



General Public Comment

Name of Sender	Distributed prior to hearing	Distributed after the hearing
1. Anna Marie Gott		x

PLEASE BE ADVISED

The following public comment was not received in time to process. Distribution to the Historic Landmarks Commission occurred after the meeting.

From: [Anna Marie Gott](#)
To: [Community Development HLCsecretary](#)
Subject: Public Comment: Reinstate Virtual Meetings for Advisory Boards
Date: Wednesday, April 13, 2022 1:10:37 PM

EXTERNAL

Commissioner's,

Please review the email below which I forwarded to the City Council on virtual meetings for Advisory Boards.

I urge you to agendize a discussion on reinstating virtual meetings for the Historic Landmarks Commission so that members of the public can make a public comment during the meeting.

Thank you,
A

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Anna Marie Gott** <anna.marie.gott@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Apr 11, 2022, 3:01 PM
Subject: RE: Reinstate Virtual Meetings for Advisory Boards
To: City Clerk <Clerk@santabarbaraca.gov>, <sbcitycouncil@santabarbaraca.gov>, Rowse, Randy <rrowse@santabarbaraca.gov>, Kristen Sneddon <ksneddon@santabarbaraca.gov>, Eric Friedman <efriedman@santabarbaraca.gov>, Oscar Gutierrez <ogutierrez@santabarbaraca.gov>, Alejandra Gutierrez <algutierrez@santabarbaraca.gov>, Mike Jordan <mjordan@santabarbaraca.gov>, Meagan Harmon <mharmon@santabarbaraca.gov>, Rebecca Bjork <RBjork@santabarbaraca.gov>
Cc: Ariel Calonne <acalonne@santabarbaraca.gov>

Mayor and Council Members,

I wrote an [op-ed for Edhat](#) on the need to reinstate virtual meetings for Advisory Boards, which I have included below. I would like you to read the op-ed and consider agendizing the reinstatement of virtual meetings for Advisory Boards.

As I state in the op-ed:

Ensuring that the public has the ability to attend public meetings virtually in order to participate in our local government is simply the right thing to do. The pandemic has shown us that allowing the public to attend and participate remotely is easily accomplished, is more democratic, provides more transparency to the public on governmental actions, allows those who would not otherwise be able to attend a public meeting to participate from home, work or wherever they may be, and increases public participation. - Additionally, virtual public meetings are broadly popular and help to reduce built in inequities.

Further, I would like you to know that I have requested ADA accommodations to participate in and attend meetings under the American with Disabilities Act. To date the City has denied my requests or ignored them. I have been told to send an email to make a public comment in

advance of a meeting without a staff report or staff presentation to view. How could anyone be expected to write an intelligent public comment on an issue when no materials are provided before the written public comment is due? The answer is they can't. How is that the City has decided that it won't make any reasonable accommodations as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act?

I urge you to agendize the reinstatement of virtual meetings as soon as possible.- It is simply unacceptable to have the City move to in-person meetings and you have the power to change this.

Thank you,
A

Santa Barbara City Council: Reinstate Virtual Meetings

By Anna Marie Gott

Every 30 days the Santa Barbara City Council has consistently voted to continue teleconferencing of City meetings during the ongoing COVID-19 state of emergency. The last vote was held on March 8, 2022 and the Resolution stated that "the City Council would reconsider the Resolution and any extension or renewal every thirty days." However, Rebeca Bjork, the new City Administrator, **made a unilateral decision to eliminate virtual meetings** for the City's Advisory Boards on March 31, 2022. - Most, if not all, of the City Council was unaware of this change and there has not been a public discussion on preserving or eliminating virtual meetings at the City Council.

As a result of Ms. Bjork's sweeping decision anyone who wanted to watch or participate in an Advisory Board meeting, beginning April 1, 2022, has to now do so in-person. This includes those of us in the community who cannot attend in-person meetings which is counter to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Eliminating virtual meetings, which are not only broadly popular with the public but allows the public to weigh in on policies and decisions that impact their lives, **is a tremendous loss for residents**. It is also a **blow to democracy** itself because fewer people will participate when they are required to meet in-person either due to the fear of the coronavirus or the inability to attend an in-person meeting due to work, caregiver obligations, or a disability. Furthermore, at a time when the City is intentionally trying to increase public participation due to equity concerns it seems poor form to eliminate virtual meetings.

For two years members of the public with computers or smartphones have been able to easily login from home, work, or on the go, to participate in, and attend, Advisory Board meetings. While others have been able to do so by phone.

However, **now that Ms. Bjork has eliminated virtual meetings for Advisory Boards all of the gains which include everything from increased public participation, accessibility and transparency, to recordings of public meetings that had never been available before have been lost.**

What are the far-reaching consequences of this unilateral action? It means that a select few who have the ability to attend a meeting, often during the middle of the day, can continue to participate in our local government while those of us who will not be able to participate in in-person meetings will no longer be able to participate. The end result is that the City Council will enact laws and regulations that may not be broadly supported by residents.

Holding in-person public meetings during the day when most residents are working inherently prioritizes the interests of a minority of the population who have the freedom to lobby for what they want. Those who have attended in-person meetings in the past are generally retirees, paid “lobbyists”, or those who will financially benefit from a change such as business and property owners as well as architects and developers. The population who generally cannot attend in-person meetings are generally, renters, workers, full-time parents or caregivers, those with disabilities, and students. – Don’t you think that going back to in-person meetings seems to favor the have’s over the have nots and is perpetuating well-known built-in inequities?

Finally, when Ms. Bjork was asked the reason for eliminating virtual meetings, she said it was due to the additional staff required to manage remote public comment. - She did not claim lack of equipment or trained staff.

Hosting a hybrid meeting where an Advisory Board meets in-person while some members of the public participate virtually through Zoom or by phone does not require a second person or a large amount of effort to run the meeting. Anyone who knows anything about hosting virtual meetings knows that one person can manage public comment while facilitating the meeting and taking notes. So, the reason Ms. Bjork states does not ring true.

There is simply no good reason to eliminate virtual meetings for our Advisory Boards and every reason to continue them.

If you feel as I do and would like to see the City of Santa Barbara begin holding hybrid meetings for their Advisory Boards, please sign this [Change.org/VirtualMeetings](https://change.org/petitions/Reinstate-Virtual-Meetings-for-Advisory-Boards) petition and/or send a short email to the City Council asking them to reinstate virtual meetings immediately.

Thank you,
Anna Marie Gott

Here is a sample email to send to the City Council and Administrator (SBCityCouncil@SantaBarbaraCA.Gov, Clerk@SantaBarbaraCA.Gov, RBjork@SantaBarbaraCA.Gov)

Subject: Reinstate Virtual Meetings for Advisory Boards

Mayor and City Council,

I would like the City Council to agendize and vote to reinstate virtual meetings for Advisory Boards.

Ensuring that the public has the ability to attend public meetings virtually in order to participate in our local government is simply the right thing to do. The pandemic has shown us that allowing the public to attend and participate remotely is easily accomplished, is more democratic, provides more transparency to the public on governmental actions, allows those who would not otherwise be able to attend a public meeting to participate from home, work or wherever they may be, and increases public participation. - Additionally, virtual public meetings are broadly popular and help to reduce built in inequities.

For these reasons, I want the City of Santa Barbara to continue to offer virtual meetings for every Advisory Board.