

Dear Committee and Commission Members,

The City of Petaluma has exciting news to share with you. Beginning March 1, 2023, all subordinate body (committee/commission) meetings will be held in-person, in the same manner they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Generally, the Brown Act requires committee/commission members to be present at a single location, and if members were to participate via teleconferencing the Brown Act requires the location that the member teleconferences from to be open to the public. However, in response to COVID-19, Governor Newsom signed Executive Orders that suspended the requirement that the locations of teleconferenced meetings be open to the public. In 2021, Governor Newsom signed Assembly Bill 361 which allowed City Councils in State of Emergencies declared by the Governor to make findings and pass resolutions that allowed teleconferenced meetings without having to make the locations where the members teleconferenced from open to the public.

As California has been in a State of Emergency due to COVID-19, for the past year the Petaluma City Council has been adopting resolutions pursuant to Assembly Bill 361 every thirty days to allow its subordinate bodies to have teleconference meetings. However, on October 17, 2022, Governor Newsom issued a press release that stated he will be ending the COVID-19 State of Emergency on February 28, 2023. Accordingly, City Council will not be able to continue its practice of adopting resolutions pursuant to Assembly Bill 361 to relax the teleconferencing meeting rules and, thus, committee/commission members will need to attend meetings in-person.

Staff also want to inform you about Assembly Bill 2499 (2022) which relaxed the teleconferencing rules by amending Section 54953 of the Brown Act. Under AB 2449 a committee/commission member may teleconference without allowing the public to a member's remote location if:

1. A quorum of the committee/commission participates in a single location; and
2. The teleconferencing committee/commission member has either a "just cause" or "emergency circumstance"
 - "Just cause" means childcare or caregiving of family member; contagious illness; need related to physical or mental disability; or travelling while on official business of the body or another public entity. (A member can only have a "just cause" two times in a calendar year). The member must notify the legislative body at the earliest opportunity possible, including the start of a meeting, with a general description of the "just cause" circumstances that require the member to appear remotely.
 - "Emergency circumstances" means a physical or family medical emergency that prevents the member from attending in person. The body needs to vote and approve the "emergency circumstance" and a general description of the emergency circumstance needs to be included on the agenda description. (A

member can only claim an “emergency circumstances” no more than 20% of the regular meetings).

If a member teleconferences due to either a “just cause” or “emergency circumstance”, the member must verbally announce if a person over the age of 18 is in the room with them and their relationship and that member participates with both audio and visual.

Staff have held regular meetings to discuss logistics to ensure a smooth transition. For those committees/commissions that met in the Council Chamber prior to our virtual meetings, you will see some upgrades that have been underway over the past year to prepare us for our return to in-person meetings. These renovations and improvements in technology and layout will enhance public meetings for both our committee/commission members and the public. It is important to note, the technology configuration that is allowing the City Council meetings to operate in a hybrid format, with live public participation via Zoom, is in a pilot phase and not yet available for committees/commissions to use. The public will be able to watch the live stream of meetings occurring in the Council Chamber but will need to submit public comments in writing prior to the meeting or attend in-person to provide oral comments.

As you may have been appointed during COVID-19 and have never participated in a meeting in the Council Chamber and with the updated technology, staff recommend that committee/commission members meet thirty minutes before their first in-person meeting to go over the new technology and troubleshoot any problems.

The following committees/commissions do not meet in the Council Chamber: General Plan Advisory Committee (virtually via Zoom as this is not a Brown Act body); Senior Advisory Committee (Senior Center); and Youth Commission (Community Center).

Thank you for your service and making Petaluma such a great city. Please reach out to the City Clerk’s Office at cityclerk@cityofpetaluma.org if you have any questions.