

On Fri, Oct 1, 2021 at 4:57 PM Patel, Nisha <Nisha.Patel@viennava.gov> wrote:

Hi,

I agree with Councilmember Anderson and would also support this legislation.

Nisha Patel

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

----- Original message -----

From: "Anderson, Chuck" <Chuck.Anderson@viennava.gov>

Date: 10/1/21 3:14 PM (GMT-06:00)

To: foiacouncil@dls.virginia.gov

Cc: Elizabeth Bennett-Parker <elizabeth.bennettparker@alexandriava.gov>, COUNCIL <COUNCIL@viennava.gov>

Subject: Flexibility for Public Bodies to Hold Electronic Meetings

To Members of the FPIA Council,

I am writing in strong support of legislation which would provide public bodies in Virginia, such as town councils, planning commissions, and the like, with the flexibility to hold electronic meetings (complete or hybrid) in non-emergency situations. During the pandemic, we have learned that a number of things, including the fact that public bodies can hold electronic meetings in a manner that actually increases transparency and citizen participation. Moreover, this type of flexibility opens the door for participation by citizens who have difficulty meeting in person on a strict basis -- people who are providing in-home care, have kids, or who have disabilities and/or are immuno-compromised.

Let me relate w real life example of this enhanced participation from my experience as a council member of the Town of Vienna. We have one council member who is a physician -- an ophthalmologist -- who must meet regularly with patients face to face. As an eye doctor, she has no choice but to be in close proximity with a large number of members of the general public, so here risk of getting COVID are not insignificant. One of our fellow council members has battled three different types of cancer, so is highly immuno-compromised. Both of my fellow council members are extremely valuable public servants, who might not be able to serve going forward, if electronic meeting options are eliminated.

To be frank, local public bodies should have the right to determine their own format for meetings. We know our specific situations better than any state body. We are only asking that we have the flexibility to determine the format -- including frequency, video versus audio only, number of in-person representatives (for hybrid formats), and voting procedures.

Thank you for your service and consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Chuck Anderson