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ALERT

DANE COUNTY | BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

## **Dane County meetings to remain digital for several months, likely until summer, chair says**

Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal  
Dec 16, 2021



The Madison City Council and Dane County Board chambers at the downtown City-County Building are empty as meetings are streamed online. Staff are still working on adding technology upgrades to the room so hybrid meetings — with some people attending in person and others online — can be held in the future.

RUTHIE HAUGE, CAPITAL TIMES ARCHIVES

Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal

**A** return to in-person Dane County Board meetings is unlikely to happen until late spring or early summer because of delays with technology upgrades, the need to train staff for hybrid meetings and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, County Board Chair Analiese Eicher said Wednesday.

County offices also still aren't open, and administrative staff plan to keep them closed through June 13 because of COVID-19. Unless that changes, meetings will remain online until then too, Eicher said in an interview.

"I would say the hybrid meetings wouldn't fully start until after the building reopens," she said.

Since County Board and Madison City Council meetings happen in the same room, the ongoing building closure and technology delays also prevents in-person city meetings from happening. The **council had already voted last week to keep the online meeting format** as the default for every meeting through the end of May.

Even if buildings were to open up today, the county wouldn't be ready to offer hybrid meetings, an option where board members and residents can choose to participate in meetings either in person or online. Eicher said the County Board should wait until the hybrid processes are up and running before returning to in-person meetings.

“I know there is some interest in resuming in-person meetings, however, I believe we will be more successful with hybrid meetings if people feel safe attending meetings, have technology accessible for those who do not and the processes in place to make them run smoothly,” Eicher told board members in an email Wednesday morning.



### **Delta variant pushes Dane County Board to postpone return to in-person meetings**

Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal

Eicher said the county had expected to have the equipment for hybrid meetings — which includes video conferencing technology — in place this month, but the supply chain and other issues have caused delays.

Now, staff expect to finish off the upgrades to the County Board chambers in the next three to four weeks, Eicher said. After that, staff need to be trained on how to run meetings in a hybrid format, something the county hasn't done before. Training on how to use the new equipment is planned for May and June.

“It's not just a matter of turning on the equipment,” Eicher said. “There are any number of other pieces that go along with that.”



### **Dane County Board might consider proposal seeking to end mask mandate**

Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal

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Another piece is that the county set aside funding in 2022 for new limited-term information technology employees to help support the hybrid meetings, Eicher said. The county is drafting position descriptions for those roles, and will hire them in the new year.

The County Board will vote Thursday on an ordinance amendment that will allow the board and committees to legally hold hybrid meetings in the future. Eicher said that will allow county staff to start working on the “next steps” for returning to in-person meetings.

Eicher said she knows some board members are frustrated that the county isn’t returning to in-person meetings immediately, without the hybrid option.

“Some folks are gonna be upset,” Eicher said, noting that that is “a small minority” of the board. “Some folks want to be back fully in person right now.”



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### **Dane County Board members to hold public meeting on mask mandate**

Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal

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## **Some pushback**

Sup. Tim Rockwell, 19th District, said he’s in favor of returning to face-to-face meetings “as soon as possible.” As a relatively new County Board member, Rockwell said he still hasn’t met some of his colleagues in person.

“A personal relationship, a firm handshake and a look in the eye cannot be replaced with virtual interaction,” he said.

Sup. Dave Ripp, 29th District, said it’s “very frustrating” that meetings are still online, especially for rural residents. He’s lost his connection to board meetings because his internet connection wasn’t strong enough. But he said “we can’t return to in-person meetings” because “we don’t really have a place to meet.”

Rockwell said in-person meetings are better for public access and he believes community participation would rise if the county found a way to resume meetings in the City-County Building. But Eicher said having online meetings has actually caused resident participation to increase.



### **A vocal few: New members bring conservative views to blue Dane County Board**

Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal

In terms of having publicly accessible meetings, Eicher said it's important for residents and board members who may be immunocompromised to continue to have an online option to participate so they can stay safe from COVID-19 as cases increase.

