



DATE: February 9, 2021

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Councilmember Colin Parent and Councilmember Bill Baber

SUBJECT: Expanding Public Participation Before and After the Public Health Emergency

During the current public health emergency, local governments like La Mesa are using technology to preserve opportunities for public participation.

These innovations create the added benefit of making access to participation more equal for people who cannot physically attend a hearing. Now if someone is homebound as a caregiver, or who has another barrier to attending a full hearing, they can still have their voice equally heard in our public decision-making.

Even before the pandemic, La Mesa worked to expand the ways that the public can engage with meetings. For example, we recently began streaming our meetings on our website, and we simultaneously broadcast those meetings on social media feeds.

During this emergency, La Mesa allows comments to agenda items via email, and for live testimony through one City-run remote camera. However, we have allowed at-home live testimony for commission appointment interviews, and at a town hall.

We can continue our efforts toward expanded and more-equal access by looking to best practices from peer jurisdictions, and to take the lessons from this pandemic into the future. Toward those ends, I am requesting my colleagues to take the following actions:

Step 1: Direct staff to allow at-home remote audio testimony for any agenda item at our remote Council meetings via Zoom or another tool.

Step 2: Form a Council subcommittee to recommend a public participation policy for after the emergency, to consider at least the following issues:

1. Preserving remote audio testimony during in-person Council meetings
2. Preserving opportunities for written testimony, to be available online for the Council and public to view before, during, and after a Council meeting
3. Preserving broadcasting, and remote participation, for board and commission meetings