



Planning for 2022 In-Person and Hybrid Council/SSC/AP Meetings

STAFF DISCUSSION POINTS for Council review, October 2021

In September 2021, the Council decided that all meetings through the end of the year would remain virtual, in response to concerns about the impact of COVID-19 in Alaska and to provide certainty with respect to planning dates for Council meetings. At the time, however, staff noted that we would report back on options to resume in-person or hybrid meetings at the October Council meeting. As we have reported previously, we are trying to find the right balance among effective meetings, safety for staff and participants, and broad public access through new opportunities such as broadcasting more of the meetings and remote testimony.

Staff recommendations for February 2022

The following describes our current planning for a February in-person meeting. We are providing this discussion in part to set expectations about how meeting in person will be different than pre-COVID in-person meetings, and also to get feedback from the Council and the public early in our planning process. Most of our planning is based on feedback from previous discussions with the Council, particularly at the [April](#) and [June](#) Council meetings.

Our 2022 February meeting is scheduled to take place at the Renaissance Hotel in Seattle, WA. **Please note, our first in-person/hybrid meeting will be a test of new equipment and procedures, which we will likely continue to modify.** We cannot yet commit that some or all of these features will continue to be available in the future.

Remote accessibility

- **Broadcast all in-person Council/AP/SSC meetings:** We intend to broadcast audio and powerpoints for all in-person AP, SSC, and Council meetings in the immediate future, as long as we can access reliable internet to support this feature. The Council has one-way broadcast live audio for many years; this will be an addition to do so for the AP and SSC as well. We intend to try using Zoom, rather than Adobe Connect, as it is a simpler program with lower bandwidth for hosts and users, although without the bells and whistles. We do not intend to use webcams to capture or broadcast video of the members sitting together in the in-person meeting room; remote users will have audio only, plus powerpoint visuals as appropriate. Also for February at least, we will not broadcast the meeting on YouTube, only through Zoom. Daily audio recordings can be posted within 24 hours if useful.
- **Accommodate remote testimony at Council/AP/SSC:** We are planning for remote testimony options for the in-person AP, SSC, and Council meetings. For this first meeting, we intend to provide remote testimony issue by issue, as with in-person testimony. At some point in the future, as we get a better sense of public interest and the effect on our scheduling, we may want to explore options to provide a consolidated remote testimony time slot for multiple agenda items. We will use VOIP, which means that testifiers may choose whether to call in on with a phone line, or connect using their computer audio. We will continue to use the eAgenda as the means to sign up for both remote and in-person testifiers.
- **Encourage presenters to attend in-person, but accommodate remote presentations:** We believe that in-person meetings will run most effectively if presenters are also in the room, to best facilitate dialogue between members and the presenter on the agenda item, however we will be able to accommodate remote presentations whenever necessary. At some point in the future, the

Council may be interested to articulate which type of presentations are best taken in person, versus which can equally well be remote (e.g., length of presentation? Degree of complexity or controversy? Minimum internet requirements for presenters?)

- **Question for the Council: *allow members to participate remotely?*** The Council's guidance earlier in 2021 was that while remote testifiers and presenters could be accommodated, allowing members to participate remotely would affect the ability of the Council to operate cohesively and effectively. This guidance took into account the fact that if the meeting mode is in-person, some members may not be able to participate because, for whatever reason, they are unable to travel to and attend the meeting, noting that this has always been the case for Council/ AP/SSC meetings.

We have the technology to allow for remote member participation at an in-person meeting, so at this point the concern would strictly be the additional burden on the Chair to manage a meeting with both remote and in-person members, and the difficulty for remote members to participate in what is effectively a teleconference, while other members are together in-person. This decision can be made closer to the time of the meeting, and staff suggests it may make sense for each Chair to make this decision for their individual group.

