

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

DATE: OCTOBER 27, 2021

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: NATHAN HAMBURGER, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: APPROVE AB 361 FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL BROWN ACT REQUIREMENTS FOR TELECONFERENCE MEETINGS

This item is being presented in order to allow the Agoura Hills City Council, Agoura Hills Financing Authority, Agoura Hills Improvement Authority, Parking Authority of the City of Agoura Hills, Successor Agency to the Agoura Hills Redevelopment Agency, City Council Subcommittees (e.g., City/Schools Subcommittee, Communications Subcommittee, Community Services Subcommittee, Environmental Responsibility Subcommittee, Finance Subcommittee, Land Use/Economic Development Subcommittee, Law Enforcement/Fire/Emergency Response Subcommittee, and Public Works Subcommittee), Agoura Hills Planning Commission, Agoura Hills Specific Plan Update Citizens Advisory Group, Community Services Coalition, and the Cultural Arts Council (collectively referred to as the "City Council and its Agencies, Authorities, Boards, Commission, and Committees") to continue to meet virtually pursuant to Assembly Bill ("AB") 361's special Brown Act requirements for teleconference meetings. These special requirements give local public agencies greater flexibility to conduct teleconference meetings when there is a declared state of emergency and either social distancing is mandated or recommended, or when the legislative body determines an in-person meeting would present imminent risks to the health and safety of attendees. To hold a meeting under AB 361 teleconferencing, the City Council must make certain findings no less than every 30 days.

On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency to exist in California due to the spread of COVID-19. The Governor subsequently issued numerous executive orders suspending or modifying state laws to facilitate the response to the emergency. Among other things, these executive orders superseded certain Brown Act requirements and established special rules to give local public agencies greater flexibility to conduct teleconference meetings, including authorizing council members and board members to participate in meetings from remote locations without compliance with certain noticing requirements. (Executive Order N-29-20.) Suspended teleconferencing rules included the Brown Act's requirements that: (1) the notice of the meeting and agenda identify the location of the remote location; (2) the remote location is accessible to the public; and (3) the agenda provides an opportunity for the public to directly address the council at each teleconference location. The special rules suspending these Brown Act requirements expired on September 30, 2021. (Executive Order N-08-21, ¶ 42.)

On September 16, 2021, in anticipation of the then-imminent expiration of his special rules for teleconference meetings, the Governor signed AB 361. In key part, this bill amends the Brown Act to establish special requirements for teleconference meetings. AB 361 continues to permit remote meetings during a proclaimed local emergency, if social distancing measures are required or recommended.

To continue to hold meetings under these special teleconferencing requirements, a legislative body of a local public agency needs to make two findings. First, there must be a declared state of emergency and the legislative body must find that it has “reconsidered” the circumstances of such emergency. Second, the legislative body must find that state or local officials continue to impose or recommend social distancing measures or that such emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the legislative body’s members to meet safely in person. These findings must be made within 30 days after the first teleconferences under AB 361 and at least every 30 days thereafter.

The City’s first meeting conducted pursuant to AB 361 was the October 7, 2021, Planning Commission meeting, so findings need to be made no later than November 6, 2021.

The City Council and its Agencies, Authorities, Boards, Commission, and Committees have met remotely or in a hybrid meeting format throughout the pandemic to protect the health and safety of the public and staff pursuant to these requirements. The factual circumstances exist for the City to continue to hold meetings pursuant to AB 361. The declared emergency is still in effect. Furthermore, Los Angeles County officials recommend measures to promote social distancing. The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Order Responding Together at Work and in the Community recommends physical distancing. The County Health Department encourages people at risk for severe illness or death from COVID-19 to take protective measures such as social distancing and, for those not yet fully vaccinated, to physically distance from others whose vaccination status is unknown. The County Health Department also continues to recommend that employers take steps to support physical distancing.

The City has already implemented the requirements for conducting public meetings under AB 361 and is in full compliance with AB 361, thus there will be no change of the currently established procedures.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff respectfully recommends the City Council make the following findings so that meetings of the City Council and its Agencies, Authorities, Boards, Commission, and Committees, will be subject to the AB 361 special Brown Act requirements for teleconference meetings: (1) the City Council has reconsidered the circumstances of the COVID-19 state of emergency; and (2) state and local officials continue to recommend measures to promote social distancing.