

Conducting Accessible Virtual Public Meetings in Response to COVID-19

Strategies and Lessons Learned

PRESENTERS



Jonathan Buono, AICP

Planning & Development Services Director

803-909-7173

Jonathan.Buono@yorkcountygov.com



**BERKELEY
COUNTY SC**

Alison Simmons, AICP

Planning & Zoning Director

843-719-4164

alison.simmons@berkeleycountysc.gov

Nicholas Madray

IT Project Manager

843-719-4005

nicholas.madray@berkeleycountysc.gov

DISCUSSION OUTLINE

1. Initial Response
2. Selecting A Virtual Meeting Platform
3. Virtual Meeting Preparation
4. Managing the Virtual Meeting
5. Pros, Cons, and Other Takeaways



INITIAL RESPONSE – YORK COUNTY

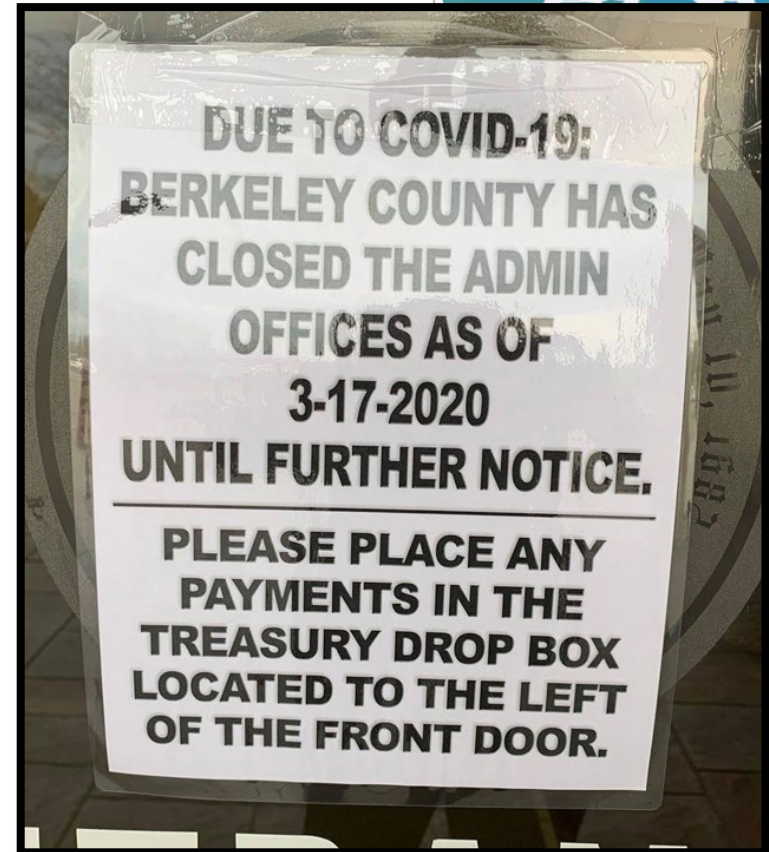
- Declaration of Public Health Emergency and Emergency Ordinance
 - Suspended Council meeting and business rules
 - Established virtual meeting process
 - Applied to all County boards and commissions
- April Boards and Commissions cancelled
- First County Council virtual meeting April 20
 - Carolina Panthers tax agreement public hearing
- Emergency Ordinance expired after 60 days
 - Virtual meetings no longer permitted by CC



INITIAL RESPONSE – BERKELEY COUNTY



- Closed County Building and Facilities to the Public from 3.17 - 5.18.
- Issued Press Release on 3.16 notifying the public of the status of operations and upcoming meeting cancellations.
- County Council Passed Declaration of Emergency Resolution on 3.17.20
 - Provided the Berkeley County Supervisor the Authority to Conduct Meetings as Deemed Appropriate



INITIAL RESPONSE – BERKELEY COUNTY



Due to technological advancements, meetings cannot only be conducted via telephone, but by other virtual means. A meeting can be streamed live by video, or through the use of some of the other digital platforms such as Go to Meeting, Zoom, or Skype, to name a few. Based on all of the above, SCAC offers some suggestions on how to conduct virtual meetings:

1. Conduct a council meeting by telephone conference with public access to the conference call. Council members should identify themselves each time they speak during the meeting. All voting shall be done by roll call voting or in some manner that allows the votes of each council member to be recorded into the minutes. If individual council members will be attending the meeting via telephone, the chair needs to identify the members at the beginning of the meeting attending by telephone.
2. Stream a meeting where only council members and necessary staff are physically present and the public can stream and email questions or comments for the public comment period, or where they can listen by dialing into a conference call and comment during the public comment period, or they can email questions or comments to council, if a period for public comment is provided for during the meeting.