COVID accommodations (as best we can predict)

- ***Masking:*** We will strongly encourage masks at the February meeting, and additionally intend to follow the hotel and city guidance with respect to requiring masks at the meeting. At the current time, masks are required indoors in Seattle, but we do not know what requirements will be in February. An observed practice with mask mandates is to allow the mask to be removed when someone is speaking (in our case, persons around the table while they are speaking into the microphone), but to keep the mask on the remainder of the time. We will clarify our policy closer to the meeting.
- ***Social distancing and capacity considerations:*** For the February meeting, we intend to rent more hotel meeting space to allow our meetings to take place in larger rooms. This will allow us to space out member and audience chairs, and keep doors open for ventilation. We will also consider whether to set up audience overflow space at the hotel, if it seems prudent.
- ***Vaccination status:*** At this time, we do not intend to verify proof of vaccination for members or public as part of our meeting process, unless required by local mandates. Proof of vaccination or a recent negative COVID-19 test is currently a requirement for conferences occurring in public places in King County, WA. We will clarify our policy closer to the meeting.
- ***No evening reception:*** At this time, we recommend against planning any Council-related events or special evening sessions during the course of the meeting.

Schedule and other changes

Because the February meeting generally has a lighter agenda, we have more opportunity to make accommodations for our first in-person/hybrid meeting while still remaining within the scheduled Council meeting footprint of January 31-February 8, 2022.

- ***Delay the start of the SSC meeting by half a day:*** We propose starting the SSC at 1pm on Monday, to give our administrative staff a few hours during a business day (Monday) to troubleshoot any problems associated with the meeting setup that require service from local vendors.
- ***Delay the Council start until the SSC meeting is finished:*** At least for February, as we work administratively to implement new hybrid options and sound equipment in the Council, we intend for the SSC and the Council to use the same meeting room. This gives us a larger space for the SSC meeting, and our administrative staff capacity is not split out supporting three separate meetings.

- **Committee meetings:** Again for this first meeting at least, we recommend against holding concurrent committee meetings during the week, other than the Finance Committee (which meets in Executive Session), as we will not be able to provide technical support for additional meetings. Committee meetings can be held virtually before the start of the meeting, as we have been doing in virtual.
- **No paper copies:** We intend to encourage use of online reference materials rather than paper copies, and will continue to use our eAgenda for public testimony signup.

Considerations for the future

We will be using the experience of our first in-person meeting to refine our hybrid protocols, discover what is effective and what needs improvement, and continue to get feedback from the Council, advisory group members, the public, and staff. We expect to see our experiments with protocols evolve as we find the right balance between the effectiveness of our various tools and the number of staff and availability of meeting space resources necessary to support them.

Reliable and fast broadband is necessary for hybrid meetings

One thing that is immediately obvious, however, is that many of the features that provide remote accessibility also require considerable broadband capacity. While this may not be as much of a concern when we meet in larger cities such as Anchorage and Seattle, it may be a problem for some of the remote coastal communities in which we meet (e.g., Homer, Kodiak, Sitka). The need for internet capacity includes broadcasting the meeting, meeting materials access for all in-person attendees through the eAgenda, and ability for remote presentations and testimony (and perhaps member participation). We were beginning to feel this as a limitation even prior to COVID; with the additional remote access features, we may need to evaluate where we are able to hold our meetings, or which features may be offered in each place.

Decisions to change in-person Council meetings to a virtual mode

The Council leadership will continue to ground their ultimate decision on whether to hold meetings in person on prevailing Federal, State, and municipal recommendations and guidelines, Federal and State travel and meeting guidance, and the needs of the Council. In particular, the decisions take into account the trajectories of community transmission rates and numbers of active COVID-19 infections in the area where we will be meeting, and the resilience of the local medical infrastructure, such as ICU bed capacity and medical staffing capacity, when deciding whether a meeting needs to move from an in-person to a virtual mode.

In terms of timeline, the Council aims to make a decision about whether to hold the meeting in-person approximately 6 weeks before the planned meeting. This is necessary to accommodate travel planning horizons for members, staff, and the public (noting that Federal staff in particular need a longer time-horizon to plan travel), and also because meeting in a virtual format requires more days than an in-person meeting. While we hope it will not be necessary, we have identified in advance the most likely virtual dates if any of the 2022 Council meetings are required to shift to virtual.

2022	In-person	Virtual
February	January 31 – February 7, Seattle, WA	January 31 – February 11
April	April 4-12, Anchorage, AK	April 4 – 15
June	June 6-14, Sitka, AK	June 6 – 17
October	October 3-11, Anchorage, AK	September 28 – October 12
December	December 5-13, Anchorage, AK	December 5 - 16