



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Consider a Three-Month Pilot Program to Stream Council Meetings on Facebook Live and Consider Budget Modification No. 10 in the Amount of \$6,500 to Fund the Pilot Program.

BACKGROUND

The City of Sunnyvale has a long practice of live streaming meetings on the City's agenda management system, Granicus. When Santa Clara County enacted shelter-in-place orders in March 2020, City staff transitioned to holding City Council meetings online. Staff initially conducted the virtual meetings using 8x8 Video Meetings then switched to Zoom. Both meeting platforms allowed live streaming to either Facebook Live or YouTube. For an additional cost, the City could stream to both social media platforms using a third-party service called Restream. After considering the City's strategy for Facebook and YouTube's clear advantages as a video platform, staff chose to live stream to YouTube exclusively.

Currently, the City conducts meetings via Zoom, broadcasts on cable television, and live streams to Granicus and YouTube. Members of the public can easily access meetings on YouTube using a quick link: [YouTube.com/SunnyvaleMeetings](https://www.youtube.com/SunnyvaleMeetings). Council along with Board and Commission meetings are branded on the YouTube channel with specific tile images making it easy for users to select meetings of interest. Viewing options for the meetings are included on the meeting agendas, posted on the City's website, sent to subscribers of meeting announcements via Constant Contact, and promoted on Twitter prior to each meeting.

On August 25, Council directed staff to prepare a Report to Council to consider approval of a three-month pilot program to live stream Council meetings on Facebook Live. The goal would be to increase public engagement with Council meetings.

DISCUSSION

Staff continues to believe that YouTube is the best platform for live streaming City meetings. However, based on Council direction, staff evaluated the feasibility and potential success of Facebook streaming that includes a 3-month pilot. Research regarding streaming practices included:

- Surveying all cities in Santa Clara County;
- Inquired with the 3,500-member Government Social Media (GSM) Facebook Community group; and
- Reviewing findings from the City of San Jose's Civic Engagement through Technology Pilot conducted April 2018 to March 2019. This pilot tested three approaches: livestreaming solely on Facebook Live, livestreaming solely on YouTube, and livestreaming using both platforms simultaneously.

Research findings show that most cities use and prefer YouTube for streaming government meetings (see Attachment 2) and that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages for using Facebook Live.

Platform Use - Most cities in Santa Clara County use YouTube. Seven use it exclusively. Following their pilot, San Jose opted to use YouTube exclusively. They concluded YouTube is better geared for government meeting videos and allows for better content management. Since the pilot, San Jose's YouTube subscribers have increased from 50 to nearly 1,500. Few cities from the GSM Facebook group report using Facebook Live. Those that do use Facebook Live tend to be smaller cities.

Live Streaming by Cities in Santa Clara County			
YouTube 10 (67%)	Facebook Live 5 (33%)	Neither 3 (20%)	Both 3 (20%)

Community Engagement - Overall, there was not a clear indication that Facebook Live had increased engagement with members of the public. San Jose found that Facebook Live engagement quickly dropped after the initial novelty around the new streaming option wore off. While some cities reported increased views, it may not translate into meaningful engagement. For example, some shared stories of sudden spikes in followers from foreign IP addresses and others said their viewers were the same "regulars." Facebook also counts a view as being 3 seconds or longer. This results in inflated viewership numbers because of autoplay. This feature automatically starts videos as people scroll past them in the news feed, regardless of their intention to watch them.

Comment Moderation - YouTube enables the user comment feature to be turned off while Facebook does not. As such, cities expressed concern about monitoring the comments on Facebook during meetings. Many cities use a disclaimer in the video descriptions stating that comments are not monitored or part of the public record. Some cities review comments after the meetings and determine which warrant a response. Trolling and phishing attacks are most concerning. Many cities and Sunnyvale's own Library staff reported phishing attacks in the comment section while using Facebook Live. San Jose found that Facebook users expect two-way engagement that creates a community conversation. Their staff concluded they could not support live interaction through comments on Facebook Live.

Staff Support - Some cities using Facebook Live reported needing IT staff support for live streaming on multiple platforms. Cities in our county have staff support to manage potential technical difficulties when streaming to multiple platforms. Cities that actively manage the comment section on Facebook Live need additional staff support. A dedicated staff person is needed to monitor and evaluate this content for deletion. However, deleting content could bring up free speech concerns and requires careful evaluation. Those cities with a disclaimer stating that comments are not monitored risk leaving the public vulnerable to phishing attacks or inappropriate comments.

Channel and User Considerations

Selecting YouTube as opposed to Facebook for streaming meetings was a strategic decision based on staff's experience with and goals for the City's social media channels. While streaming government meetings on Facebook is technically possible, staff believes this type of content is not suited for the channel and will perform poorly. Because Facebook algorithms downgrade poor performing content, this has a detrimental effect on other posts and the channel overall.

