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CITY NEWS

Town Hall Drags on Digital Transparency

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Webcasts of previous meetings

Live streaming could pave the way for ease and accessibility in civic participation. Credit: Mike Hitch

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By John Moyle

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Their stance is despite repeated efforts by the Council's independent and Liberal councillors to pass motions to introduce the technology.

These councillors are also saying that the reluctance has more to do with issues other than technophobia and points to problems of accountability across Council operations.

“Over the past two years the Lord Mayor has dismissed numerous attempts by councillors to introduce live streaming of Council meetings in a bid to keep meetings outside of public view,” Councillor Professor Kerryn Phelps, City of Sydney, said.

Liberal councillor Craig Chung said, “I moved more than a dozen motions to introduce live streaming to the City of Sydney and every single time it was voted down by the ruling Clover Moore block.

“Live streaming is important because it allows for complete transparency of council meetings.”

Live streaming important

The NSW government regards live streaming to be so important that it has introduced legislation requiring its adoption.

“Webcasting has been mandated for all councils under the new Model Code of Meeting Practice for local councils in NSW,” a Spokesperson for the Office of Local Government said.

The legislation states “all councils will be required to webcast meetings of the council and committees of which all members are councillors from December 2019”.

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meetings and are not necessarily required to live stream their meetings, the requirements may be met by simply posting a video or sound recording on their website after the meeting,” a Spokesperson for the Office of Local Government said.

The City of Sydney draft code of meeting practice was put on public exhibition from 25 March to 22 April and was approved by Council at its meeting on 13 May.

“The new code requires the City’s Council and committee meetings to be webcast from December 2019 onwards,” a Spokesperson for the City of Sydney said.

“This will require upgrades to audio-visual equipment and technology in the City’s council chamber and the purchase of additional software licences.

“The Lord Mayor has continually put off this obligation citing exaggerated cost estimates and other minimal barriers, when you could live stream the meetings on Facebook with an iPhone for free,” Cr Prof Phelps said.

Inner West Council has been live streaming since 2016 when they were in administration.

“On average there are approximately 200 views of the stream for each meeting while Council caters for 50-100 members of the public to attend each meeting,” a Spokesperson for the Inner West Council said.

“Live streaming the meetings increases accessibility for members of the community who can’t attend Council meetings.”

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panel plus a mixer for camera and audio inputs, and live streams all Council meetings along with the Operations and Community Services Committee and the Strategic Planning and Development Committee meetings.

“Council meetings are public meetings, so this means everyone can access local democracy in action,” Mayor John Wakefield, Waverley Council said.

The stream averages 80 views per meeting while around 10 people attend each Council meeting.

“There’s a long list of justifications that the City of Sydney put up for not taking live streaming on board but it is important for them to be involved in the democratic process,” Cr Chung said.

Councillor Chung also cites the issue of accuracy in minute taking where “the draft minutes often do not reflect what was happening at the meeting.”

Inner West independent councillor Pauline Lockie said that live streaming is also important and a behaviour modifier for councillors who often get carried away in the fray.

“I’m aware of live streaming even in the middle of a heated debate and you realise everything you say is recorded,” Cr Lockie said.

Potts Point heritage expert Andrew Woodhouse, who attends many City of Sydney meetings, said, “We could all stay at home, put our feet up with a hot cup of cocoa and watch the meetings drag on and it would also hold them to be more accountable.”

“It is a modern world and the Lord Mayor loves to talk about having a global connected city but how can you have this if you don’t embrace digital technology?” Cr Chung said.



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