While the provisions of the law dealing with public hearings (§ 4-9-130 and § 6-1-80) are silent as to whether or not a public hearing could be conducted by virtual means, SCAC is of the opinion that they can as long as the meeting is properly noticed and the public has access to participate in the virtual meeting as outlined above.

virtual meeting procedures



SELECTING A VIRTUAL MEETING PLATFORM – BERKELEY COUNTY



Zoom

- Purchased Business Tier License (\$200/Month)
 - Up to 10 Hosts
 - Pro License is available at \$15/Month for 1 host
- User-Friendly
- Simple to offer technical support
- Link to Facebook
- Popular and widely-used platform (used by many businesses and schools)
- Allows for option to videoconference or dial in
- Waiting Room Offered Security (to prevent “Zoom-Bombing”)
- Looked into Microsoft Teams, Skype, and In-House VOIP, but Zoom perceived as optimal for our use.



VIRTUAL MEETING PREP – YORK COUNTY



- Know the software!!!
- Trial runs to test capability, connections, process - work out the kinks
- Coordinate with board/commission members on capability
- Arrange with applicants or other presenters on managing their slideshows
- Virtual meeting access and instructions posted with required ads, on the agendas, on the county home page, and publicized by Public Information Officer
- IT coordinated with Zoom to create a county virtual meeting page

York County, SC
Virtual Conferencing

Council Meeting	Join a Council Meeting in progress
ZBA Meeting	Join a ZBA meeting in progress
Join	Connect to a meeting in progress
Host	Start a meeting
Sign in	Configure your account

Made with Zoom

GOVERNMENT CENTER
4 SOUTH CONGRESS STREET

[Yorkcountygov.zoom.us](https://yorkcountygov.zoom.us)



VIRTUAL MEETING PREP – BERKELEY COUNTY



- Gave applicants the choice to proceed under virtual meeting framework or defer until normal meeting procedures are resumed.
- Publicized a virtual meeting framework in Press Releases, Facebook, public hearing ads, meeting signage, and Agendas.
- Procured special, “virtual public hearing signs” through coordination with our Roads and Bridges Department and a local sign shop.
- Developed “virtual public meeting procedures”.
- Hosted test sessions with members; IT offered to loan video cameras to members.



VIRTUAL MEETING PREP – BERKELEY COUNTY



Berkeley County Board of Zoning Appeals & Planning Commission April Meetings will be Held Via Video Conference

Board of Zoning Appeals: **Tuesday, April 21 at 6 p.m.**

Planning Commission: **Tuesday, April 28 at 6 p.m.**



Instructions for Applicants:

Participation by applicants is required. There are two methods in which applicants can address the Board/Planning Commission during the scheduled meeting:

1. Applicants, through coordination with the department, will receive in at least 24 hrs in advance of the scheduled meeting the video/telephone conference access information to participate remotely.
2. Council's Small Conference Room 100 is equipped with video conferencing equipment & available to applicants upon request at least 24 hrs in advance of the meeting. They are instructed to contact the Planning & Zoning Department at 843.719.4095 AND the IT Department at 843.719.5008 at least 24 hrs in advance of the scheduled meeting in order to make proper arrangements.

Instructions for Citizens Seeking to Provide Input:

There are three methods in which citizens can address the Board or Commission with questions or comments (in favor of or in opposition to) items scheduled for consideration. Citizens seeking to do so shall contact the County departments in accordance with the procedures listed below in order to make proper arrangements.

1. Citizens can provide written comment to Alison.Simmons@BerkeleyCountySC.Gov at least 24 hrs before of the meeting.
2. Citizens desiring to provide input in a virtual capacity can receive video/telephone conference access information upon request at least 24 hrs in advance of the scheduled meeting by contacting the Planning & Zoning Dept. at 843.719.4095 AND the IT Department at 843.719.5008.
3. Citizens may use Council's Small Conference Room 100, which is equipped with video conferencing equipment and available upon request at least 24 hrs before meeting. Citizens are instructed to contact the Planning & Zoning Dept. at 843.719.4095 AND the IT Department at 843.719.5008 in at least 24 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting to make proper arrangements.

