

Title: Virtual Access Focus Group Report

From: The Virtual Access Focus Group

Recommendation:

The Virtual Access Focus Group (VAFG) recommends that the Board direct staff to explore technology solutions and prepare draft policy revisions that will allow members to participate in board meetings virtually and expand member access to board meeting recordings.

Background:

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Heritage Ranch Owners Association (HROA) held virtual board meetings in order to continue serving the needs of the membership while also complying with prohibitions against public meetings. Organizations and local governments all shifted meetings online and developed ways for decision makers and the public to participate remotely. Many local governments have maintained this virtual participation in one form or another as a way to increase public participation.

The HROA has continued to present in-person board meetings online, but is no longer offering members the option of participating virtually in real time. The HROA has at the board's direction, extended the length of time that recorded board meetings are available to membership from 24 hours to 72 hours. This has resulted in a small increase in the number of distinct viewers during meetings and a larger increase in the total number of views.

At the board's direction, the VAFG began meeting in March of this year in order to develop a list of recommendations for board action with the goal of increasing the transparency of the governance of the HROA and encouraging additional member participation at board meetings. The board expressed the goal of fostering members' trust in HROA governance. Participation in the VAFG was open to all members. Director Cogan serves as the board liaison with the members participating in either meetings or through email. Sheryl Fox, Eileen Eden, Heath Owens and Nancy Fleming have provided valuable suggestions and feedback in drafting these recommendations to the board.

Analysis:

Virtual Participation

There are several possible technology solutions that the HROA could use to allow virtual member participation in board meetings. Staff has suggested that Microsoft Teams is likely the most cost-effective solution and so the VAFG recommends that the board directs staff to offer this option for a 1-year pilot period to see if members utilize this option for participation. It is further recommended that staff report back to the board at the end of the pilot period with information about member participation.

Board Meeting Video Availability

Board meeting videos can serve a valuable role in understanding the context for board decisions and member participation. Therefore, it is recommended that staff explore and present technology solutions as well as any policy revisions necessary to archive board meeting videos for member reference. As a private organization, board meeting videos are not available to the general public but should remain available to members. This could be achieved by creating an archive which members would be able to access through use of a personalized password. It is in the interest of every member to ensure that videos remain for HROA and member reference only. It is further recommended that videos are available for 96-hours until an archive is available to members. The recommendation to extend the time from 72 hours to 96 hours will make it more convenient for members who wish to view the board meetings and may be away for the weekend or limited in access to videos over the weekend.

Meeting Minutes

After the video archive is available to members, it is recommended that meeting minutes reference meeting videos to ensure that they are convenient and easy for members to access.

Agenda and Staff Report Format Revisions

While not initially included in the scope of the VAFG's work, there was discussion regarding possible staff report revisions that might improve communication to members and the board about possible board actions. For example, any item coming before the board that includes a request for funding should include the dollar amount within the title for the item on the agenda.

Meeting Calendar

Staff should explore providing members with the option of signing up for calendar invitations for HROA meetings and events. Many private organizations and local governments offer this service. It is possible that making offering members this service may reduce staff time in circulating information to members.