

Agenda Report



MEETING DATE: Tuesday, February 13, 2024

TO: City Council

FROM: CITY MANAGER MENDEZ

**SUBJECT: PROVIDE DIRECTION ON WHETHER TO UTILIZE THE ZOOM
OPTION FOR COUNCIL AND OTHER PUBLIC MEETINGS, AND
CONSIDER ADOPTION OF RULES OF DECORUM**

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Provide direction to staff whether to utilize the Zoom option for Council and other public meetings and consider adoption of Rules of Civility and Decorum for Public Meetings.

BACKGROUND:

This is the follow-up to the Council meeting towards the end of 2023 that saw the City experienced zoom bombing. The zoom bombing resulted in the individuals on Zoom during public comment yelling out racist and anti-Semitic slurs that were unrelated to any Council item and not within the subject matter jurisdiction of the City Council.

As a result, the use of zoom was paused until early 2024 to allow time for a fuller discussion of the Council to consider allowing this use for Council meetings and other public meetings of the City.

DISCUSSION:

Certainly, the appropriate use of zoom provides the opportunity for more public engagement; however, the proliferation of hate speech and other disruptive behavior via zoom has negatively impacted the use of this technology.

This is not an issue unique to Watsonville as the attached survey¹ illustrates, it is an issue plaguing cities throughout the state and as is evident, cities are taking many different approaches. Some have discontinued the use of zoom, paused the use, or have adopted and/or updated rules of decorum for public meetings.

As explained by the City Attorney, the public has a right to comment on items on the agenda, and within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Council, so long as

¹ Survey was conducted by the Calabasas City Clerk's office.

those comments are on topic (if related to a specific item), and not so disruptive that they prevent the Council from conducting business. Rules of decorum would not change the public's right to comment, and would not eliminate hate speech or inappropriate behavior. Instead, Rules of decorum would re-state State law, and establish clear expectations and the means for addressing this issue. As drafted the Rules would apply to all meetings of Boards and Commissions, as well at the Council.

As a result, should Council direct staff to bring back zoom, it is staff's recommendation that the Council consider the attached draft Rules of Decorum and Order at Public Meetings for adoption. In addition, it may also make sense depending on the number of items on the agenda and the number of public speakers, the number of speakers on zoom for public comment, that zoom comments be moved to the end of the meeting.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This is consistent with Strategic Plan Goal: 6 – Community Engagement and Well-being.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact as a result of this item.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION:

Council has the options to direct on whether to utilize zoom or not. In addition, should zoom be brought back into use, then the Council has the option to direct changes to the Rules of Decorum and Order at Public Meeting or simply not adopt any rules, which is not recommended.

ATTACHMENTS AND/OR REFERENCES (If any):

- 1) Zoom Use Survey