



## [See NWCCOG Coronavirus Resource Guide here](#)

*If you know someone who would enjoy our newsletter,  
please forward them to this link.*

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

### SPECIAL EDITIONS

*News is developing as fast as the speed of the spread of the virus. For the next few weeks - hopefully not months -- we'll publish more frequently as needed to get the most current information to our members. If you have information you think should be shared on this newsletter, please send suggested content to [jstavney@nwccog.org](mailto:jstavney@nwccog.org).*

## From the Director's Desk: Municipal Video Conference Zoom-bombed

The March 25th headline in the Vail Daily was one any Mayor would dread, "[Avon Council gets hacked, forced to reschedule meeting: Mayor ~Deepest apologies for any disturbing content you may have witnessed.](#)" Avon learned about video conferencing the hard way. In discussions about what parameters they desired in moving public meetings to a virtual platform during the COVID 19 response, Council had suggested that they wanted a platform for citizens to communicate freely as they would in a live meeting, and wanting to share the change of platform with as many as possible, the link was blasted out without a security code on social media. The day of the meeting, the lesson took about 5 minutes. There was profanity and nudity.



Apparently, because of utilizing a cheaper version of Zoom Meeting, a remote attendee was able to take over the desktop and were sharing porn and profanities. Staff and elected officials were on the meeting 15 min early taking up most of the 99 maximum connections, and within 5 minutes of the posted start time, the call was "bombed" according to Robert McKenner, Town of Avon IT Manager, and the call was closed immediately. The clerk opened a second private meeting to staff and council to discuss how to proceed. Paul Weiser, Town Attorney, recommended because the meeting had not yet been called to order that they reschedule the meeting

for two days later. Though Avon had no way to track who else was on the call, not many public likely witnessed the shocking 5 minutes. Whoever did might have trouble "unseeing" what they saw.

In the day between, McKenner, Town of Avon IT Manager circled back with colleagues in Vail and elsewhere and decided to go back to his earlier preference for a higher security platform. In a day, the Town went Pro and changed a number of settings. Following what Vail is doing, Avon is not taking comments over the phone, but taking comments via email. McKenner said that Council ran yesterday's meeting through Zoom Meeting Pro, with webinar add-on with 100 gig storage. It is the platform being used for employee meetings. There are three different log-ins with different controls: the host, panelists and attendees. Attendees know about meeting through legal postings for agendas, and click on a link after passing through a registration page on a website. Attendees can only virtually raise hands. They can be given permission to talk which can be turned off. They can also be promoted to a panelist who can share screen. They have no controls. Panelists can be demoted to attendee. Attendees and panelists can be kicked out. A Question box can be used. So far Avon is not utilizing the running dialogue box. Like many of the larger municipalities and counties, Avon Council meetings are filmed live and broadcast on local PEG Channel which has a 5 minute delay behind Zoom, so the council is learning they to wait for comments to come in before moving to next agenda item.

The same Tuesday as the Town of Avon meeting, just down the road at the Town of Eagle, after adopting Emergency powers the prior meeting which included a [Remote Meeting Policy](#) started the meeting using a platform called Crowdcast which was used in prior years by an employee who "hosted educational meetings worldwide" with a previous employer, switched platforms less than half way through. According to Manager Brandy Reitter, they switched platforms to Zoom Meeting mid meeting due to technical difficulties. As Reitter noted in a phone call, making the change on the fly was just another adjustment town has had to make in recent weeks to adapt to COVID-19 restrictions on public gatherings and social distancing. Thursday morning, the Governor of Colorado issued a shelter in place public health order.

This past week, at Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), we sent an email to our 28 municipal and county managers with brief questions related to how they had changed operations related to public meetings, elections and staffing. I followed up with a number of phone conversations with managers. The responses were interesting. Most town halls are closed to the public. Nearly all are doing virtual or remote meetings on one platform or another. Red Cliff appears to be the only town planning to continue holding public meetings including the public with only social distancing. Town Administrator, Barb Smith says, they rarely have more than 40 voters, and only a fraction of those ever attend a meeting. Kremming is holding meetings and requesting public watch from home via Facebook streaming. Blue River and Steamboat Springs have a similar approach with the board attending in person, distanced, and the public participating via GoTo Meeting. Towns each have a different approach to public who want to speak. Silverthorne, Vail, Aspen and Winter Park are all requesting comments and questions be submitted by email prior to meeting and are read in the meeting.

