

Communication from Public

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Comments for Public Posting: My name is Steven J. Stanton, and I'm a Residential Representative on the Palms Neighborhood Council Board. However, I am speaking on behalf of myself. The ability to meet virtually is how I initially became involved in the Neighborhood Council System. While meetings have always been open to the public, having to be someone in person is a luxury not everyone has. It is commitment of time, and for many, that time may come with a financial penalty. Many of the neediest in our community do not have the wherewithal to spend 2 hours at a meeting away from home, especially with children or jobs that may dictate their time. In the 21st, we need to embrace a decentralized, equitable approach to meetings such as this. Particularly, Neighborhood Councils, which are completely volunteer-run government bodies, do not have the money or means to reach the community as deeply as they could with a decentralized approach such as virtual meetings. The toughest aspect of this are our committee meetings, which can be numerous, requiring a public meeting space to conduct any business. This becomes increasingly difficult to manage as a volunteer legislative body, which requires our elected officials and members to continually commit to donating their time to conduct business on a monthly basis. This can become an impediment to democracy, as those with the greatest time to commit may be those who might be well-off, retired, etc whereas those who may be busy working, taking care of children, etc have far less time to commit to things such as this. The greatest problems occur when we cannot achieve quorum, causing a postponement in discussing our agenda for the month, potentially missing deadlines. We recently had this issue occur at our Neighborhood Council when faced with a limited timeframe to comment on the City's changes to their Code of Conduct policy. In order to stay in compliance with the Brown Act, we had to attempt to create a special meeting and post that information publicly with our agenda. However, with such a narrow window to act (less than 2 weeks), we were unable to achieve quorum in that limited timeframe, and thus, the voices of our constituents would not be heard. At the committee level, there have been many instances where quorum issues have led to cancellations in years past. We have members who are sole care providers for children, and do not have the wherewithal to hire childcare to donate their

time to NC at a public meeting place. For many, it can be as simple as a time commitment. For those unfamiliar with the council system, we may want to check it out or even comment on something, but are concerned about committing to a time to go for a whole amalgam of reasons. Virtual Meetings are low-commitment ways for people to participate without having to necessarily inconvenience themselves to do so. It was an easy way for me to start exploring my local NC during the pandemic while handling other commitments from home. I eventually started exploring committees (without joining officially) but still offering my voice on topics that were relevant or important to me. This led to me eventually running – and winning a seat – on my NC board. However, while I am able to donate my time in-person for the time being, future commitments may seriously inhibit my ability to do so. With the impending birth of my child this winter, my time may become seriously constrained, making it very difficult to continue donating my time at a physical location multiple times a month while balancing childcare needs. Virtual Meetings help eliminate these issues by decentralization. People can participate in meetings while on the bus home from work, on their break from a job, at home while watching the kids, or remotely while traveling. Democracy doesn't stop because residents/stakeholders can't make it to a physical meeting place consistently. Democracy isn't interrupted because people without the means or luxury of time in their schedules can't donate hours to keep a vital form of government running. Virtual Meetings offer everyone an equal playing field to join where they are and not upend their weekly schedules to help keep local government going. Since NC's operate purely on donated time, it seems fair that an NC's members can at least choose where they are when they donating that time, and how. We all want to keep local government going, and virtual meetings is another valuable tool in our limited tool box to help communicate to our constituency en masse, and allow the greatest number of people to participate. We need things like this to make it easier to participate in democracy, not harder; without virtual meetings, democracy is harder to do.