



CITY OF MADISON
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL
CORRESPONDENCE

 DATE: February 1, 2019 

TO: Task Force on the Structure of City Government (“TFOGS”)

FROM: Sarah Edgerton, IT Director
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SUBJECT: **Information Technology Presentation to TFOGS Subcommittee on** existing and future capabilities to hold meetings or take public testimony from remote locations

Background

One of the most significant deterrents to public participation in local government, identified by TFOGS, is attending meetings downtown. Therefore, TFOGS would like to pursue the idea of offering remote locations for meetings.

The TFOGS Task Force asked Information Technology (IT) staff to prepare a memo to discuss what it would take to hold meetings or take public testimony from remote locations. They also asked IT to discuss what capabilities the City currently has to do these things now, and what it would take in terms of investment, such as, the costs of such a system, staffing, and/or what alternatives might exist to provide these services to our residents.

The Current State and Future State: Madison City Channel Coverage by the Media Team

The Media Team currently covers regular meetings of eight bodies for an average of just under 12 meetings a month. In addition to 137 such meetings covered in 2018, we covered 55 special meetings, including presentations before the Common Council, Department/Division Head Meetings, and meetings of bodies such as the Oscar Mayer Advisory Committee, Police Policy Review Committee, Work Group on Surveillance Policies, and Task Force on Government Structure. We also covered 56 non-meeting events including press conferences, award ceremonies, and panel discussions. Additionally, there were 77 studio productions, 85 field productions for video projects, and 56 Monona Terrace productions.

Regular meetings are always covered. Requests for coverage of special meetings, along with presentations, award ceremonies, press conferences, and other events are subject to our event coverage selection criteria. These include prioritization by type of event (standing committee, ad hoc committee, press conference, etc.), who the requester is, who will appear at the event, if the City of Madison or a City agency is a sponsor of the event, where the event is held, and if staff and equipment are available. We also apply the fast-track equity tool to take into consideration the effect of coverage on traditionally underserved or underrepresented communities. Of the 139 event coverage requests received in 2018, 28 were denied. Only 9 of those 28 denials were for meetings.

Most meeting productions happen in rooms with remotely operated PTZ (pan, tilt, zoom) cameras and networked audio systems. Currently, these rooms are all in the City County Building and the Madison Municipal Building. These are operated in one of two control rooms in our suite in the CCB. Meeting rooms with these cameras include MMB 153, MMB 206, MMB 215, CCB 201, and CCB 354. We will be adding rooms in the new Pinney library and in Public Health Madison and Dane County's remodeled suite on the fifth floor of the CCB in the coming months. We encourage installing this equipment in any new spaces in public works projects that might host public meetings or other events that would be recorded or streamed. When budgets don't allow such installations, we rough-in conduit and cabling so equipment can be added more easily in the future. Examples include four additional rooms in the MMB, and community rooms in Fire Station 14, Fleet Services, and the new addition to Olbrich Gardens. It costs about \$30000-\$60000 to add PTZ cameras and a networked audio system to a room. Coverage of meetings or events in these rooms requires a crew of two people and a total of 45 to 90 minutes of setup and teardown time. These events can always be presented live over cable networks and via streaming.

Meeting coverage in rooms that don't have these systems requires a crew of four people and the use of our remote multi-camera production system. In facilities other than the CCB, MMB, or Monona Terrace, transport via van is required. Setup requires at least two hours and teardown requires at least 90 minutes. Live presentation over cable TV networks is not possible and live streaming is only possible in rooms with access to the City data network. Videoconferencing could not be incorporated into coverage of meetings in these rooms.

Even as we add more rooms with PTZ cameras and networked audio systems, we're still limited by the fact that we have only two control rooms, so we can only cover two simultaneous meetings from such facilities. We're adding an option for Producers to cover simple productions like press conferences or basic presentations from their personal workstations. That won't be appropriate for something as complex as meeting coverage, but it can reduce potential conflicts by freeing up a control room. We don't currently have space to add more control rooms, and if space were made available, construction and equipment costs would be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Future State: Testimony Via Video Recording

Allowing public testimony via video recording could mean one of two things: It could mean submitting some kind of pre-recorded video file to a body or it could mean using some kind of videoconferencing technology to present live testimony to a body from a remote location.

If it's the former, the video recording could either be accepted by the body as a communication or correspondence or it could be treated as testimony. In either case, there would have to be rules about what formats are acceptable and submissions would have to be received with ample time allowed to be reviewed by staff and transcoded into a format that would be accessible to members of the body. This would likely mean publishing them as streaming files that could be accessed via a link. If it's treated as correspondence, a link could be provided along with other letters, email messages, etc. received by the body. Presumably, open records laws would apply in the same way for any of these formats. If it's treated as testimony, the meeting would have to be held in a room with video playback equipment that would allow it to be seen and heard by members of the body and any staff or members of the public in attendance. If the meeting was covered for Madison City Channel, it would need to be in a room in which that content can be captured so that it can be seen and heard by the television and/or streaming audience. People who testify in person have to fill out a form to verify their identification and address and identify affiliations or lobbying activity. There would have to be an online process to gather that information and match it to submitted video testimony. Video correspondence or testimony has the same drawback as written correspondence in that it affords no opportunity for members of the body to ask questions. It's also potentially problematic in that not everybody has access to technology to record testimony, and there could be a large range in quality among submissions based on the kind of technology and expertise accessible to various users.

If it's the latter, videoconferencing methods identified for use by members of the body could also be employed by the public. In either case, equipment would need to be available in the room to ensure that members of the body could see and hear the person on the far end of the conference, and that the person on the far end of the conference could see and hear all members of the body and any presentation materials that are visible and audible in the room. Madison City Channel coverage would require the person on the far end of the conference to be seen and heard by the television and/or streaming audience, as well. There are currently no rooms that allow this functionality. One of the rooms in the remodeled Madison Municipal Building was designed for integrated videoconferencing and Madison City Channel coverage, but the videoconferencing features have not been added yet.