## **City debate**

A similar debate recently played out on the city level. Council President Syed Abbas proposed a return to in-person meetings in February, but the measure failed at the council's Dec. 7 meeting.

Ald. Grant Foster, 15th District, put forward a different proposal to keep the online meeting format as the default for every meeting through the end of May. It passed on a 13-6 vote. He noted the council can change its mind and conduct an in-person meeting with at least a two-week notice.

Those in support of staying online cited the emerging omicron variant of the coronavirus, which **scientists say is more contagious and reduces the effectiveness of the vaccines**. But Abbas said gathering in person helps build a culture among the 20 council members and makes it easier to collaborate. Both sides said they wanted a remote option for public comment to continue.

Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway was one of the most vocal supporters of reintroducing in-person meetings. She said the past year and a half of an online format, which was necessary at the start of the pandemic but has outlived its usefulness, has been

“incredibly detrimental to our functioning as a body.”

“This virus is not going anywhere, and the sad fact is that every single one of us has to figure out how to live with this virus for the rest of our lives,” Rhodes-Conway said. “It’s time to start figuring out what that means and how we function not on a short-term emergency basis but on a long-term, living-with-the-virus basis, and I think that it is detrimental enough to the function of this body — and frankly to the city — that we have to find a way to start meeting in person.”

*State Journal reporter Logan Wroge contributed to this report.*

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Art of the everyday: See the world through the eyes of the Wisconsin State Journal's photographers



Alissa Krueger and daughter Nora, 2, create chalk drawings on the sidewalk in front of their Madison house Friday. The artwork might be short-lived, with a chance of showers or thunderstorms through the weekend and into Monday before sunshine returns on Tuesday.

KAYLA WOLF, STATE JOURNAL

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Cycling friends David Ghilardi, left, Keith Kosbau, center, and Mike Hart take in the changing autumn scenery during an afternoon ride Monday through the UW Arboretum in Madison. This week will feel a little more like autumn than the summery temperatures in the 80s seen last week, with highs in the low 70s predicted for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL

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Gabrielle Javier-Cerulli, a community artist with the Madison Public Library's The Bubbler project and Dane Arts Mural Arts, adds tiles to a mosaic project outside the Dane County Juvenile Shelter Home on the East Side. Using tiles hand-colored by students at the home, the project is a collaboration among the artist, students and staff, and features a "waves" theme designed by the students to illustrate the ripple effect people can have on each other.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL

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Walter Weber makes liberal use of Schuster's Farm's dried corn kernel pit, one of several attractions at the farm that's a longtime Halloween season destination for Dane County families.

KAYLA WOLF, STATE JOURNAL

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Kylie Steiner helps her son Atlas navigate the Schuster's Farm pumpkin patch in Deerfield on Wednesday.

KAYLA WOLF, STATE JOURNAL

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A group of students on a Thursday field trip from DeForest High School watch as local actress Victoria Mecozi, holding a Blue Star Service Banner, portrays Jessie Smith during the Wisconsin Veterans Museum's Talking Spirits Cemetery Tours: Wisconsin Women at War at Forest Hill Cemetery. Smith, who died in 1953 at age 72, lost her son, Lt. Robert Standish Smith, in February 1944 when his air ambulance crashed into a hillside while he was transporting wounded soldiers from Italy to North Africa in World War II. Four crew members, three nurses and 18 wounded men died in the crash. Standish Smith was buried in Sicily, but his remains were returned home two years after the war and reburied at Forest Hill Cemetery. The sold-out tours continue Saturday and Sunday, and an online tour will be available in the coming weeks.

AMBER ARNOLD, STATE JOURNAL

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Graduate and post-doctoral students in the Department of Horticulture lab of UW-Madison professor Irwin Goldman carry one of a dozen large pumpkins grown by the students to a trailer in Merton on Thursday. Each weighing more than 100 pounds, the gourds will be used in Saturday's Giant Pumpkin Regatta on Lake Mendota. The event, co-hosted by the department and the Hoofers Sailing Club, features students racing each other in the hollowed-out shells of the pumpkins. Assisting in the effort are Shakirah Nakasagga, a post-doctoral student; Chandler Meyer, a graduate student; and Emilee Gaulke, a graduate student whose family owns the farm. The pumpkins were started from seed in a UW greenhouse in March and transferred to the field in May.