Both meetings will be streamed LIVE on the Berkeley County Government Facebook Page: **Facebook.com/BerkeleySCGov**



VIRTUAL MEETING PREP – BERKELEY COUNTY



- Equipped a private conference room with teleconferencing equipment for stakeholders.
 - Guaranteed operability
 - Majority of stakeholders opted to use our equipment
 - Cleaned after each use
- Streamed meeting to Facebook for viewing



MANAGING THE MEETING – YORK COUNTY



- All May public meetings virtual
 - Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, York County Forever Commission, Stormwater Appeals Board, public hearings at County Council
- Board/Commission members offered use of department space and equipment to participate
 - most opted to participate from home
- Staff participated from a mix of office or home
 - IT staff available remotely during meeting timeframes
- Phone conference bridges set up in the event of called executive sessions for legal advice or other matters
 - County Attorney staff participated in all virtual meetings



MANAGING THE MEETING – YORK COUNTY



- Two-tiered participation
 - Zoom “Webinar” feature - differs from “Meeting”
- Participation via Zoom application or phone
- Housekeeping
 - Repeated instructions during meeting
 - Roll call votes
 - Staff manually unmutes participants permitted to speak
 - Staff operates presentations, which all viewers can see

The image shows a screenshot of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. The main slide is dark blue with yellow text. The title is "Zoning Board of Appeals Housekeeping Items". Below the title is a list of seven items, each preceded by a square bullet point. To the right of the slide is a small video feed window showing a man with glasses and a red shirt, identified as "Al Quarles". The PowerPoint window title bar reads "PowerPoint Slide Show - [5-14-2020 Presentationb] - Microsoft PowerPoint".

**Zoning Board of Appeals
Housekeeping Items**

- Members of the public cannot share or present content to the ZBA through Zoom
- Members of the public are not visible to the ZBA, staff, or other members of the public
- Each member of the public shall be muted for the duration of the meeting except during his/her public commentary period and/or Q&A with Board members
 - Profanity or unruly commentary are prohibited & may result in forfeit of an opportunity to speak
- Speakers will be addressed by name. The 5 minute time limit will begin after the speaker states his/her name & address for the record
- Callers will be addressed by the last 3 numbers of their phone numbers. The 5 minute time limit will begin after the caller states his/her name & address for the record
- As long as the Zoom meeting is active, participants may enter/exit voluntarily

Al Quarles



MANAGING THE MEETING – YORK COUNTY



Zoning Map

Proposed Site Plan

Elementary School Level of Service

Facility	Building Sq Ft	Acreage	2018 Enrollment	Permanent Capacity	Utilization
Bethany Elementary	59,688	13.90	386	430	90%
Bethel Elementary	63,765	18.40	343	410	84%
Kinard Elementary	70,820	9.00	424	470	90%
Larne Elementary	121,000	50.60	581	740	79%
Griggs Road Elementary	90,000	33.80	512	615	83%
Crowders Creek Elementary	164,324	80.50	945	1,310	72%
Oakridge Elementary	121,000	34.40	656	784	84%
TOTAL	690,597	240.60	3,847	4,759	81%

Elementary School Levels of Service		Building SF	Land
LOS per Student (current enrollment)		179.52	0.0625
LOS per Student (current capacity)		145.11	0.0506

Source: Clever School District



MANAGING THE MEETING – YORK COUNTY



May 11 2020 meeting



MANAGING THE MEETING – YORK COUNTY



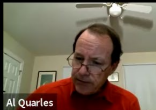
PowerPoint Slide Show - (5-14-2020 Presentations) - Microsoft PowerPoint

Variance Approval Criteria

Zoning Code §155.601 (A)(2)—A variance may be granted in an individual case of unnecessary hardship if the Board makes and explains in writing the following findings:

- There are extraordinary and exceptional conditions pertaining to the particular piece of property;
[Interpretation: Is there a special or unique feature or an uncommon situation present on the property?]
- These conditions do not generally apply to other property in the vicinity;
[Interpretation: Is the special or unique feature or uncommon situation on the property present on surrounding properties?]
- Because of these conditions, the application of this chapter to the particular piece of property would effectively prohibit or unreasonably restrict the utilization of the property; and
[Interpretation: Because of the situation, if the regulations are applied, they would prohibit or limit the proposed use of the subject property?]
- The authorization of a variance will not be of substantial detriment to adjacent property or to the public good, and the character of the district will not be harmed by the granting of the variance.
[Interpretation: Approval of this request will not cause significant harm to surrounding properties, the character the surrounding area, and the public in general?]

