



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Council Member John Hines and Policy Assistant Claire Goodwin
COPY: Government Performance and Finance Committee (GPFC); Andy Cherullo, Director, Finance; Ted Richardson, Senior Management Fellow, City Manager's Office
PRESENTER: John Hines, Chair, Government Performance and Finance Committee
SUBJECT: Returning to In-Person Public Meetings
DATE: February 8, 2022

PRESENTATION TYPE:
Informational Briefing

SUMMARY:

On September 21 and October 5, 2021, GPFC approved proposed guidelines to potentially allow certain Study Sessions to be done in hybrid format as directed by Emergency Rule No. 4 instated on August 19, 2021. This briefing proposes revisiting the topic of returning to in-person meetings and holding hybrid format meetings to include those of the City Council, including Study Sessions, and those of the Public Utility Board. A hybrid meeting means Council Members, Public Utility Board Members, and members of the public have the option of attending in-person or virtually.

The revised proposal includes the following recommendations for Council to hold hybrid format meetings:

- Effective Wednesday, February 23, 2022, City Council and the Public Utility Board shall have the option to hold public meetings in hybrid format to include:
 - City Council meetings
 - Study Session meetings
 - Council Retreat meetings
 - Public Utility Board meetings
- The City Manager shall work in coordination with Emergency Management to establish appropriate protocols to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19 at the public meetings.
- The Mayor and Council shall monitor national COVID-19 trends, including new variants, and when needed, discuss at Study Session whether to return to virtual-only meetings or remain in hybrid format. Any Council Member or Public Utility Board Member may request the topic be discussed or revisited at a public meeting.
 - Justification: COVID-19 cases are declining and trending downwards; Council Members are beginning to conduct Council business in-person so there appears to be a desire to meet as an elected body; other jurisdictions are beginning to return to in-person meetings with the option of attending virtually (hybrid format).

The following public meetings shall remain in virtual-only format:

- Standing Council Committees
- Committees, Boards, and Commissions



An evaluation of 28 jurisdictions found the following:

- 54% of the jurisdictions' elected bodies are meeting exclusively virtually
- 68% of the jurisdictions are accepting public comment exclusively virtually
- 29% of jurisdictions' elected bodies are meeting in hybrid format and the same percentage are accepting public comment in hybrid format
- 18% of jurisdictions' elected bodies are meeting exclusively in-person with only one appearing to only accept oral public comment in-person

BACKGROUND:

Previously Adopted Guidelines: On September 21 and October 5, 2021, GPFC approved proposed guidelines to potentially allow certain Study Sessions to be done in hybrid format as directed by Emergency Rule No. 4 instated on August 19, 2021. The Emergency Rule states:

“Effective August 19, 2021, City Council and Public Utility Board study sessions and business meetings, and any other public meetings of the City of Tacoma, will be held in virtual format only. I am also directing the Government Performance and Finance Committee (“GPFC”) to develop proposed guidelines to potentially allow certain study sessions to be done in hybrid format. The guidelines should be presented to the City Council by the end of September and must be consistent with current COVID-19 guidelines and staff safety protocols.”¹

The Committee approved the following guidelines and metrics that would trigger a discussion at City Council to potentially hold in-person or hybrid-format Study Sessions using Pierce County data – these guidelines were shared in writing with City Council on October 12, 2022 with a follow-up presentation to Study Session on November 2, 2021:

- 7-day rate of new COVID-19 hospitalizations per 100,000 population is less than 5
 - Justification: This was a metric used by the State of Washington to allow counties with a population over 50,000 people to move into Phase 3 reopening. Phase 3 allowed gatherings with no more than 50 people; resumed non-essential travel; and restaurants could open at less than 75% capacity.²
- 14-day average case rate is under 200
 - Justification: This was also one of the metrics used by the State of Washington to allow counties with a population over 50,000 people to move into Phase 3 (see additional details in justification above).

The metrics were proposed to be used to trigger a discussion at City Council so all Council Members can evaluate their comfort level on returning to in-person meetings and provide input on the final decision.

