

April 21, 2022

Informational Update and Possible Action on Public Participation at Meetings of the Board and Its Committees

Background

Presented below is information on meeting participation statistics that compares the one-year period before the start of the pandemic with each year following. For the purposes of this comparison, the “start” of the pandemic was March 17, 2020, the last on-site MPS work day before the governor’s emergency orders went into effect.

Summary

	One Year Pre- Pandemic	1 st Year Post- Pandemic	2 nd Year Post- Pandemic
Number of Meetings	68	55	70
Attendance in-person	3,245	0	0
Attendance (views) via You-Tube	181	73,955	75,829
Speakers	1312	441	458

Meetings

The meeting count is a count of all meetings of the Board and includes all committee, regular, and special meetings as well as any work sessions and retreats. If meetings were stacked, each meeting was counted.

Attendance/Views

Attendance in live meetings is a count of the individuals present in the auditorium and any overflow rooms, but not those who are on stage. This includes the general public as well as individuals who are present while performing their work-related duties (i.e. safety officers, technology and engineering staff, or administrators waiting to present on an item). The numbers presented represent the most people in the auditorium at a particular meeting.

It should be noted that when meetings were in-person, there were several instances where meetings were “stacked” with two meetings occurring in one evening. The audience count of a particular meeting represent individuals who may have been present and counted for the first meeting and were actually waiting for the second meeting to begin.

Attendance via YouTube is a count of individuals viewing the meeting and is measured by the number of views. It includes people who watched the meeting live as well as those who watched it on-demand after the meeting ended. Use of YouTube prior to the pandemic was only for Regular meetings and certain Special meetings. After the pandemic, we began using YouTube for committee meetings as well.

In either instance, it must be pointed out that individuals are free to come and go from the auditorium, and/or to turn the YouTube platform on and off and to watch the same meeting more than once. This should also be considered when calculating the true attendance count.

Speakers

The speaker count reflects the number of individuals who either filled out a speaker slip or who registered to speak on the platform.

Access to Meetings

Wisconsin Open Meetings law states that “all meetings of all state and local governmental bodies shall be publicly held in places reasonably accessible to members of the public and shall be open to all citizens at all times.” Similarly, an “open session” is defined in Wis. Stat. § 19.82(3) as “a meeting which is held in a place reasonably accessible to members of the public and open to all citizens at all times.”

Hybrid Participation

One option would be to offer hybrid participation whereby the public could either provide comments either remotely, while on the Zoom platform, or come in-person to access and participate. There are some important issues to keep in mind relative to hybrid participation:

The sound system in the auditorium is a closed system. Audio from the microphones on the stage and podium play over speakers in the ceiling. The system adjusts for this audio to prevent feedback. This audio then also feeds to various streaming systems, such as Boardcast, WUWM 88.9 FM Radio, YouTube, and Spectrum Cable.

Generally speaking, the auditorium sound system is configured to provide excellent audio for in-person attendees and view/listen-only participation for a remote audience. Efforts to combine in-person and virtual meetings in this space compromises the design and effectiveness of the system. *When virtual participants speak, the auditorium’s system picks up that sound and tries to re-broadcast causing a feedback loop.*

Connecting a device that is joined to a Zoom meeting into this setup presents a few challenges:

- *In order for the Zoom audience to hear the audio from the Board Meeting, the audio from the auditorium needs to be streamed into the meeting as a participant.*
 - o *This must happen directly from the auditorium sound system before/alongside feeding any other streaming platforms.*
 - o *Currently the only location to access this feed is from the front of the stage.*
 - o *All audio within the Zoom meeting would be coming from a single participant identified as “Auditorium” or similar.*
- *In order for the Zoom audience to see the participants in the auditorium, there would need to be an additional camera attached to the device that is connected to the Zoom meeting.*
 - o *This camera would have an inferior view compared with the built-in cameras used to stream to YouTube and Spectrum Cable.*
 - o *All video within the Zoom meeting would be coming from a single participant identified as “Auditorium” or similar.*

- *When Zoom attendees are given the ability to speak, all audio inputs in the auditorium would need to be turned off to prevent feedback.*
 - o *All Board Member, Administration, and OBG microphones must be muted.*
 - o *Any open audio source within the auditorium will cause feedback.*
- *The Secretary would be unable to prompt the speakers that it is their turn to speak from the auditorium without causing feedback.*
 - o *They would need to be joined to the Zoom meeting separately, outside the Auditorium, any time there was a shift to public comment.*

Other Options for Consideration

As the district transitions back to in-person meetings, the Board may wish to consider the following options relative to access and participation:

1. Discontinue virtual meetings (except where Board Rule 1.05, Public Notice and/or Board Rule 1.30, Virtual Meetings applies). Current broadcasting methods will still be used (radio, livestream, YouTube). However, public participation would be in-person only.
2. Continue current practice.
 - a. Meetings at which the Board will take public comment (Committee Meetings) will be held virtually, with Board members participating remotely (either at Central Office or from elsewhere). Public access will be via the broadcasting methods only.
 - b. Meetings at which the Board will not take public comment will be held in-person in the Central Services auditorium. Board members will be on stage. Public access to the building will be determined based on current public health guidance and the contingencies of the pandemic.
3. The Board determines another option for public access and participation.