

From: Mary Catherine <tesselara@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 23, 2021 1:53 AM
To: Selby Turner; Rusty Spaulding; PAUL ZERA; Sarah Noble
Subject: zoom meeting issues

Dear Sarah, Selby, Rusty, and Paul,

The way the zoom meetings are run create issues for public participation. There have been multiple complaints from multiple attendees for the following:

- 1) Poor connection (it was fixed once, and then happened again at the 3/15 meeting--I had to hang up on the meeting, because the connection was so poor)
- 2) Audibility. Multiple zoom attendees have commented that there were serious issues with hearing what was being said in the room. Not only could people not hear the public's questions, but very frequently, it was also quite difficult to hear the Board members when speaking.
- 3) Moderation needs for the Zoom meetings are as follows: please name the person speaking, so the Zoom audience knows who was speaking. If a microphone isn't used, then please repeat the comment or question from the audience.
- 4) On the subject of the Zoom meeting, none of the Zoom attendees were listed on at least the 3/3/21 meeting in the "attendee" list. The minutes for the 3/10 meeting aren't up, and the 3/15 meeting was so unintelligible that I hung up after trying to make it work for 5 minutes.
- 5) There is a document that gives strategies and suggestions for COVID-safe microphone use and public meetings. It would be very helpful to remote attendees if you followed the suggestions.
<https://accd.vermont.gov/news/update-new-work-safe-additions-stay-home-stay-safe-order#meetings-of-public-bodies>
(the section I'm referring to--15.1--is at the bottom of the page)
- 6) In the above document, they STRONGLY suggest that meetings not be held in-person, and a fully remote meeting would make the meetings significantly more audible, AND reduce the risk of COVID transmission to attendees. It's surprising, actually, to hear how much the Board wants to move the town offices due to COVID risk, but the Town still has had multiple in person public meetings this year, despite the strong advisory against in-person meetings.

Please respond with your action plan to address these ongoing issues. You have been informed of them, verbally and in writing on the zoom messaging interface, and unfortunately, the issues were not addressed adequately. I am now writing, officially, to you about the issues. I hope that they will be addressed in the next meeting, so that the public participation process is functional.

Thank you very much,
Mary Catherine Graziano

--
Mary Catherine

TOWN OF ISLE LA MOTTE

P.O. BOX 250
ISLE LA MOTTE, VERMONT 05463

Vermont's Oldest Settlement

April 1, 2021

Mary Catherine Graziano
2468 Main Street
Isle La Motte, Vermont 05463

Re: Selectboard Zoom Meeting Accessibility and Posting Meeting Minutes

Dear Mary Catherine,

I am writing on behalf of the Isle La Motte Selectboard in response to your email of March 23, 2021 regarding the matters referenced above. We appreciate you bringing these issues to our attention and apologize for any delay in responding to them.

I realize that we (the Selectboard) have had some problems conducting Selectboard meetings via Zoom and that there have been occasions when those not in attendance have had difficulty hearing the discussion, either because the internet connection was poor or due to equipment or "moderation" issues. The Selectboard thought that it had corrected many of these problems by using a different computer and repairing/enhancing the internet connection at the school, as well as by establishing protocols for in-person meeting attendees to ask questions or provide comments in a manner that would improve audibility (i.e., by marking out a space on the floor for those asking the questions to stand, and asking them to state their names and speak up). This was done for the 3/31/21 meeting and we also asked that those not speaking mute their Zoom microphone connections.

Since that time, I have personally run multiple tests between my residence and the school to ensure that the volume issue was resolved (it was very good during our tests). However, I apologize for not running an actual test with you at your residence, which likely would have helped to further address your audibility issues. We are in the process of purchasing a new microphone system and, if you would agree, we would like to test it with your connection to determine whether it will help to meet your accessibility needs.

If we are not successful with the new microphone system, we will continue our dialogue and explore other options, including closed captioning for Zoom.

The use of Zoom for Selectboard meetings has been an on-going learning process for us. We are committed to continuing to improve our "hybrid" meeting model to ensure that everyone who wishes to participate in a Selectboard meeting, whether remote or in person, and regardless of any disability, will be able to do so. While you may be correct that going to a fully remote meeting may improve audibility, the Board is concerned that it could limit participation by others who may be less "tech savvy." Therefore, we have tried to find an appropriate balance through our hybrid model – allowing for

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both in person and remote participation. I understand, however, that we still have work to do to ensure this approach works for all involved.

Regarding the minutes, while Vermont law generally requires that minutes be posted to the Town's website within 5 days of a meeting, during the state of emergency due to Covid-19, Act 92 authorized the Selectboard to extend the time for posting to up to 10 days. Even with this extension, it is possible that all minutes were not posted within the required time. I apologize if that occurred. As you may know, the town clerk (who typically posts the minutes) has had some health issues that may have contributed to the March minutes not being timely posted. We will make sure this does not happen again — the clerk has had surgery and is recovering. During this recovery period, a temporary clerk will be handling the minutes and posting.

Again, we would be glad to work with you to further improve our Zoom connection and in reasonably resolving any audibility issues that you may have. We also welcome any other suggestions that you have to improve our meeting process and procedures. While I cannot promise that all suggestions will be adopted, we certainly want to take whatever steps are reasonable and appropriate to ensure that our meetings are accessible to you and to other members of the public.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Isle La Motte Select Board

cc: Isle La Motte Town Clerk