Staff is intentional about the types of content it posts on each channel and considers user expectations, channel algorithms and historic performance. For instance, user behavior favors YouTube versus Facebook for long-format video. Facebook videos are more successful when they are short - no longer than 20-40 seconds. For YouTube, that number is just under 3 minutes (See Attachment 1: Improvado - Battle of Video: Facebook vs. YouTube). Because YouTube is a platform designed specifically for video, users expect and seek out that type of content and therefore have longer viewing times. Results from the City's recent 23-minute 2020 State of the City video bear that out. The average view time on Facebook was 30 seconds compared to almost 10 minutes on YouTube. And, while 644 people viewed the video on Facebook, only 80 (12%) viewed it for longer than one minute. Additionally, the City promoted the speech in a Nextdoor post, providing links to the video on both Facebook and YouTube. Users overwhelmingly chose YouTube 2.5 times to 1.

Perhaps most important, is the City's communications strategy for Facebook which is to create shareable stories. Facebook is a social media platform that primarily focuses on social interaction. Facebook algorithms measure success based on the number of "interactions" or likes, shares and comments. The more interactions your content receives, the more discoverable Facebook makes it to other users. The most successful posts combine creative copy with compelling people-centric images or videos that spark conversation among users.

In staff's experience, engaging and shareable stories perform far better than typical government topics in both reach and engagement. For example, one of the City's most popular posts from the third quarter (July-September 2020) was a photo gallery congratulating the annual community award winners. This post had 9 times the reach and 42 times the engagement than a post about the City's Housing Strategy. Similarly, a post about shopping at our local comic bookstores for the Shop Sunnyvale Campaign had 4 times the reach and 112 times the engagement than a post about COVID testing. These posts demonstrate strong user preference for more engaging, personal content on Facebook (see Attachment 1).

Facebook Posts	Reach	Engagement
2020 Community Award Gallery	6,236	1,041
Shop Sunnyvale: Comics Shop	2,531	672
Housing Strategy	697	25
COVID testing	608	6

For these reasons, staff does not recommend moving forward with a Facebook Live pilot program.

Facebook Live Pilot Considerations

Should Council approve the three-month pilot program, the following support would be required:

- **Software Requirement** - the Facebook Live pilot would require the City to purchase a subscription to a multi-stream service. Multi-stream services allow for the broadcast of live video to multiple social media platforms at the same time. The most popular multi-stream service among cities is Restream.
- **Technical Support** - IT support is needed to acquire, set up, and test live streaming on a multi-stream service. We also recommend having technical support address issues that may

arise during the first live stream.

- **Comment Moderation** - staff support is needed to monitor comments. Staff proposes to include disclosure language notifying the public that comments made on Facebook Live are not considered public comment and will not be added to the public record. Language will also state that the City will monitor comments and delete any that violate the City's Social Media Policy. Staff recommends one Administrative Aide be assigned to manage comments on Facebook Live during meetings.

If approved, staff recommends the pilot program run between January 2021 and March 2021. This timeline gives staff time to acquire the needed multi-streaming service and arrange staff support. Additionally, staff needs time to determine performance metrics to evaluate the results of the pilot program.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The action being considered does not constitute a "project" with the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to CEQA Guidelines sections 15320, 15378 and 15061 (b)(3) as it is an organizational structure change and does not have the potential to result in either a direct or reasonable foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT

Staff estimates the total cost for a three-month Facebook Live Pilot Program to be \$6,500. The staff cost estimate assumes 10 Council meetings with an average duration of five hours. It also assumes overtime rates for a Senior Applications Analyst and an Administrative Aide.

- Software: \$99/month for a total of \$300
- Staffing: \$6,200
 - Senior Applications Analyst for technical support - 17 hours of overtime (\$2,600)
 - Administrative Aide for comment moderation - 50 hours of overtime (\$3,600)

If Council wants to proceed with a pilot, staff recommends Budget Modification No. 10 to appropriate \$6,500 to a new project to fund the three-month pilot.

Administrative Budget Modification No. 10 FY 2020/21

	Current	Increase/ (Decrease)	Revised
General Fund			
<u>Expenditures</u>			
New Project - Facebook Live Streaming Pilot Program	\$ 0	\$ 6,500	\$ 6,500
<u>Reserves</u>			
Budget Stabilization Fund	\$ 45,723,397	(\$6,500)	\$ 45,716,897

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, Sunnyvale Public Library and Department of Public Safety. In addition, the agenda and report are available at the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve a three-month pilot program to stream Council meetings on Facebook Live.
2. Approve Budget Modification No. 10 in the amount of \$6,500 to fund the pilot program from the General Fund Budget Stabilization Fund.
3. Approve Budget Modification No. 10 in the amount of \$6,500 to fund the pilot program from the Council Set-aside Fund.
4. Take no action.
5. Other action as directed by the City Council.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Alternative 4: Take no action.

The cost and effort associated with a Facebook Live pilot for streaming government meetings is not recommended because 1) the City is already successfully using YouTube, which is optimized for video and has better content management and comment control features; 2) many other agencies have validated the challenges associated with Facebook Live and prefer YouTube; 3) historical reach and engagement data show that users do not respond to this type of content on the City's Facebook channel; and 4) the potential for an increase in engagement is modest and does not outweigh the downside risks to the City's Facebook presence.

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Reviewed by: Tim Kirby, Director of Finance

Reviewed by: Teri Silva, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Source Links
2. Live Streaming in Santa Clara County Cities