

Sbt: An Open Letter (Email) Regarding In Person PMRC Meetings

Lacey Kerfoot

Wed 1/11/2023 9:11 PM

Good evening PMRC Members and County Staff,

My apologies for the late nature of this correspondence, as I only just became aware of an item on tomorrow's PMRC agenda. My comments are for Item 8 - "Parcel Map Review Committee (PMRC) Meeting Type."

I oppose the proposal to revert to in person PMRC meetings for the following reasons:

Accessibility – This meeting is held at 2:00pm on Thursdays. While in-person meetings may not hinder County staff, they are highly inconvenient for other working people that may want to attend. And I would even argue that in-person meetings **do** hinder County staff. These meetings can be quite short and requiring staff to come into the office for a 15-minute meeting is a waste of time and resources.

Accessibility (Part 2) – Remote meetings expand access for folks with disabilities who may not be able to physically make it to the County complex. The video recordings that are posted to the website easily allow for closed captioning, making them more accessible for those with hearing impairment.

Public Participation – As demonstrated by the below data, attendance at PMRC meetings has increased with the convenience offered by remote meetings. Notably, in 2022, applicants or applicant representatives were present for 21 of the 24 items that came before the board. Having applicants present allows the committee members to ask questions and ensures that the applicant(s) can consent to any changes of conditions.

Transparency – Mailed public noticing is not required for parcel map applications, unless the application is for a subsequent division (which happens less now than it did in the past due to code amendments). Therefore, the first notice that the public receives is when the agenda is posted, no less than three days before the meeting. Again, this goes back to accessibility and the ability of folks to rearrange their schedules in order to attend an in-person meeting.

Workload – Speaking directly from my experience with the Planning Division (although I'm sure it impacts all areas of the County), the workload has expanded exponentially over the last decade. Unfortunately, the staffing levels have not. There are less people working on more cases. As mentioned above, requiring staff to come into the office for these meetings is a waste of valuable time and resources.

In addition to the above reasons, I'm forwarding an email that I sent to Planning Manager, Trevor Lloyd, last year when this same topic was raised. I urge you to review my arguments therein; namely, that this return to in-person meetings **was not provoked by a deficiency, nor was it requested by the public**. If the Committee is considering an in-person or hybrid approach, I would also point you to my comments on availability.

In closing, I believe that the current remote technology meetings are best suited for PMRC. Having worked with all of you as the prior Recording Secretary for this committee, I have the utmost confidence that you will prioritize the needs of Washoe County citizens and staff when making your decision. Thank you for your time and consideration.

(And, yes, I did spend my Wednesday evening reviewing PMRC minutes from the last four years, because data > opinions.)

Parcel Map Review Committee

Attendance Data 2019-2022

	2019		2020		2021		2022	
# of Cases	18		14		22		24*	
	PC	App/Rep	PC	App/Rep	PC	App/Rep	PC	App/Rep
January	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2
February					0	1	0	4
March					2	2		
April	0	1	0		0	2		
May			0	1	0	2	0	2
June	0	0	0	0			0	2
July	0	0					0	2
August	0	1			0	1	0	6
September	0	1			0	1	0	2
October	0	2	0	4			0	1
November	0	6	0	1	0	1	0	1
December	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2
Totals	12		6		18		24	

*Notable: In 2022, an applicant or representative was present for 21 of the 24 cases that came before the PMRC.

Public Comment numbers refer only to individuals who attended the meeting, not to those who submitted letters or e-mails.

With gratitude,
Lacey Kerfoot

Hi Trevor,

It recently came to my attention that during the February Parcel Map Review Committee (PMRC) meeting Roger, who Chairs the Committee, stated: "It is my understanding that the Governor made the announcement today that masks are no longer required in doors, and I am going to look into seeing whether this committee will actually start meeting in person again sometime in the relatively near future."

I've spoken with Roger personally regarding his statement. I asked Roger if anything prompted the statement, such as requests from the Committee or the public to return to in person meetings. Roger was unaware of any such requests but was vocal about his personal desire and belief that "things will go back to normal" and that everyone will return to the office.

I know that time and attention are currently running at a steep premium, so I appreciate your time and attention in considering my concerns.

Quoting a July 6, 2021, email in response to a possible return to in-person only meetings in Chambers, I wrote:

"The ability to participate via zoom offers a huge benefit to citizens. Not everyone can take half a day off of work to participate in local government, but many may be able to step away for 30 minutes to watch a presentation and call in for comment. I also know that

throughout the last year, hybrid and virtual offerings have been a boon for differently-abled folks who may need accessibility allowances. Personally, I would be much more likely to participate in a meeting virtually than attending in person.”

The Planning Division has continued to be a champion of accessible meetings, despite other areas of the County eliminating hybrid options. I continue to stand by all my prior statements.

In this particular case, PMRC has been held as a Zoom-only meeting since April 2020. PMRC is a relatively low-key committee composed of (3) County Staff – Planning, Health District and Engineering, (1) Planning Commissioner and (1) member of Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District. Depending on the size of the agenda, these meeting can take as little as 15 minutes. Applicants occasionally, but not always, join in and public comment is rare; I’ve only had one or two community members participate in the year that I was Recording Secretary.

If committee members and/or the public specifically request an in-person option, and leadership is agreeable, it **is** possible to host a hybrid meeting out of Mt. Rose. Mt. Rose is currently available during the PMRC time slot. However, hosting a hybrid meeting out of Mt. Rose requires exceptional efforts by Admin to organize, since the equipment in the room is not set up for hybrid meetings. Admin has access to a Bluetooth speaker and a USB-microphone to be utilized for such purposes, if necessary. **Also of note, Slide A/B conference rooms are booked every other month during the PMRC timeslot. Having two meetings side by side can become distracting due to the ineffective noise barriers that separate the rooms.**

In conclusion, I believe that the current practice of Zoom-only meetings is best suited for PMRC. Requiring these meetings to be held in person is an inefficient use of staff time and resources. Especially when unprompted, except by someone who will no longer be impacted by the decision beyond the next 15 months. If changing the format of these meetings is under consideration, I would recommend polling the Committee and staff for their opinions. Continuing to add more days in office, on top of BoA/PC/BCC meetings, POD, and Wednesday pre-application days begins to whittle away staff’s remote work benefits. There are some situations that warrant bodies in office, but this is not one of them. Thank you again for your time.

With gratitude,
Lacey Kerfoot