements Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law (§19.81–§19.98) and any applicable city ordinances.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all official meetings of the City of Watertown Council, Boards, Committees, and any other city bodies subject to the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law. All meetings must be held and conducted in person. Virtual participation is allowed as a supplement but cannot replace the in-person meeting.

### **Authority**

This policy is adopted pursuant to the authority granted under Wisconsin Statutes §19.81–§19.98 (Open Meetings Law) and local ordinances. In case of a declared emergency or public health order, additional state or federal provisions may apply.

### **Definitions**

- Virtual Meeting – Participation in a meeting through electronic means such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams.
- Hybrid Meeting – A meeting that includes both in-person and remote participants.
- Quorum – The minimum number of members required to conduct business, in-person or approved virtual participation.
- Public Access – The ability of the public to view, listen to, or participate in a meeting consistent with Wisconsin Open Meetings Law.

### **Meeting Platform and Access**

Virtual participation platforms may be used to allow members to join meetings virtually. Virtual access is supplemental to in-person attendance and does not replace the requirement that meetings be held in-person. Public access instructions, including meeting links or dial-in numbers, must be included in the official meeting notice if the board/committee is allowing public access through a virtual platform.

Virtual meetings or remote attendance shall not be permitted for meetings that include quasi-judicial action requiring due process.

## **Notice and Agenda Requirements**

Meetings must meet the same posting and notice requirements as in-person meetings. The notice must include instructions for public access and participation, including virtual access if provided. Accessibility accommodations must be provided upon request in compliance with ADA requirements.

## **Attendance and Participation**

Voting members of the City Council, Boards, and Committees may attend meetings virtually only with prior approval from the Mayor or Committee Chair. Requests for virtual attendance shall be made to the Mayor or their designee at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting, stating the reason for the request. Exceptions may be made for family emergencies, illness, or other special circumstances. Approval may be granted at the discretion of the Mayor or Board/Committee Chair based on the circumstances and the need to maintain effective governance.

Members participating virtually with approval shall identify themselves when speaking and maintain audio and visual presence when feasible. Approved remote participants shall be considered present for quorum and voting purposes unless otherwise restricted by law. All other members are expected to attend in-person.

All commenting features on virtual meeting platforms shall be turned off to avoid an Open Meetings notice violation.

Attendance, both in person and virtual, shall be noted in the meeting minutes. Attendance history at meetings will be considered by the Mayor as a factor in evaluations for future appointments to any Board or Committee.

## **Closed Session**

If the members of Council or a City Board/Commission vote to go into closed session, all state and local laws related to closed session shall apply. If in closed session, a member attending virtually shall take all reasonable measures to ensure that no member of the public present at their location are able to see, hear or otherwise observe the closed session.

## **City Staff Participation Closed Session**

Staff members may attend a virtual platform, provided that such virtual participation is approved in advance by the Mayor or the Board/Committee Chair. Approval may be granted based on operational needs, accessibility considerations, or other reasonable circumstances.

## **Technical Difficulties**

If technical difficulties prevent a member's participation, the presiding officer may call a brief recess. If quorum is lost and cannot be restored, the meeting shall be adjourned and rescheduled.

Each individual attending virtually is responsible for their audio and internet connections; no action shall be invalidated on the grounds that the loss of, or poor quality of, a member's individual connection prevented participation in the meeting.

### **Recording and Record Retention**

Meetings may be recorded for public record or reference. Recordings are retained in accordance with the City's record retention policy. The approved meeting minutes remain the official record of proceedings.

### **Security and Privacy**

Virtual meetings must use secure links, passwords, and waiting room features to prevent unauthorized access. Unauthorized recording, distribution, or sharing of meeting content is prohibited. City staff are responsible for managing and securing meeting settings.

### **Conduct and Decorum**

All participants must adhere to the same standards of conduct expected in in-person meetings. Members should maintain professional appearance and neutral backgrounds. The presiding officer retains authority to enforce order and decorum throughout the meeting.

### **Evaluation and Updates**

This policy shall be reviewed annually, or as necessary, to ensure compliance with legal requirements, technology changes, and best practices.

### **Effective Date and Adoption**

This policy shall take effect upon approval by the City Council and shall apply to all City of Watertown Council, Board, and Committee meetings.

Adopted by the City Council of the City of Watertown on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date).