

Race & Equity Pocket Questions

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHAPTER 2 OF THE CARRBORO TOWN CODE TO TO ALLOW REMOTE PARTICIPATION BY COUNCIL MEMBERS AT OFFICAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS

1. What are the racial and equity impacts?

If approved, this policy of remote participation by Council Members would be a new policy. As a result, some racial and equity impacts may present themselves once Council begins remote participation. However, there are some general racial and equity impacts around council meetings in general that are worth noting here. Currently, some citizens may not have adequate access to internet or necessary equipment, which can cause them to miss out on viewing Town council meetings online. Further, some community members may have jobs that cause them to work outside of “normal” business hours, which would prohibit them from attending or viewing council meetings. A lack of reliable transportation access to town hall to attend town council meetings is another impact of some citizens. Finally, there may be a historical mistrust of government or fear of not being heard by others, which limits their interest in Town Council meetings in general.

2. Who is or will experience community burden?

Lower-income households and people of color are burdened by possibly not being able to view Town Council meetings online due to limitations on internet access, high-speed internet capabilities to successful view a live stream, or transportation access. As a result, these citizens would not have the capability to watch the Town Council meetings as they are live streamed, regardless of which members are participating remotely. Further, if transportation access is also a burden, these citizens cannot come to Town Hall to watch the meeting in person. These burdens would be present regardless of whether a Council Member(s) participate remotely.

Further, if citizens are attending Town Council meetings in person, or watching online, there runs a risk that the Council Members who are remote, not being able to be sufficiently heard by members of the audience (and by other council members) because they are using various audio equipment with varying settings. This creates a burden to those citizens who have trouble hearing (and to other Council members), even more so when topics of discussion directly impact these citizens and/or their neighborhood.

3. Who is or will experience community benefit?

The entire community would experience benefit from having the capability of remote participation of Council members because the governing body could sufficiently hold and conduct business and be able to approve necessary items that ultimately has an impact on

all Carrboro citizens. This increases the probability of having all Council members present so they all can participate and vote on item discussions. Of course, this is dependent on there being a quorum of Council Member physically present in the meeting space, per the policy.

4. What are the root causes of inequity?

This would be a new operating procedure that, if adopted by Council, may present inequities once it is underway and would need to be re-evaluated if occurred.

It is worth noting, however, that historically, communities of color and lower income neighborhoods, have been at a disadvantage because of less opportunity to be “connected” with local government due to factors including internet access, computer/phone equipment, reliable transportation, non-traditional work schedules and childcare needs. Also, there is often a mistrust of government due to elected official decisions, either historically or more current, that might have been made that negatively impacted their community, while positively impacting another community within Town that may be perceived as more affluent. All these factors contribute to possible lack of attendance in Town Council meetings virtually or in person by the community. While the remote participation of Council members, doesn’t directly impact these factors, it is something of note.

5. What might be the unintended consequences of this action or strategy?

Due to unforeseen issues that come with internet connectivity, there is always a chance that the remotely participating Council Member(s) may be disconnected from a meeting due to internet disruptions, outages or computer issues (e.g., audio/video). As a result, this Member may miss important information from the meeting that is to be decided by a council vote. Further, if multiple Members are participating remotely, and the other Members are in person, this also creates potential concerns over all members hearing each other adequately, as well as members of the public being able to adequately hear all members at the meeting due to the fact not everyone has the same audio capabilities as they would in person with the audio setup in the council room. There may be a time in the future when an elected official may not have adequate means to be able to utilize this function to participate remotely due to possible unaffordability of high-speed internet access and/or equipment at their residence, and they must always be present in person.

Additionally, the remote participation policy states “remote participation shall be allowed only when a quorum of the Council is physically present at the meeting and the Council Member(s) participating remotely are not necessary to establish a valid quorum.” One unintended consequence is that more than a quorum of the Council is unable to physically attend a meeting because of the reasons listed in the policy and plans to participate remotely, unbeknownst to the other members, and by lack of notification to the Town

Clerk prior to the meeting. This would result in the Council meeting not being able to be held due to lack of a quorum of Council members being physically present. A further result is that business of the Town must be delayed.

A positive consequence of having remote council meetings would be that the full Council can be present for regular meetings, even if they are participating remotely due to the factors listed in the policy. This would ensure town business, especially that relies on council approval, continues to move forward and that council members are able to hear all matters and address any concerns they may have. The risk of cancelling a meeting is lessened by having this remote option.

6. How is your department planning to mitigate any burdens, inequities, and unintended consequences?

If this remote participation policy is approved by Town Council, the Council and Town staff will monitor feedback received from the citizens on any burdens they have experienced because of remote participation of Council Member(s). Further, if issues occur, or persist, among the remote participants that appear to disrupt council meetings regularly, the Council may need to re-evaluate the policy to ensure Town business matters are not being delayed because of these continuing issues. Finally, Council will be advised if the remote participation is creating burdens for staff to operate sufficiently. This includes the audio/video company that currently broadcasts council meetings.