

May 27, 2021

To Mr. Mayor and the Members of the Columbia, MO City Council:

This letter is written on behalf of the Columbia Disabilities Commission and is in regards to virtual participation in City Council and Commission meetings. This letter is within the Commission's purpose to consider the concerns of residents with disabilities and their caregivers, and advise the City Council as necessary. Thank you for hearing this matter of great importance to many persons of our City.

Please refer to the initial letter sent to the City Council from the Disabilities Commission regarding virtual participation in city meetings from February 2021. This is an ongoing need, and the Disabilities Commission has noted that this topic has stalled in discussion. Additionally, the Disabilities Commission noted that a draft proposal was written allowing virtual participation only in the case of a State of Emergency.

The Disabilities Commission of the City of Columbia, MO formally request that the City Council direct City Staff to draft an ordinance that would allow virtual participation by staff, commissioners, council members and the public at all times for any city meeting noting that virtual attendance is NOT to be used purely for convenience, but to be used for increased accessibility to the citizens of the City of Columbia. Allowing virtual attendance will increase the likelihood that commission meetings in particular will be able to maintain a quorum so that they can continue their work for the City and the citizens of Columbia.

The wording proposed in the February 2021 letter from the Disabilities Commission is still valid and recommended. The phrasing suggested in the February 2021 letter was created by the Disabilities Commission as well as adapted from the SAE International "Virtual Meetings: A Best Practice Guide", as well as wording from other cities across the nation who currently utilize virtual attendance for City meetings, including but not limited to the City of Sequim, Washington, the City of Mukilteo, Washington, and the City of Ellensburg, Washington.

The Disabilities Commission sincerely appreciates the Council's efforts to continue to support accessibility and inclusion to increase municipal engagement by all persons of Columbia, MO. We look forward to continued discussion and collaboration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jacquelyn M. Sample
Disabilities Commission Chair