For public entities, public notice, posting and structured public participation are a legal matter. Most are new this month to virtual platforms. They are empowered to make this adaptation to continue operations through inaction or adoption of emergency powers. For the bulk of town business, as long as there is an adopted standard (emergency) operating procedure or policy which is adhered to, public entities can continue in their legislative function (bill paying, adopting ordinances for regular town business, etc). Many drafted policy related to this within the past 30 days. A handful of towns have not yet held their first meeting as if this publication.

In discussing the challenge of preserving due process for applicants as well as the public, there was concern especially about quasi-judicial proceedings such as land use files or liquor license hearings where the formality and legality of the proceedings have a higher standard. For those wishing to read the actual documents of "Best Practice" policies adopted by some towns, I recommend [this page](#) on the Colorado Municipal League website, and for those seeking guidance on conducting electronic meetings, I recommend [this document](#) by CML General Counsel, David W Broadwell. When and if public entities are sued for these practices, most will turn to CIRSA which insures most municipalities in Colorado. This is what [CIRSA Executive Director Tami Tanoue has to say about this rapidly evolving new situation](#).

Attorneys have resisted electronic votes, and remote participation by board members for years for a variety of reasons involving preserving the legal integrity of decisions made through the public process, and many boards which could adopt such policies for regular times have resisted allowing a board member to email or call in for a vote if for no other reason than the importance of being accountable in-person to the public. Over the past decade, having meetings broadcast has become the norm, but having the public "participate" in the meetings remotely has been resisted. This very well may break that barrier to public engagement since those same citizens are increasingly accustomed to paying bills, and doing work at any hour of the day without having the inconvenience of having to go to town hall, sit for hours waiting for boards which rarely stick to posted agenda times, and are often baffled or intimidated by how to participate. It is time to break that barrier. What will be more interesting is if some public entities also shift after this COVID change of behavior to demanding they be able to represent the people in their pajamas as well. Hopefully that is not an outcome of what is being learned as we all adapt.

*Jon Stavney*

Executive Director

[jstavney@nwccog.org](mailto:jstavney@nwccog.org)

## UPDATE

### Zoombombing

Since this article was originally written a new word has been coined to describe the activity of being hacked while on a zoom conference - zoombombing. You can read updated information from [Forbes](#) and [NPR](#) as well as what [multiple state AG's](#) are doing to ensure Zoom tightens privacy practices.

Simple steps to protect your meetings:

Zoom meeting hosts don't need to grant screen sharing abilities to other participants, so it's pretty easy to be Zoom bombed. Thankfully, a few extra steps at the beginning of a Zoom call can remove the ability for unwanted attendees and their hijinks. To begin, don't publicly share Zoom links unless absolutely necessary and follow the suggestions below.

- Disable the "Join Before Host" option so people can't cause trouble before you connect
- Enable the "Co-Host" feature so other participants can help moderate your call
- Disable file transfers to avoid the spread of malicious files
- Disable the "Allow Removed Participants to Rejoin" to prevent removed attendees from causing more trouble

Ultimately, the easiest way to avoid falling victim to Zoom bombing is to not share public links to your meetings. Invite your participants by email or another one-on-one means of communication to avoid unwelcome guests.

## Fighting the virus with a giant wolf roar

According to an article in The Washington Post, a small county in Idaho has one of the highest incidences of Coronavirus rates in the nation. The population of Blaine County is only 22,000, but hosts the world renown Sun Valley Ski area along with Ketchum. When the WP article was written on April 1st the number of cases was 192, on April 4th, the count has doubled to 384.

As the article states, Ski resorts are ideal breeding grounds for the spread of disease. While people are outside in the pristine air, there is plenty of time for social interaction on the long rides up the lifts. Sun Valley resorts closed the same day Vail closed it's resorts in Colorado but as The New Yorker goes on to say "this year, somewhere between the lifts and the lodge, the tourists left behind something else: a deadly virus."

Did the tourists just leave their "gift" in Sun Valley? Probably not. but so far ski counties in our region are faring much better. Knock on wood.

Blaine County continues to fight the epidemic the best way they know how. They ferry the worst cases hours away to bigger hospitals, they train volunteers in one day to become ambulance drivers, they quarantine their own health care workers, and they hunker down.

One more thing, each night, at 8 p.m., the region puts its own spin on a global phenomenon of breaking the isolation and thanking health-care workers - not with pots and pans or cheers or a song. But with a howl.

"The whole valley lets out a giant wolf roar."

**Northwest Colorado Council of Governments**

[www.nwccog.org](http://www.nwccog.org)

970.468.0295

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN NWCCOG!**

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)