



Emmet County News Release

For immediate release – April 10, 2020

Notice to Public on Participating in Zoom Meetings

Conducting public meetings remotely is a new process for most local governments. Due to the coronavirus outbreak and requirements on physical distancing, the Emmet County Board of Commissioners has recently started using Zoom, a video conferencing platform, to hold its meetings while making them available for the public to join remotely.

Reports are now circulating of some abuses using the video conferencing technology for virtual meetings in ways that would not be tolerated during the in-person meetings.

Those attending the county's Zoom meetings are reminded that these are public meetings where state law, established rules of procedure and civility will still be followed. The meetings are held to address county business and to that end, anyone participating in the virtual meeting will be expected to follow the board's rules for public comment at meetings. Those rules are summarized and included at the end of each meeting's agenda with a link to the complete "Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Meetings."

As noted in section 6.2 of those rules, the board's chairman may require a person who wishes to address the Board of Commissioners during the public comment period to fill out a card providing his or her name, address, and the topic to be presented. Since no persons will be physically present as required in the governor's executive order, those wishing to address the board will instead need to enter the Zoom link provided and identify themselves.

In addition to providing a name and address, those wanting to speak during the public comment period will also need to identify by an IP address. Members of the public joining the Zoom meeting only to watch and listen will not be asked to identify themselves.

The board chairperson also has the right, according to rule 6.4, to call to order anyone "who is being disorderly by disrupting the meeting by failing to be germane, by speaking longer than the allotted time, by speaking vulgarities or by making a personal attack on a board member or employee regarding conduct that is unrelated to the performance of his or her duties."

The same rule provides that if a person continues to be disorderly and disrupt the meeting, the board chairperson may request removal of the person by an appropriate law enforcement agency. This will include using vulgarities, posting nudity or pornographic images or displays, or addressing the Board of Commissioners in a manner unrelated to county business. The public should be aware that a law

enforcement official will be virtually present to assist in the removal of the person from participating in the Zoom meeting and, if deemed necessary, possible referral for criminal prosecution.

The information detailed above complies with the requirements of the Open Meetings Act and the governor's executive orders regarding conduct of public meetings.

To assist the commissioners in maintaining an orderly virtual meeting, the board's chairman has authorized the county's Information Technology Director, or his designee, to immediately terminate a person's participation in the meeting while on Zoom. Any attempt to continue to disrupt the meeting will be referred to the Emmet County Sheriff's Office for investigation and possible criminal charges.

Additionally, if anyone attempts to use the meeting to state or display anything which could be considered in violation of criminal law, Emmet County officials will request the Sheriff's Office to investigate and seek prosecution for any violation of law.

County officials are hopeful these requirements for public participation in the county's virtual meetings will allow the Board of Commissioners to continue handling the county's business despite the coronavirus pandemic.

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Complete Rules of Procedure for the Conduct of Meetings is here:

https://www.emmetcounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BOC_2019_Rules-of-Procedures_revised-10-24-2019.pdf

For questions or more information, please contact Mike Reaves (231-348-1701) or Board of Commissioners Chairman Bill Shorter (bshorter@emmetcounty.org).