

COMMENTS from page 1A

"The governing body of a public body shall hold public meeting and hearings by telephone, video or through some other electronic or virtual means whenever possible," the EO stated. "For all public meetings and hearings held by telephone, video or through other electronic or virtual means, the public body shall make available a method by which the public can listen to or virtually attend the public meeting or hearing at the time it occurs."

The mandate also explains that the public body does not have to provide a physical space for the public to attend the meeting or hearing.

There is some latitude given to local municipal leaders to provide for these basic communications. However, there is no specific requirement as to what public comments must be allowed at particular types of meetings.

Florence Public Information Officer Megan Messmer explained the crafting of local meeting policies for the acceptance of public comments from residents.

"During the temporary COVID-19 procedures, public comment received for items on the agenda are sent to the council either in the meeting materials distributed on the Thursday prior to the meeting, or at 4 p.m. on the day of the meeting," she said, adding that public comments are also included on ci.florence.or.us to allow all members of the public access to the same information.

"These comments have to be written and follow the policy to be submitted to allow adequate time before the meeting," Messmer said. "This is different than general public comment."

General public comments regarding items not on a city council agenda are provided

to the city council via email. Each member of the city council then has an opportunity as individual members to provide feedback to the Mayor and City Manager on the need to discuss any public comments received or provide an administrative response during a meeting.

Messmer pointed out that any city councilor has the opportunity to bring up any item of interest at a council meeting, particularly during the "City Council Reports" section of the agenda.

"This is the most likely area where a city councilor could bring up comments received and request a future agenda item," she added.

The limitation of public comments during a city council meeting was not discussed in EO No.20-16 but was adopted as a policy to address the challenges presented to the council.

"Yes, the decision to limit public comments is a local decision made by the city council as part of the adoption of the COVID-19 Temporary Public Meeting procedures located on the City's website," said Messmer. "These procedures were adopted at the March 23 Florence City Council special session as a way to quickly respond to the emerging crisis while maintaining the requirements of Oregon Public Meetings and Records Laws.

"These temporary updates serve to meet the needs of social distancing requirements by the state, streamline meetings and move to providing virtual services during this time of crisis."

There are legal requirements for public input at public meetings for the simple reason that better decisions can be made when there is more information used to determine a course of action. Allowing public comments on official activity also provides a level of

oversight to council deliberations and decisions.

However, the city's abridgement of this legislated mandate has been perceived by some as stifling public discourse.

One local resident who had intended to share her thoughts with the council at a recent meeting was Sally Wantz, who submitted a Guest Viewpoint to the Siuslaw News expressing disappointment in the limitations resulting from the city's current public comment policy.

"Doing business today is different from it was before Covid-19 when I could offer my comments in person at city council during the initial 15 minutes of public comment time," said Wantz. "Knowing that council was not meeting in person on May 16, I sent comments via email with the hope and expectation that my comments would be conveyed to council and become a part of the public record the same as it would have been in person. However, since the new public meeting policy has been adopted, the city council has not held general public comments on any items not on the agenda."

Wantz believes this is wrong and stifles the voices of people who wish to be heard.

"Yes, I'm disappointed that council chose the path that silenced me on May 16," she said.

In her public comments, Wantz had intended to request that future public meetings, including city council, be presented live via a teleconference format similar to Zoom and recorded for future viewing.

"It's unfair to citizens who cannot see our elected and appointed officials during public meetings," Wantz said. "I want to see faces and reactions to what is being said as if I were sitting in the audience at City Hall."

Wantz said that, with a

Zoom type of format, the "host" of the meeting can allow citizens the opportunity for their three minutes of verbal comments in full view of all who are watching. In addition, the host would also have full control to mute comments when needed, such as when their time has expired.

"Businesses worldwide are conducting business in this manner. We should as well," stated Wantz.

In response to that, Messmer said that, while it is common practice during "normal" times to have public comment, it is not a requirement.

"Meetings in Oregon are required to be held in public, but do not have to have public dialogue. Including an opportunity for members of the public to provide input on items that are not public hearings is a decision that has been made by the city council through its policies," Messmer said. "The public is able to reach the council through email, regular mail, the Florence City Hall drop box, 250 Highway 101, and by phone. These communications received outside of public meetings are passed on to the City Council and/or the departments responsible for the items discussed. Citizens can — and do — publicly communicate their thoughts, desires, demands, wishes and complaints through a variety of other channels not operated by the city."

"These are all monitored and reviewed by staff and members of the council."

Afterwards, Wantz, who

said she was appreciative of the work done by city staff, was concerned more with any decision to effectively exclude submitted comments from the public record.

"The concerns I shared in my guest viewpoint were not with city staff but the leadership of city council for declining to share my comments publicly," Wantz said. "It sent a message to me that my comments don't matter. While there is every expectation that this policy needs to be in effect during COVID-19, now is the time to update that policy to include a way for all community members to be heard. It's the right thing to do and would be a huge sign of respect for our community."

