

June 10, 2021

Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

RE: Calling for Hybrid (Virtual and In-Person) Meetings for Advisory Neighborhood Commissions

Dear Councilmembers:

Advisory Neighborhood Commissions have been meeting virtually since Mayor Muriel Bowser declared a public health emergency related to COVID-19 (coronavirus) on March 11, 2020. Despite some challenges due to minimal centralized support, virtual meetings are not only possible but have provided increased inclusivity and accessibility for both Commissioners, as well as more residents. We call on the DC Council to authorize hybrid (virtual and in-person) Commission meetings following the end of the declared public health emergency.

Once the public health emergency ends and [emergency legislation](#) expires, Commissioners will need to be physically present at public Commission meetings to participate in those meetings, including being counted toward the presence of a quorum and voting. [DC Code § 1–309.11\(b\)\(1A\) \(Perm\)](#). For some portions of our population who cannot be vaccinated this poses inherent and still unknown risks. In addition, Commissions are likely not to have continued Cisco Webex licenses or other centralized supports to ensure options for virtual participation by either Commissioners or residents. A return to in-person meetings without a virtual option will exclude individuals and limit participation.

Overall, like many other public bodies, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions have seen an increase in the number of meeting attendees due to virtual meetings. Virtual meetings have improved the inclusivity and accessibility of Commission meetings for both Commissioners and residents, more fully satisfying our statutory obligation to “hear the views of residents ... on problems or issues of concern,” adequately consider community views, “ensure the broadest dissemination of information,” and “involve all segments of the Commission population in [Commission] deliberations regardless of race, sex, age, voting status, religion, economic status, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression.” [D.C. Code §§ 1-309.11\(b\)\(3\), \(f\)](#).

As Commissions transition following the end of the declared public health emergency, hybrid (virtual and in-person) meetings will provide the following benefits:

- A virtual option keeps people safe and reduces risk of harm following a global pandemic.

- Commissioner and resident participation is more inclusive and accessible with a virtual option, including people who care for young children or other family members, people who are disabled, unhoused residents, and people who have extended work schedules or jobs that are not 9-to-5 work schedules.
- A virtual option provides an opportunity to make Commission meetings more accessible to members of DC's deaf and hard of hearing communities. Many virtual meeting platforms offer real-time voice recognition and closed captioning, providing a low-barrier mechanism to enhance the accessibility of meetings to those who are deaf or hard of hearing. By allowing hybrid Commission meetings, DC can immediately make these meetings more accessible while working to address resourcing constraints related to live interpretation services at Commission meetings.
- More individuals might consider running and serving for Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner where participation is more inclusive and accessible. Increased inclusivity and accessibility reduces the barriers to entry, which are already high due to the lack of centralized support for Commissioners.
- A virtual option is essential for participation by any Commissioner who resides at and residents of the DC Jail, a potential future prison system, or residents subject to home confinement or terms of probation and parole that include a curfew.
- A virtual option is essential for participation by any Commissioner and residents who are students and may not have local housing during portions of the year, diminishing their representation in our government.
- Councilmembers, DC government agencies, and other government representatives can more easily attend (and seem to have more often attended) Commission meetings via a virtual meeting option.
- A virtual option allows Commissions to transition from the current virtual-only setup and provides more flexibility regarding meeting logistics considering that meeting spaces and technology may not be immediately equipped for in-person meetings as the District transitions from an extended public health emergency.
- Video recordings of meetings, which include audio, that are shared on a public-facing website or platform are easily observable and presumably satisfy meeting transcription requirements. [D.C. Code §§ 1-207.42\(b\)](#). The [Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia](#) has opined that an audio recording satisfies this requirement. See Letter to Gottlieb Simon, Aug. 10, 2015, at 2-3 (on file).

While we understand that every Commission is different and may have different needs, the ability to have hybrid (virtual and in-person) meetings is essential to ensure efficient, effective, and responsive Commissions across the District.

Thank you for your consideration and implementation of our requests.

Sincerely,

Robin Nunn, ANC 2B03 Commissioner

Christian Damiana, ANC 3D07 Commissioner

Ben Bergmann, ANC 3D08 Commissioner

Evan Yeats, ANC 4B01 Commissioner

Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02 Commissioner

Alan Wehler, ANC 4C09 Commissioner

Jonah Goodman, ANC 4C10 Commissioner

Alison Horn, ANC 6B09 Commissioner

Makia Green, Working Families Party