



Planning in a Pandemic

CITY OF HAGERSTOWN

PLANNING AND CODE ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT (PCAD)

Background

- ▶ Prior to the pandemic, Planning Commission meetings were held in person in close quarters
- ▶ City Hall closed to the public in mid-March, all public meetings temporarily cancelled
- ▶ With development projects continuing to move forward, we were determined to have Planning Commission meetings safely so as not to delay development

Choosing Zoom

- ▶ Several platforms were considered as options: Zoom, Google Meets, and Go To Meeting
- ▶ After testing, we chose Zoom as our virtual hosting platform
- ▶ Reasons for choosing Zoom include:
 - ▶ Ease and efficiency of use
 - ▶ User friendliness for others joining meetings
 - ▶ Live streaming features

Choosing Equipment

- ▶ Computer/laptop
 - ▶ We had a designated laptop for Planning Commission
- ▶ Webcam
 - ▶ View angle
 - ▶ Resolution
- ▶ Speakers
 - ▶ Amplify sound
- ▶ Microphones
 - ▶ Within webcam OR
 - ▶ External plugged into laptop

Test Runs

- ▶ We hosted a test meeting with staff and Planning Commission members
- ▶ Test run is necessary in order to ensure Commission members' confidence with joining and participating in meetings
- ▶ We created manuals on how to join and use the platform- each member was given the Zoom Meeting ID and Password to join
- ▶ In some cases, we visited the board members in person to explain the platform

Hosting/Chairing a Virtual Meeting

- ▶ Controlling the virtual environment
 - ▶ Virtual roll call where Chair introduces all members present
 - ▶ Ensure board members are seen/heard
 - ▶ Rollcall voting when all members join virtually
- ▶ Displaying plans
 - ▶ Enable screen sharing feature for the duration of the meeting
 - ▶ Easily switch between PDF plans, renderings, photos, and Google maps



Hosting/Chairing a Virtual Meeting

- ▶ Ensure applicants are given opportunity to present full case
- ▶ General public providing testimony
 - ▶ Must go through staff vetting process before they are given the meeting ID and password
 - ▶ Controlled waiting room environment and automatic muting ensures control
- ▶ Evolution of meetings
 - ▶ From completely virtual;
 - ▶ To a “hybrid model” with some members in-person and others choosing to participate remotely and virtually



No Excuses

- ▶ One of the positives with these circumstances is that we are able to get a quorum no matter what
 - ▶ Members who would have been absent or traveling can choose to call in if they are needed for the quorum
 - ▶ Members can choose to participate virtually
- ▶ Out of town applicants
 - ▶ No travel expense to meet with Planning Commission
 - ▶ Can bring in experts remotely if necessary

When Things go Wrong

- ▶ Backup plans for different scenarios
 - ▶ Equipment
 - ▶ Technical difficulties
 - ▶ Not going Live