

Sent via email to Madison Mayor 6-23-2020

The League of Women Voters of Dane County urges you to direct the IT Department to enable observers to see virtual meetings. We believe this can easily be done by modifying the wording on the virtual registration form to allow members of the public to see the video without registering to speak or answer questions on a specific item.

The League appreciates the work the Information Technology Department has done to significantly increase the number of city meetings that it records on City Channel. This has made more meetings accessible to city residents.

The League has noticed the help you personally provide to residents who want to participate, your appreciation for public comments (even from critics), and your accomplished management of a significant amount of technology when you chair meetings.

We also applaud the technical assistance IT staff provide to you, alders, and city staff in running virtual meetings; this has been a major new work effort and IT staff deserve credit for permitting meetings to run relatively smoothly and for allowing residents who want to speak at the meetings to observe and participate.

However, it is time for the city to enable members of the public to **view**, not just **listen to**, meetings, which are not recorded by City Channel. It is our impression that most elected city officials believe the public has full access to video of all city meetings, and the phone access is provided only as an alternate back-up. This, however, is not the case.

For example, as of June 21, here was the information available to the public about the following meetings:

- Public Safety Review Committee Budget Workgroup June 22, 2020
- Public Safety Review Subcommittee June 23, 2020
- Sustainable Madison Committee June 23, 2020
- Water Utility Board June 23, 2020
- Housing Strategy Committee June 24, 2020

If you want to speak at this meeting, you must register. When you register to speak, you will be sent an email with the information you will need to join the virtual meeting.

Listen by Phone Phone number (Toll Free) Webinar ID: #####

(For the June 24 Police and Fire Commission meeting, as of June 21, no information on the agenda, about how to participate, or whether it was a closed or open meeting, was available).

If a member of the public wishes to observe the city meetings in the list above, without speaking, there is no opportunity to actually view the meeting. Participation by phone is very burdensome. If the individual uses a cell phone, it uses many of the plan's minutes. If the individual uses a cordless phone, the lengthy time drains the battery. The listener cannot always tell who is

speaking; chairs do not necessarily use full names when calling on committee members; any visual presentations cannot be seen; and observers cannot tell if the committee members are actively engaged in the topic at hand. The IT Department has explained that only registrants should be permitted to participate via video, in order to limit disruption. That is quite reasonable. ***What is not reasonable is that members of the public cannot register to simply observe the meeting.***

Fortunately, the resolution to this limitation on public involvement is simple. The registration form for the meetings should include an option to register to observe the meeting by video, and should not require registration to speak or be available to answer questions on a specific item in order to observe the video. We presume the IT Department simply converted the prior registration form for meetings to an online format. This form worked well at in-person meetings—observers simply didn't fill out the form unless they wished to register on a specific item. It does not work for virtual meetings. We would be happy to work with staff on appropriate wording.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns about the public's ability to view virtual meetings.

Aileen Nettleton
President