

# Virtual meetings increase public access

By [C. Eric Davis](#)

This article appeared as a [Guest Column in The Journal Record on April 21, 2021](#).

As schools and businesses increasingly met virtually over the past year, so too did Oklahoma's governmental bodies, including boards of education, city councils, and state commissions. Today, largely as a result of the pandemic, online governmental meetings are commonplace, available to anyone with access to the internet. This increased accessibility has made it easier for Oklahomans to participate in government at all levels, an outcome that is in keeping with Oklahoma's laws designed to ensure governmental transparency.



Eric Davis

In particular, Oklahoma's Open Meeting Act requires public access to governmental meetings in order "to encourage and facilitate an informed citizenry's understanding" of their government. The act requires that the meetings of all governmental boards and commissions be open to the public, and that advance notice of the time, place, and purpose of meetings be posted in advance. Prior to 2020, the Open Meeting Act mandated a majority of a public body's members be

physically present together to hold a meeting. However, amendments since March 2020 have given public bodies temporary flexibility to meet virtually, leading to an increased presence of meetings online, and thus increased public accessibility.

The recent amendments to the Open Meeting Act, however, have otherwise left the act's preexisting requirements in place. For instance, meeting agendas must still be publicly posted in advance, votes of individual members must be recorded, and meeting minutes must be kept and made available. Moreover, meetings must continue to be accessible to all those who wish to attend. Thus, if a meeting is held via videoconference, those who wish to watch may not be excluded due to the online room's capacity limits. Instead, accommodations must be made so that all those who wish to participate can.

Recognizing the benefits of online access to public meetings, Oklahoma lawmakers are now considering legislation that would mandate, to the extent practicable, that all public meetings include a livestream. Similar efforts to modernize open meeting laws are underway in states across the country.

Whether it be school redistricting or local zoning decisions, actions taken at public meetings affect all of us. If travel or time conflicts have deterred you from attending public meetings in the past, consider taking advantage of the increased access via the internet. As public engagement grows, so too will the diversity of viewpoints, providing public bodies with increased input and, perhaps, leading to more durable public policy.

*Eric Davis is an attorney in the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group and the Government Relations and Compliance Practice Group. He represents clients in a range of regulatory and energy matters.*

---

***For more information on how the information in this article may impact your business, please call 405.606.4757 or [email](#) C. Eric Davis.***



***Follow our coverage on [FACEBOOK](#)***