



CITY OF RAPID CITY

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To: Legal & Finance Committee
From: Kevin Thom, Community Resources Director
Re: Tele/Video Conferencing for City Council Meetings

The question was asked regarding the capabilities of the current audio/video equipment in the Council Chambers and the Information Technology Department (IT) has explored the tele/video conferencing capabilities for City Council meetings

I will first address the teleconference capabilities of the current system. The system is set up for teleconferencing as this feature is built in and can accommodate multiple callers. Therefore there is no additional cost for equipment and this can be easily achieved. There may be a cost for long distance charges assuming a Council Member is outside of the local calling area when participating in the call.

With regards to video conferencing that is a more complicated request. The current system does not have a built in feature to accommodate outside video conferencing. The other option we explored in attempt to achieve video conferencing was the use of Skype. We did experiment with Skype by setting a laptop up on the top ledge of the dais, in front of the seat of the Council Member. We did purchase two web cameras (\$40 each) to test the system and they are available for use if this is implemented. The Council Member absent from the meeting could see the podium and a large part of the audience, and the audio quality was okay, but not great. The Council Member would be displayed on the laptop screen. For audio from the absent Council Member we put the Council microphone in front of the laptop speaker so the audio would be broadcast through the system when the absent Council Member spoke.

With both of the above mentioned systems there are some limitations, such as the remote site not having access to the request to speak buttons and the need to have a roll call vote for each item. The roll call vote is required to accommodate state law. In addition, Skype limits the number of video participants to 3 people. There may be other web video meeting services available that would accommodate more than 3 people, but we have not yet explored all the options.

In researching the technical aspects of this issue we also encountered some policy questions that would need to be considered. The reason I mention the policy considerations is because the policies set forth by the Council can impact the IT functions and staffing requirements for Council meetings. The review of the policy considerations was very brief and only intended to initially identify items for discussion. I have not checked, but perhaps the National League of Cities may have some model policy and/or research on this issue. I have enclosed several policy items as "food for thought". There may be other policy considerations, but here are a few we found:

- Long Beach California article regarding Skype meeting. Article makes reference to California's Brown Act (open meetings) which allows for remote participation, but requires remote sites complies with open meeting requirements, including public notices, public access and the like. Consider South Dakota law implications, if any.
- Homer Alaska requires the Mayor or Council member who will be absent for a regularly scheduled Council meeting to notify the "City Clerk" at least 5 days prior to the meeting. The teleconference participation is limited to 3 meetings per member in a 12 month period, commencing on November 1st of each year.
- In the event of a pandemic crisis it may be advantages for the Council to have the ability to meet via teleconferencing rather than meeting in person.
- If there is a cost for the tele/video conferencing, who pays for the cost?
- Port Townsend Washington City Council has developed rules specify when teleconferencing may be allowed and they are included with this memo

Please let me know if you have questions or requests for additional information.