



January 25, 2021
The Seattle Mayor and City Council
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Mayor Durkan and The Seattle City Council,

As a city and a world we have faced a crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the globe causing disruption, radical lifestyle changes, and economic catastrophe. We as a society have done our best to adapt rapidly to this dynamic and uncertain situation. In many ways we have failed, in others we have made do, and in some we have quickly adapted ways of doing business that have actually improved upon our previous condition.

The rapid deployment of virtual meetings for City of Seattle boards and commissions is an improvement we should maintain after the current crisis has passed, because they provide enhanced participation from residents who may otherwise have not been able to participate.

While the numerous boards and commissions within our city have provided a greater degree of public input into government, they have had lingering problems of equity and accessibility. In general, board and commission meeting times and locations that have worked for some people provide insurmountable barriers for many others. The excluded group includes those with caregiver responsibilities, who work non-9 to 5 work schedules, with disabilities that make travel difficult, who live in the extremes of our city and cannot spend the time getting to and from downtown. This is reflected in both who serves on the boards and commissions and who is able to attend. Neither reflect the demographic makeup of our city, but we believe that they should.

The use of remote meeting access both through phone and computer has provided an alternative that has worked. It has allowed board business to continue while easing the time and travel burden on board members and attendees. Anecdotally, public attendance has been equal to or higher than prior to adoption, and boards have received positive feedback from members of the public.

In addition, maintaining the option of remote access could help with the recruitment of more diverse boards by easing the time and travel burden and accommodating people's individual needs. Racial equity in city engagement and services is a goal of Seattle's Race and Social Justice Initiative as well as a value of our residents.



We are concerned that this tool of which provides increased accessibility will go away after the city eases out of COVID-related precautions. We therefore ask that:

- The option of remote access both by phone and internet be maintained for both board and commission members and the public, even as we resume in-person meetings.
- Board and commission meetings to be held in a room with video-conference capabilities.
- Meeting materials be made available 48 hours before meetings for both the public and board and commission members.
- Live captioning be provided at all board and commission meetings. (Live captioning is an option on Microsoft Teams and other video conference programs)
- Recordings of board and commission meetings be posted online for the public. (Recordings and transcriptions are an option on Microsoft Teams and other video conference programs)

We also strongly encourage you to continue the option for remote public comment at City Council meetings and over the longer term for the city to work towards ensuring that every household has affordable high speed internet access.

We thank you for your time and your work. We hope that you will make these simple reforms to further access and equity for the boards and commissions and allow additional members of the community to participate in the important work they do.

Sincerely, the below boards that have voted to endorse:

School Traffic Safety Committee
Seattle Bicycle Advisory Board
Seattle Pedestrian Advisory Board
Seattle Human Rights Commission
Seattle Transit Advisory Board
Seattle Women's Commission
The MOVE Seattle Levy Oversight Committee