

To: **Mayor and City Council**
Through: **Nate Burkett, City Manager**
From: **Dan Nowicki, Marketing and Communications Manager**
Date: **August 9, 2021**

Future OCWS Setting Discussion

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Prior to the pandemic, the City of West St. Paul conducted Open Council Work Sessions in the Lobby Conference Room. This setting allowed for less formal round-table type discussions, face-to-face interaction, and an atmosphere more conducive to exploring ideas that may not be ready to bring to the dais for official action. As the name suggests, these meetings were open to the public. However, they were not broadcast live or video recorded. Members of the public would regularly attend these meetings and the City Clerk would record the audio for their records.

With the onset of COVID-19, and after a period of not holding OCWS, the virtual OCWS was born. In lieu of a physical space for transparency, staff worked out a system with Townsquare TV to broadcast these meetings on television and stream online, thus allowing the public to watch the OCWS from home.

While we were eventually able to move back to in person meetings, we felt it best to continue to broadcast OCWS meetings as a way for the public to watch if they could not come to City Hall or didn't feel safe in public settings. In order to accomplish this, the OCWS were relocated to the chambers where cameras were ready to broadcast.

However, this formal setting with the council at the dais has the feel of a regular City Council Meeting which some feel hinders the exploration of ideas and open conversation. Staff was asked to explore options on how to get back to the previous atmosphere of OCWS. Options are below.

Option 1: Full Lobby Conference Investment

Room: Lobby Conference Room

Transparency: Full broadcast production quality – Live broadcast, stream and on-demand video.

Overview: Essentially all the tech currently in the council chambers would be added to the Lobby Conference room. Articulating cameras, gooseneck mics, etc. but sitting at the roundtable. Townsquare TV would direct the production from the media room.

Cost: See attachment: ~\$54,000 with 3 Cameras (Which Townsquare Recommends) or ~\$43,000 with 2 cameras (production would be significantly diminished with fewer angles and more panning and tilting)

Pros: Top notch production quality in the ideal setting. Room is ready for other broadcast uses.

Cons: Highest cost

Option 2: Lobby Conference – Non-Broadcast Quality Video

Room: Lobby Conference

Transparency: Significantly less production value – only a single wide shot webcam for the entire meeting with a few omni-directional mics catching all audio.

Overview: Townsquare would not be producing this option as it is not up to their production standards. It's basically bare bones. No live TV broadcast. Recording would be available the day after the meeting through WSP's website. No close shots of subjects talking, just a single shot of the room.

Cost: ~\$1,000 - 2,000

Pros: Back to lobby conference room – Cheap

Cons: No live broadcast, no graphics, no close ups, diminished audio. Essentially, staff will start a webcam to capture the meeting and post the video the next day.

Option 3: Lobby Conference – No Video (audio only)

Room: Lobby Conference

Transparency: Audio only

Overview: Back in the Lobby Conference Room. The clerk will use a recorder to capture audio and upload it on the website the following day. No video, but still open to the public

Cost: \$0

Pros: Zero cost, no installation necessary.

Cons: No video

Option 4: Stay the Course

Room: Council Chambers

Transparency: Full broadcast production quality – Live broadcast, stream and on-demand video.

Overview: Continue to do OCWS as we have for the last few months. Council and staff at the dais.

Cost: \$0

Pros: No Cost – Excellent production quality, live and on-demand video

Cons: Setting is not ideal for conversation and feels too formal for exploring ideas and back and forth organic discussion.

Option 5: Council Chambers in the Audience

Room: Council Chambers

Transparency: Full broadcast production quality – Live broadcast, stream and on-demand video.

Overview: This option uses the cameras that are currently in the chambers, however, due to limited space will need to take up a portion of the chamber's audience in front of the lectern. This means the OCWS will have to end with enough time for staff to break down the tables, remove the mics, move a mixer and set up additional chairs before the council meeting can begin. This will also add to the clutter in the chambers as all of that hardware would need to stay off to the side. Also, with moving pieces, replacement will have to be done more frequently and staff will need to be trained.

Cost: \$8,000 - \$10,000

Pros: Round table discussion setting. Don't need additional cameras in another room.

Cons: Lots of moving pieces by staff means more technical difficulties and wear and tear. Set up and breakdown time by staff. OCWS will have to end ~20 minutes before Council Meeting begins. Audience intrusion. Still a significant cost.

It is worth noting the IT Department had planned to spend about \$40,000 for Council Meeting technology replacements/upgrades (PC, monitors, controller, speakers, and runs) in 2023. With the upcoming City Hall Administration remodel plans, staff could work OCWS needs into the remodeling budget to make changes this year and delay the planned tech upgrades until 2025.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Discuss options and give staff direction to begin making accommodations for future OCWS.