- After discussion at City Council on whether to return to in-person or hybrid meetings, if the two metrics are maintained for six weeks in Pierce County, City Council would automatically return to holding in-person or hybrid public meetings, unless otherwise directed by the Mayor.
 - Justification: Waiting six weeks attempts to account for a potential rebound in case numbers to avoid a back-and-forth of returning to in-person meetings only to revert to exclusively virtual meetings. The 14-day average case rate from the periods May 12, 2021-May 25, 2021 to July 13,

¹ https://www.cityoftacoma.org/in_the_news/proclamation_of_emergency_rule_no__4

² <https://coronavirus.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/PhasedReopeningChart.pdf>



2021-July 26, 2021 was below 200. However, the 14-day average case rate beginning in the period July 14, 2021-July 27, 2021 crept above 200 and has remained there ever since.³

Other Elected Bodies: A review of how other elected bodies in the region are conducting public meetings in January 2022 is provided below:

- Pierce County: Pierce County Council is meeting in-person with the public able to attend virtually or in-person (aka “hybrid” format).⁴
- City of Puyallup: City Council meetings are being held in-person with the ability for electeds to attend virtually and public comment is accepted in-person and virtually.⁵
- City of Lakewood: City Council meetings are being held virtually.⁶
- City of University Place: As of January 2022, the Council only had two electeds in chambers along with the City Clerk and possibly others, though the vast majority of Council was attending virtually. The public is only allowed to attend virtually.⁷
- City of Fife: As of January 2022, City Council meetings were held in hybrid format with both Council Members and the public attending virtually and in-person.⁸
- City of Fircrest: City Council meetings are being held in-person and the public is able to attend in-person or virtually.⁹
- City of Gig Harbor: City Council meetings are being held virtually.¹⁰
- City of Federal Way: City Council meetings are being held in-person and the public is able to attend in-person or virtually.¹¹
- City of Seattle: City Council meetings are being held virtually.¹²
- King County: County Council meetings are being held virtually.¹³
- City of Auburn: City Council meetings are held in hybrid format with only the Mayor attending in chambers and the rest of Council attending virtually. The public was invited to attend in-person or virtually.¹⁴
- City of Kent: City Council meetings are being held in-person and the public is able to attend in-person or virtually.¹⁵
- City of SeaTac: City Council meetings are being held virtually.¹⁶
- City of Renton: City Council meetings are being held virtually.¹⁷
- City of Bellevue: City Council meetings are being held virtually.¹⁸

³ <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/COVID19/DataDashboard>

⁴ <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/1430/Council-Committee-Meetings>

⁵ <https://www.cityofpuyallup.org/637/City-Council-Meetings>

⁶ <https://cityoflakewood.us/calendar/#MEETINGS>

⁷ <https://www.cityofup.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/83?fileID=424>

⁸ <https://www.cityoffife.org/454/Watch-Now?clientID=4845477838&eventID=2022011003>

⁹ <https://www.cityoffircrest.net/government/city-council/ccagenda-minutes/>

¹⁰ <http://www.cityofgigharbor.net/267/City-Council>

¹¹ <https://docs.cityoffederalway.com/WebLink/ElectronicFile.aspx?docid=875074&dbid=0&repo=cityoffederalway>

¹² <http://www.seattle.gov/council/calendar/>

¹³ https://kingcounty.gov/council/committees/full_council.aspx

¹⁴ <http://www.pbtech.org/clients/auburncc/auburncc01182022.html>

¹⁵ <http://kentwa.iqm2.com/Citizens/SplitView.aspx?Mode=Video&MeetingID=4803&Format=Agenda>

¹⁶ <https://www.seatacwa.gov/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/11074/471?toggle=allpast>

