

# VIRTUAL MEETINGS: THE FOX POINT EXPERIENCE

By Douglas H. Frazer



The pandemic forced us all to acquaint ourselves with various virtual meeting platforms.

Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention, or in this case, the catalyst for discovering invention. We quickly adapted.

But what rules and procedures would adhere to this technology?

No state law addresses the issue. Previously, the Wisconsin attorney general had suggested that the open meetings law did not prohibit government body members from participating in a meeting by phone or by video conferencing provided that meetings were reasonably accessible to the public. At a minimum, this means that members of the public attending the meeting in person or remotely must be able to hear the government body member attending by phone and see members participating by video conferencing.

Would a remote attendee count for purposes of establishing a quorum? Again, state law is silent on the question.

Along with other governing bodies across Wisconsin, we took the matter into our own hands. In my capacity as village president on



May 21, 2020, I issued Emergency Proclamation Number 3 that authorized regular and special meetings of village governing bodies to be held remotely either through remote attendance or through an entirely virtual meeting at which no member of the governing body would be present at Village Hall.

The system worked well. We had occasional technical difficulties, but the meetings proceeded in good order. The village used a portion of its federal pandemic money to enhance audio and visual capabilities at Village Hall. By June 2021, we were equipped to host

hybrid meetings where governing body members and members of the public could participate either in person or virtually. We used Zoom as our platform.

On September 14, 2021, the village board spoke as a body and adopted an ordinance creating Sections 19-32D and 19-32E that, superseding the emergency proclamation, authorizes our boards, commissions, and committees to conduct meetings either in hybrid or virtual form.

The ordinance recitals make note of these considerations.

By providing for a hybrid model of attendance both in person and in a remote manner, the board believes it will maximize participation among the village staff and officials as well as the interested public.

The board believes a benefit exists for members to attend in person and encourages members to attend meetings in person whenever possible.

Virtual meetings have drawbacks. The village board experienced one such issue on August 10, 2021, when 30 minutes into our meeting a severe weather event blew through and much of the village, including village hall, lost power. (We quickly adjourned.) Our experience suggests, though, that at least for now maintaining hybrid meetings is in the best interest of the community.

*Douglas H. Frazer is a Fox Point resident and neighborhood contributor as well as the village president. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the village board, other village board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.*

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