

From: [Portland Copwatch](#)
To: [Commissioner Hardesty](#); [Wheeler, Mayor](#); [Commissioner Ryan Office](#); [Commissioner Rubio](#); [Commissioner Mapps](#)
Cc: [Hull Caballero, Mary](#); [Council Clerk – Testimony](#); [Portland Copwatch](#)
Subject: COMMENTS on Agenda Item 518, expanding virtual Council meetings
Date: Tuesday, June 29, 2021 3:20:53 PM

Members of City Council

We're writing to you today with concerns about item 518, which will amend City Code and allow for virtual attendance by Council members until June 2022, even if all in-person pandemic-related restrictions are lifted including the federal mask mandates for public transportation. While we agree that Council members should be able to attend by phone or electronically when they are unable to get to City Hall due to illness/health concerns, family emergency, etc., this ordinance makes appearing virtually seem to be the default rather than the exception.

We probably don't have to tell you all this, but three of you were elected and seated during the pandemic and have never been in Council Chambers for a regular City Council meeting.

The ability of the _public_ to dial in remotely should definitely be retained, since holding Council meetings during weekday working hours has always been a problem.

That said, these past 15 months of Zoom public meetings with our elected officials has taken away a lot from our democracy. When one person is testifying on Zoom, none of the rest of us can express approval as we were able to do in Council Chambers (albeit usually with thumbs up/down gestures rather than clapping). Council can no longer see when a majority of the audience is all wearing the same color, same T-shirt, same buttons/stickers, or, on occasion, standing up and turning our backs when a particularly bad decision is being made.

Having a remote viewing area for the community to watch City Council meet virtually, which is provided for in the ordinance, is not a suitable solution. Will it be possible for Council to see the reactions in that room? Will people observing the Council be allowed to sign up/ come up to the microphone to testify if they didn't register online by 4 PM on a Tuesday? These pre-COVID elements of in person Council meetings need to be considered and reinstated.

We urge Council to modify the language so that whenever City Hall is open to elected officials, Commissioners need to meet in person unless there are extenuating circumstances. If City Hall is also open to the public, the public should be allowed in Chambers. Safety protocols, extra security and a barricade in front of the Council's dais were all put in place well before the shut down. If additional measures are needed for COVID safety such as distancing and masking, Council can add those to the protocols.

We have raised the concern previously that ejecting a person from a meeting is now as easy as pushing button and excluding them from being able to log back in. Somewhere, Joe Walsh is wagging his finger at you all and pointing out how the misuse and overuse of virtual meetings is

leading to the death of our democracy.

It's reasonable to extend the current exceptions until all COVID restrictions are lifted, but given that is likely to happen well before July 1, 2022-- and indeed, all Oregon-created restrictions are supposed to be lifted on June 30, this ordinance should be written more clearly as "break glass in case of emergency"-oriented rather than "let's keep meeting without having to see the public" as it is now constructed.

It's one thing to think about defaulting to remote attendance in Salem for legislators who have to travel hours and hours to get there, but local City Council members should be able to show up once or twice a week to engage with the public they represent.

Meeting by Zoom has transformed public input into something that just does not feel real or human anymore.

Thank you
Dan Handelman, Trudy Cooper and other members of
portland copwatch

*518 Amend Council Organization and Procedure Code to clarify attendance by electronic communication and meeting location (Ordinance; amend Code Sections 3.02.010 and 3.02.060.C.2 and add Section 3.02.026)
15 minutes requested

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/auditor/article/784669>

City Council Meeting - Wednesday, June 30, 2021 9:30 a.m.

Agenda No.	First Name	Last Name	Zip
518.1	Dan	Handelman Portland Copwatch	97242