¹⁷ https://rentonwa.gov/city_hall/city_council

¹⁸ <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/city-council>



- City of Mercer Island: City Council meetings are being held virtually.¹⁹
- City of Redmond: City Council meetings are being held in hybrid format with the option of electeds attending virtually. Most appeared to be attending in-person at the February 1, 2022 meeting. The public is invited to attend in-person or virtually.²⁰
- City of Bothell: City Council meetings are held in hybrid format with only the Mayor attending in chambers and the rest of Council attending virtually. The public is invited to attend virtually only.²¹
- City of Kirkland: City Council meetings are being held virtually. The City Manager appeared to be attending in Council Chambers, though no electeds appeared to be attending in-person.²²
- City of Shoreline: City Council meetings are being held virtually.²³
- City of Woodinville: City Council meetings are being held in hybrid format, with the majority of electeds attending in-person. Oral public comment appeared to only be taken in-person.²⁴
- City of Sammamish: City Council meetings are being held in hybrid format, though only the Mayor and City Clerk was attending in-person among the elected body.²⁵ The public was invited to attend virtually only.
- City of Issaquah: City Council meetings are being held virtually.²⁶
- City of Olympia: City Council meetings are being held virtually.²⁷
- City of Lacey: City Council meetings are being held virtually, though in-person meetings will be considered in March.²⁸
- City of Tumwater: City Council meetings are being held virtually.²⁹
- City of Spokane: City Council meetings are being held in hybrid format with only the Mayor and Council President attending in chambers.³⁰
- City of Vancouver: City Council meetings are being held virtually.³¹

ISSUE:

This Committee was directed by Emergency Rule No. 4 to develop recommendations on holding in-person study sessions which was adopted by the Committee on September 21, 2021. Given the variable climate of COVID-19, the Committee is asked to reexamine the option of the City Council and the Public Utility Board of returning to in-person public meetings in a hybrid format to allow the possibility of elected officials and members of the public to attend in-person or virtually.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHt7-Hk9xvA>

²⁰ https://redmond.granicus.com/player/clip/2129?view_id=2&redirect=true

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bodyh2yrI-U>

²² https://kirkland.granicus.com/player/clip/4541?view_id=54&redirect=true

²³ <https://www.shorelinewa.gov/government/council-meetings>

²⁴ https://woodinville.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=11&clip_id=1802 and https://granicus_production_attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/woodinville/7f52fc4a93c8bc2a6fb398017e3718d10.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/embed/4vIIMMrai90>

²⁶ <https://issaquah.civicweb.net/portal/meetinginformation.aspx?Id=2246&content=true>

²⁷ http://olympia.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=2431

²⁸ <https://www.ci.lacey.wa.us/city-government/city-council/city-council-2/city-council-meetings>

²⁹ <https://mccmeetings.blob.core.usgovcloudapi.net/tumwater-pubu/MEET-Agenda-00a4888274ea424da1119d3ce56d6958.pdf>

³⁰ <https://my.spokanecity.org/citycouncil/meetings/2022/01/24/legislative-meeting/>

³¹ <https://vancouvercity.novusagenda.com/agendapublic/MeetingView.aspx?MeetingID=271&MinutesMeetingID=-1&doctype=Agenda>



ALTERNATIVES:

Proposed alternatives are welcome for discussion by the GPFC Members.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There may be a fiscal impact to the recommended protocols developed by the City Manager and Emergency Management to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19 at the public meetings, though they are unknown at this time.

RECOMMENDATION:

Effective Wednesday, February 23, 2022, City Council and the Public Utility Board shall have the option to hold public meetings in hybrid format (allowing in-person and virtual attendance) to include:

- City Council meetings
- Study Session meetings
- Council Retreat meetings
- Public Utility Board meetings

The City Manager shall work in coordination with Emergency Management to establish appropriate protocols to mitigate the potential spread of COVID-19 at the public meetings.

The Mayor and Council shall monitor national COVID-19 trends, including new variants, and when needed, discuss at Study Session whether to return to virtual-only meetings or remain in hybrid format. Any Council Member or Public Utility Board Member may request the topic be discussed or revisited at a public meeting.

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