

Macalester-Groveland Community Council (“MGCC”) Policies and Procedures for Remote Participation at MGCC Meetings

Introduction and Background

This document defines policies and procedures for remote participation at MGCC meetings, in order to implement the following new clause (h) in Article V, Section 3 of MGCC’s bylaws, which was approved by the Board of Directors at its Feb. 2020 meeting:

Section 3. The Board of Directors shall have power:

(h) to establish, and revise from time to time, such policies and procedures as it deems appropriate regarding remote participation at meetings of the Board of Directors and its committees, via electronic or other methods. Such policies and procedures shall be approved by the Board of Directors.

As initially drafted and approved by the board, this new power was envisioned as allowing one or more members of MGCC’s board, committees and task forces to remotely participate in meetings of those bodies that were being held at a physical location, with most members in personal attendance.

However, because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the various federal, state, city and MGCC decisions related to dealing with it, no MGCC meetings can be held at any physical location, effective 3/12/2020 and continuing until further notice. In the interim, all MGCC meetings will be conducted online with everyone participating remotely via video-conferencing software such as Zoom.

Normally, no changes to MGCC’s bylaws are effective until approved at an annual meeting. However, due to emergency conditions, MGCC has decided to conduct all meetings remotely until it can safely resume physical meetings, and will seek retroactive approval of all actions taken at such meetings at the next annual meeting that can be safely held at a physical location. Most other St. Paul district councils are proceeding with eMeetings on some similar basis.

Also, MGCC may possibly have already approved electronic meetings when it adopted the Democratic Rules of Order in 2017, since those rules state that:

“These rules, modified if necessary, can be used for telephone or video conference meetings and for computer connected meetings in which discussions and voting are done electronically. “

These policies and procedures shall apply both to online meetings where all participants attend remotely, and to meetings held at a physical location where only some participants attend remotely.

Definitions

eMeeting

An eMeeting is any MGCC meeting at which some or all participants are attending remotely, via video conferencing software or telephone calls.

Host

A host is a person who has administrative rights to schedule an eMeeting, send invitations to it, start it, control all aspects of it, and close it. A host can also assign co-host privileges to one or more persons to assist in running a meeting. Hosts may also be referred to as moderators.

Participant

A participant in an eMeeting ideally has the ability to see and hear all other persons in the meeting, to be seen and heard by them, to use chat features, and to share their screen or documents (if allowed by the host). If any participants cannot join a meeting with full audio/video capabilities due to hardware problems or for other reasons, they may still participate by audio only or telephone, and will still retain any voting rights.

Any meeting attendee may choose to participate by audio only (no video). However, the chair should encourage video use, because it makes it easier to see who is speaking, and reduces the confusion that occurs in audio-only conferences when multiple persons try to speak at the same time.

General Policies and Procedures

All eMeetings shall be conducted according to the “Democratic Rules of Order”. These policies and procedures are intended to supplement those rules, not replace them, and should be interpreted in their spirit.

Should any issue related to remote participation arise that is not covered by this document, the decision of the chair shall prevail, unless overridden by a majority of voting members in attendance.

Video recordings of all board meetings shall be made and posted to MGCC’s Facebook site.

Video recordings of committee and task force meetings do not have to be made and posted publicly, unless the chair of such group, or the board of directors, elects otherwise, either as a general policy or on a meeting-by-meeting basis.

When voting on motions or resolutions, the meeting’s secretary shall follow normal procedures for capturing the number of ayes, nays and abstentions, except for board and large committee meetings where all members are participating remotely and where the chair elects to use the polling or chat features in the video conferencing software to capture votes

Hardware and Software Requirements

MGCC has obtained a license for the “Zoom” video-conferencing software product. The license allows an unlimited number of video-conferencing meetings, of any duration, with up to 100 participants per meeting. MGCC may, at any time, obtain a license for other video-conferencing software products in order to hold eMeetings.

Zoom can be used on smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs that run Windows, Apple or Android operating systems. Anyone can use Zoom at no charge to join a meeting.

Visit zoom.us for details and to view their many good tutorials.

Preparing for an eMeeting

MGCC staff will schedule an eMeeting for every MGCC board, committee and task force meeting, that must be held entirely remotely during the Covid-19 social isolation period. When MGCC is able to hold physical meetings again, it may choose to revise these policies and procedures at that time.