The decision by staff and council to limit public comment during meetings to items already on the agenda raises the question of how an issue or concern raised by a citizen can become an item worthy of further discussion.

Messmer again provided clarity in this area.

"The city manager, in consultation with the mayor, prepares city council agendas. The city manager is authorized to place routine items, items referred by staff or items approved for action in the City of Florence's work plan, on the agenda without council approval or action," Messmer explained. "In order to have something on the agenda, any member of the council can request an item be added to the agenda by advising the mayor and city manager

at least one week prior to the meeting. Page three of the City Council Rules of Procedure details the process for creation of the city council agendas."

One of the main points to consider when discussing the opportunity for members of the community to share their thoughts, experiences and observations with city leaders is access. Messmer again expressed the desire by city staff to listen to members of the public but also to share those communications with the Florence City Council.

"Citizens are still able to communicate their ideas and questions to the city council and staff via the website, email and phone. Our communication methods have not changed and are still in place for citizens to utilize, regardless of the city council agenda — which is determined by the city's work plan and budget as adopted by the city council," said Messmer. "During the city council report and discussion on each agenda, members of the city council have the opportunity to discuss items they would like to be considered. Individual council members have a constant open communication going with city manager and can — and do — request items during the course of the year."

The next Florence City Council meeting is scheduled to convene via teleconference on June 8, beginning at 5:30 p.m., and can be streamed live on the city website.

STUDENTS from page 1A

"This is a challenging time for adults as well, and our kids are handling it the best they can."

New this year for achievements is the Distance Learning All-Star category, where students "have stood out during tough times," the principal said.

These students were chosen for continued participation, turning in assignments, actively asking questions during online instruction and showing up to the office for extra instruction.

Also, for the first time, Mapleton staff met to honor five specific students for persisting through distance learning.

"They have been academically strong all year and they are conscientious students," Moyer said. "They care about their grades and are working hard to not only attend and participate, but actively engage. With distance learning, that's a challenge in itself. Although we don't normally do this, we decided to say it's important to recognize standouts from our students."

Whether students have been shining in the brick-and-mortar classes of 2019-20, or the virtual classes going on now, Moyer said she is proud of all Mapleton students for making it through a difficult year.

"They have persevered through the challenges and are shining," she said.

Class Achievement Awards 2019/2020 School Year

- Makayla Bender — Farm to Table
- Jeffrey Bernhardt — Frisbee Best Battle Combo
- Ryan Bernhardt — Yearbook

Jahala Blake — College Prep English Distance Learning All Star, Contemporary Health and Veterinary Science

Alex Burnett — Physical Education

Phillip Burnett — College Prep English Participation, Physics

Robert Burnett — English Distance Learning All Star

Opal Burruss — Business Achievement, Government, Spanish 3 Distance Learning All Star, College Prep English, Distance Learning All Star

Kylee Carson — Health, English

Mason Flansberg — Algebra 1 Most Dedicated, Frisbee Best Battle Combo

Trinity Holmes — Yearbook, Senior Seminar, Art

Elenore Hurley — Art Savannah Johnson — Math Distance Learning All Star

Quinn Lewis — Senior Seminar

Sabrina Marsh — World Cultures Distance Learning All Star, English

Evelynn McMaster — Health, Farm to Table

Emily Neece — Spanish 1

JJ Neece — Spanish 1, Writing 121

Landon Peck — Geography Distance Learning All Star

Joslynn Roby — Health Distance Learning All Star

Joseph Shepard — Spanish 3 Distance Learning All Star, College Prep English Distance Learning All Star

Brierlynn Shird — Advanced Art

Jordan Simington — Writing 121, College Prep

English Distance Learning All Star

Emily Stevens — Spanish 2

Keevyn Walker — Physical Education

Justyce Wierichs — Physical Education, Physics

Kody Wierichs — English, World Cultures

Staff Choice for Overall Excellence

Opal Burruss
Joseph Shepard
Jordan Simington
Kody Wierichs

Staff Choice for Overall Growth

Stuart Clifton

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Helping Hands Coalition
We are in need of volunteers on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. We need volunteers to serve food, set up for meals and also prepare meals beginning at 11:00 am and finishing at 2:00pm.
New Location: Community Baptist Church, 4590 Hwy. 101, Florence (Across from Fred Meyer)

Oregon Coast Humane Society
relies heavily on volunteers. There are many opportunities to volunteer and a variety of skills and talents are always in need. Volunteer interest forms may be found online, at the shelter and at our Thrift Shop on Bay Street.
www.oregoncoasthumanesociety.org/volunteer/

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• Plastic milk jugs and transparent drinking bottles (rinse - no lids)
• Metal food and drink cans (rinse - no lids)
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• Urologist Dr. Bryan Melihaff attends.
• Tuesday Lunch Group (3rd Tuesday) 12 noon - 1:00 p.m. - Ichiban Chinese/Japanese Restaurant
• Urologist Dr. Roger McKimmy attends.
Contact Bob for more information:
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