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UW-Madison math student Josiah Locke studies outdoors during a Tuesday afternoon visit to Bascom Hill, the same day that the University of Wisconsin System celebrated its 50th anniversary. On Oct. 12, 1971, legislation signed by Gov. Patrick Lucey took effect, merging Wisconsin's two systems of public four-year higher education under a single Board of Regents.

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Workers from Badger Swimpools add plaster to the surface of Goodman Pool as an off-season restoration of the facility continued Tuesday in Madison.

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Runners — from left, Adele Zolik, Lily Stumm and Alma Lusson — do laps around Yahara Place Park during a Girls on the Run practice Wednesday. The group meets twice a week and is open to girls in third through fifth grade.

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Enjoying mild autumn temperatures and sunny skies, members of the Wisconsin Sailing Team prepare their crafts for a practice session Thursday prior to heading out onto Lake Mendota. Half of the club's 60 members will be competing in various university-level regattas throughout the country this weekend.

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Horticulturist Larry Holterman installs lights in a tree Monday at the entrance of the Rotary Botanical Gardens in Janesville in preparation for the Gardens' holiday light show beginning the day after Thanksgiving and featuring more than 1 million lights. Holterman said he starts putting lights up in mid-August and was expecting to spend about five hours installing lights in the tree he was decorating Monday. He'll again have good weather for tree-climbing today, with sunny skies and a high in the low 70s.

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Adapting a hula skirt acquired for this year's Halloween activities for her own preferences, Kansas Polkinghorn, 5, of Madison, explores the grounds of Harvey E. Schmidt Park with a pair of sandhill cranes during a Monday visit with family.

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Second-grader Clive Hebl throws a paper airplane on his walk home from school with his mom, Melanie Hebl, not pictured, Wednesday as warm fall temperatures linger before frost moves in early Friday and Saturday.

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Jennifer Mallon guides eight dogs along a walkway adjacent to Warner Park during a Wednesday outing with the pets of clients of the Ruff Trails canine hiking and training enterprise. Along for the outing are, from left, Baxter, Rishi, Tonks (background), Toby, Greta, Bo, Coconut and Penny.

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UW-Madison students enrolled in a foundations art course in 3D design assemble constructions of wood and metal outside the Humanities Building on Wednesday. The freeform creations allowed the students to explore concepts such as line, volume and space.

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Canoers start a trip along Wingra Creek at Olin Park on a rainy Thursday afternoon. Friday and Saturday will be better days for paddling as sunshine returns before rain moves in Sunday for what looks to be a wet week.

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The changing colors of a maple tree at the UW Arboretum frame Nola Dupuis, left, and Carol Kiemel as they share a walk Friday. A frosty fall morning will give way to sunshine Saturday with high temperatures reaching back into the 50s through the weekend and into next week and a chance of showers returning Sunday.

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Brittany Plass, of Madison, practices her roller-skating skills Monday at Winnequah Skate Park in Monona. Plass recently reacquainted herself with the throwback mode of transport and should have good weather today to sharpen her skills even further. It will be in the mid-50s with mostly sunny skies.

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Stephen Balsley, of Madison, goes for one of his regular 1-mile swims in Lake Wingra on Tuesday. Balsley said he will continue to swim in the lake until it freezes over.

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Mei Li Brown of the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association prepares a plastic pink flamingo for placement on Bascom Hill while assisting with the foundation's Fill the Hill fundraising event on the UW-Madison campus Friday. Representing donations to WFAA's Always Forward campaign, the annual tradition borrows from a fall 1979 first-day-of-school prank in which the student government planted about 1,000 flamingos on Bascom Hill.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL



Eicher

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Rockwell

TIMOTHY ROCKWELL

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Capital Times archives

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### **Emily Hamer | Wisconsin State Journal**

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