

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

**MEMO: PROPOSED TECHNOLOGY POLICY**

**To:** Malden City Council

**From:** Councillor Amanda Linehan, Chair, Committee on Technology Policy

**Re:** Technology Policy Committee Report

The Committee on Technology Policy, formed in January of 2022, convened with the stated goal of devising a policy around virtual access to Malden City Council meetings for the public and Councillors.

The committee met five times this year, with a purpose outlined by our Council President as follows: “to develop clear policy on the use of technology as it relates to City Council and City Council committee meetings, including but not limited to policy that deals with remote participation (committee members and public), remote viewing (live and on-demand), and MATV/UMA broadcast of live and previously-recorded meetings.”

We began our first meeting in March of 2022 by taking inventory of our existing processes and City Hall equipment and identifying those department heads we needed to interview before crafting guidelines.

We requested and subsequently conducted meetings of our committee with **Assistant City Solicitor Alicia McNeil, Chief Strategy Officer Ron Hogan, Director of Operations at UMA (Urban Media Arts) Terlonzo Amos, City of Malden Information Technology (IT) Director Anthony Rodrigues, and City of Malden Communications Director Ron Cochran.** Assistant Solicitor McNeil provided us with a legal memo outlining the state’s current regulations around virtual meetings, which allow municipalities to opt into virtual access for the public and their members under the purview of the Mayor/Manager, so long as a quorum of members and the Chair/President is physically present in the meeting. These regulations, initially adopted under COVID-19 emergency orders, have subsequently been extended into 2023 by the Legislature, and as such we are within our rights to set a local policy.

It is the recommendation of our committee, upon the advice of the department heads and experts listed above, that the Malden City Council should adopt technology guidelines as follows:

- 1) City Councillors shall have the right to participate virtually in a limited number of regular meetings per year, by submitting a request to the Clerk and Council President before the docket has been finalized each week;
- 2) The Finance and Ordinance Committees shall be required to record and post publicly their meeting videos within the same business week, and the responsibility for creating the link, posting it on each agenda, pressing record in the room, and uploading the file to the cloud for sharing in the agenda center within 48 hours, shall reside with the clerk of each committee;
- 3) Any Council meeting that includes a public hearing must offer a virtual option for public participation, and the discretion over which platform is utilized will sit with the IT Director, with on-site support provided by the Tuesday night City Hall greeter.

It is the recommendation of our IT Director that the Council set our policy first, and then allow the IT Team to implement the most appropriate platform for participation and cloud storage, whether that be Zoom or Teams or another option that emerges in the future. We concur with this approach.

Communications Director Ron Cochran advised our committee that recordings of longer/larger meetings can take up to 12 hours to process fully, so we selected a posting deadline that would reflect that. We are requesting that all Tuesday subcommittee meetings be posted by close of business the same week (5 p.m. Thursday) or by Monday at 5 p.m. for all Thursday meetings.

Mr. Hogan has also advised our committee that the current Tuesday night City Hall greeter has already been cross trained in providing hands-on meeting support and technical assistance with virtual meeting platforms and the physical equipment in City Hall, and an updated job description will be forthcoming. He does not anticipate a budgetary request from the Council at this time.

UMA will continue to record and live-stream all regular Council meetings as they do now. Our technology policies will supplement their practices, not alter them in any way. They are poised and ready to add any future meeting recordings to their broadcast schedule for greater transparency and improved programming for the community.

Looking ahead, we do not anticipate any state-level action affecting our ability to record and stream meetings; if next year the General Court does not decide to extend the right of public bodies to offer virtual participation from the public and meeting members, we will cease providing this option for all public hearings. In the event the State House takes action on this issue in any way in the future, our committee is prepared to re-convene to address the most up-to-date regulations.

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