Slide 46 of 84



PowerPoint Slide Show - (5-14-2020 Presentations) - Microsoft PowerPoint

Parcel Map



Steve Hamilton

Lindsay Walker

Nichol Druckemiller

Creighton Hayes

Donny Mitchell

Brittnay Brown

Diane Di...

Johnny Walker

York County Planning

Beth White

Tammy Maran



MANAGING THE MEETING – BERKELEY COUNTY

- Required Chair to physically attend/host meeting from designated conference room.
- Obtained contact information/user names of each virtual participant prior to meeting.
- Requested all attendees to arrive/connect 30 minutes prior to meeting start.
- Applicants connected via Zoom were placed in a virtual “Waiting Room” until their item was called for consideration.
- IT support staff on-hand during the meeting to provide technical support.
- Custodial staff on-hand to clean the private conference room after each use.



MANAGING THE MEETING – BERKELEY COUNTY

DURING THE MEETING:

- Chair identified members in virtual attendance at Roll Call
- Members were required to identify/recognize themselves each time they spoke.
- Chair provided additional time during the evaluation of each item to allow for written comment to be read into record, input to be provided via video conference, and for the private conference room to be cleaned.
- Advised the Board that if they were not able to obtain sufficient evidence to base an informed decision due to the devices employed, they have the right to table.
- Roll Call Votes used during the meeting and certified by the Chair in the *Record of Votes*.



MANAGING THE MEETING – BERKELEY COUNTY



MANAGING THE MEETING – BERKELEY COUNTY



Berkeley County Government was live.

April 21 · 🌐

Berkeley County Board of Zoning Appeals Meeting April 21



1.9K Views



Like



Comment



Share

Gloria Jean Devine, Lisa Faucett, Phillip Farley and 9 others like this. [Most Relevant](#) ▾

1 Share



Gary Smoak · 26:41 I live at Bonneau Beach and would like to know what's the address of this property.

6w



Tony Watford · 19:22 Joe I am new to this one here .. but I think it is just zoning

Community

👍 16,173 people like this

📡 17,576 people follow this

About

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📍 1003 Highway 52
29461

📞 (843) 719-4234

✉ [Contact Berkeley County Government on Messenger](#)

🌐 www.berkeleycountysc.gov

📁 Government Organization



Page Transparency

[See More](#)

Facebook is showing information to help you better understand the purpose of a Page. See actions taken by the people who manage and post content.

📅 Page created - January 20, 2012

People



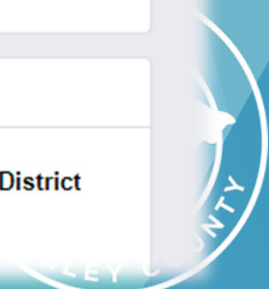
16,173 likes

Related Pages



Berkeley County School District

Public School



PROS, CONS, & OTHER TAKEAWAYS



- #1 - Continued operations and development approvals during global pandemic
- No commute!
 - Stakeholders with home commitments can still participate
 - Removes commute time burden of those on the fence about participating
- Unique opportunity for community to reach out to one another during a live meeting and instantly participate.
- Many board/commission members prefer virtual
- Ease of screensharing/presentations
- Berkeley County Facebook livestreaming increases accessibility to/visibility of meetings (April BZA - 1.9K views)
- Possible cost-savings on meeting refreshments, printed materials, prepared meeting spaces



PROS, CONS, & OTHER TAKEAWAYS



- Applicants and project opposition prefer traditional in-person meeting format
- Unreliable internet connection can disrupt communications
- User unfamiliarity can lead to delays or miscommunication - “Can you hear me?”
- Limited accessibility to older, lower-incomed, or rural residents
- Cumbersome to manage significant volume of written comment and virtual participants
- Monthly subscription is an additional cost
- Video cameras or laptop computers required for videoconferencing



PROS, CONS, & OTHER TAKEAWAYS



- COVID-19 revealed many operational vulnerabilities
- Preparedness for a “second wave”, a future epidemic, or other crises that inhibit in-person meetings
- Continue to use Zoom for multi-jurisdictional meetings, review and pre-application meetings, and other internal meetings
- Both counties returned to normal public meeting operations
 - Berkeley County allowing the option for members to use Zoom
 - Meeting room seating is spaced in accordance with social distancing guidelines
- Berkeley County continues to stream public meetings via Facebook
- York County exploring streaming options - Council meetings now streamed on YouTube

