

COVID-19 and Open Meeting Law

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak, Governor Baker issued an emergency Order on March 12, 2020, allowing public bodies greater flexibility in utilizing technology in the conduct of meetings under the Open Meeting Law. The Thayer Memorial Library greatly values the participation of its citizens in the public meeting process, but given the current circumstances and recommendations at both the state and federal levels to limit or avoid public gatherings, including Governor Baker's ban on gatherings of more than 25 people, together with the present closure of the Prescott Building and other public buildings to the community, the Town of Lancaster has decided to implement the "remote participation" procedures allowed under Governor Baker's Emergency Order for all boards, committees, and commissions. This means that:

1. All or any of the members of the public body may choose to participate in a public meeting via remote access. Meetings may be virtual, in their entirety.
2. The public will not be allowed into a Board/Committee meeting, even where there are any members of the public body and/or Lancaster staff or official(s) physically present at the meeting location during the meeting. "Public comment" portions of meetings will be temporarily suspended.
3. However, the public will be provided with alternative access through which they can watch or listen to meetings "in real-time," and meeting notices will specify the manner in which members of the public may access audio or video of the meeting as it is occurring.
4. If despite our best efforts, our technological capabilities do not adequately support public access to virtual or remote meetings, The Library will ensure that an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive records of the proceedings at the meeting is posted on the Library's website as soon as possible after the meeting.
5. Notices for public hearings will contain additional information about how the public may participate via electronic/technological means.
6. For executive session meetings, public access to the meeting will be limited to the open session portion(s) of the meeting only. Public access to any audio, video, internet, or web-based broadcast of the meeting will be discontinued when the public body enters executive session.

7. Where individuals have a right or are required to attend a public meeting or hearing, including executive session meetings, they will be provided with information about how to participate in the meeting/hearing remotely.
8. Meeting notices will still be posted at least 48 hours in advance (not counting Saturdays, Sundays, or legal holidays), unless it is an emergency meeting as defined under the Open Meeting Law (in which event, the meeting notice will be posted with as much advanced notice as is possible in the circumstances). Minutes will still be taken.

Please check individual meeting agendas on the calendar on the Town's Clerk's [webpage](#) for the latest information regarding meetings. Each meeting may experience unique circumstances that may require last-minute changes in protocol, including cancellation or rescheduling. We appreciate your patience as we undergo this shift in a significant aspect of how the Lancaster and the Thayer Memorial Library conducts business.