MGCC staff will follow normal procedures for publishing notice of eMeetings via email, print and electronic newsletters, websites, social media sites, and local newspapers.

Notices to MGCC board and committee members will include login credentials. Notices to the general public will include instructions for contacting MGCC staff to obtain login credentials.

All meeting notices should include a short set of guidelines for participants to follow, such as:

- Please attend from a private room if possible, to avoid distractions like other people moving around in the background, kids playing, dogs barking, cats jumping on your keyboard, etc.
- Please mute your microphone except when speaking, to minimize background noise.
- Please use the virtual conferencing software to virtually “raise your hand” and wait to be recognized by the chair in order to speak. The chair may waive this rule in small meetings where everyone can see each other.

Conducting an eMeeting

Normally, MGCC staff will be the eMeeting host with at least one additional member of the board or committee assigned to act as co-host. MGCC staff may delegate the host role to another person if desired. Best practices strongly recommend that the chair and secretary of a meeting should not act as the host, because of their other responsibilities. One or more voting members of every MGCC group should have basic training on hosting an eMeeting, in the event that the usual host cannot attend a meeting.

The host should use a PC or laptop to run the eMeeting it at all possible. If multiple files such as agendas, minutes, and other documents will be viewed during the meeting, they should all be opened before the meeting begins, so they are just a click away in the taskbar. The host should start the eMeeting at least 15 minutes before the posted start time, to allow people to join early, and to offer technical support to meeting attendees.

The chair should begin the meeting by welcoming all remote attendees, reminding them of the participation guidelines before calling the meeting to order. The chair or meeting host should announce if the meeting is being recorded and/or posted on the MGCC website at this time. The chair may also ask for remote attendee introductions-

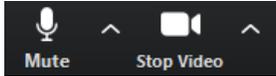
If a meeting gets hijacked by trolls or other disruptive persons, the host shall close the meeting, and may choose to reschedule the meeting, or immediately start a new meeting and send invitations with credentials only to the legitimate attendees of the prior meeting session.

Concluding an eMeeting

The chair should end the meeting by thanking any public attendees and informing them how to submit any followup questions and comments they may have, before adjourning the meeting.

Committee eMeetings via Zoom

Zoom Protocol

- **Log in Early** – Please log into *Zoom* at least 5 minutes early so the meeting can start in time. Click “Join with Computer Audio.” Use this time to test your speaker and microphone.
- **Security Precautions:** A new Zoom link will be emailed to all participants the evening before the meeting. Please do not share this link with others. In the unlikely event of an external disruption during the meeting, the Zoom meeting may be terminated, and a new Zoom link will promptly be emailed to all participants.
- **Internet Quality** – When possible, physically connect your computer directly to your internet source. If using WIFI, position yourself in an area with the best signal. Remember to disconnect from VPN and turn off unnecessary apps to optimize internet bandwidth.
- **Video** – All Board and Committee members are encouraged to participate using video. However, if you are experiencing poor video/audio quality, click “Stop Video”. As a last resort, you can join by phone.
- **Mute Your Microphone** – To minimize background noise, remember to mute your microphone at the beginning of the meeting. (Mute button is on the lower left corner of the Zoom screen). To speak, press and hold the spacebar on your keyboard to temporarily unmute yourself. Or, unclick the Mute button for an extended conversation. 
- **View Settings** – Customize how you view meeting participants on your screen using the settings on the upper right corner of your Zoom screen. Gallery View statically arranges all participants in a grid pattern. Speaker View dynamically brings the current speaker to the forefront.
- **Raising your Hand** – If you would like to provide feedback or ask a question, please click the “raise your hand” icon. If for some reason you do not see an icon labeled “raise hand”, you can also use the “thumbs up” icon. You can take yourself off mute to speak, once you have been recognized by the Chair. (See Committee Meeting Protocol below) 
- **Questions or Day-of-Meeting Troubleshooting** - Contact MGCC Staff at mgcc@macgrove.org and we will do our best to assist you.

Committee Meeting Protocol

- **If you would like to comment**, please raise your hand and wait to be recognized. When recognized, please first state your name and address.
- **This is a place for civil and respectful dialogue.** It does not mean everyone has to agree, but it means we have to treat one another well. Please keep your comments brief and to the point. At about the two-minute mark, the Chair will let you know that your time is almost up.
- After receiving public comments and inquiries, the Committee members will have the opportunity to ask final questions and to discuss the issues at hand.