

Leon County Board of County Commissioners

Cover Sheet for Agenda #11

April 10, 2012

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator 

Title: Request to Schedule a Virtual Town Hall Meeting for Tuesday, June 5, 2012 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

County Administrator Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department/ Division Review:	Alan Rosenzweig, Deputy County Administrator
Lead Staff/ Project Team:	Pat Curtis, MIS Director Jon D. Brown, Director, Community and Media Relations

Fiscal Impact:

This item has no fiscal impact to the County.

Staff Recommendation:

Option #1: Schedule a Virtual Town Hall Meeting for Tuesday, June 5, 2012 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Report and Discussion

Background:

At its November 15, 2011 meeting, at Chairman Akinyemi's request, the Board directed staff to prepare an agenda item regarding scheduling a virtual town hall meeting for Board consideration.

Analysis:

The County has traditionally scheduled and conducted a variety of community meetings, including town hall meetings, throughout the County. These meetings have been conducted at community centers, public/private schools, and other local facilities. However, the attendance at these meetings may be limited by citizens' ability/desire to actually go to the location.

To expand the Board's interaction with its citizens, scheduling the proposed virtual town hall meeting would align with the Board's Strategic Initiative – Governance: *“Implement strategies to further engage citizens, including: Develop and provide Virtual Town Hall meeting (G3).”*

Staff will develop a proposed agenda for the virtual town hall meeting for Board consideration. The virtual town hall meeting would not be considered a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board, but would serve as another forum to receive citizen input. The regular June meeting schedule would remain unchanged.

After extensive review and evaluation of a number of different technologies, the following provides staff recommendations on conducting the meeting:

- The physical location of the meeting would take place in the County Commission chambers and would be open to the public to attend in person.
- The proposed date and time would be Tuesday, June 5, 2012, from 6:00 and 8:00 pm.
- Extensive advertising/outreach would occur prior to the meeting, including news advisories/releases, newspaper advertisements, “The Link,” web-based promotions, outreach to neighborhood associations, and other civic groups.
- The meeting would be simulcast on Comcast Channel 16 and the County's website.
- A web address would be broadcast on the television screen during the entire time the meeting is being conducted. Citizens would be prompted to go to the website to participate in the meeting.
- At the website, citizens could watch the meeting or only utilize the interactive portion of the meeting (they could continue to watch the meeting on TV).
- At the website, citizens would have the opportunity to send in direct questions to the Board; this would be done through either a form on the website or via a dedicated email account.
- A staff member would be designated as the meeting facilitator to monitor the email account and web page, and would receive the real-time input from the citizens for Board and staff response.

- Polling of online participants could be accomplished during the meeting. Depending upon the type of poll, two options would be available.
 - Pre-defined questions could be set up in advance and “revealed” throughout the meeting for the participants to respond. Results would be tallied and presented.
 - If, during the meeting, the Board would like a response to a question(s) from the participants, then the question could be verbally announced (as well as posted on the TV/web site) and citizens could email an instant response.
- Poll results would be displayed on the overhead screens in the Chamber, which could be displayed on the County’s website.
- Staff is reviewing and evaluating the potential utilization of the County’s Twitter account and/or Facebook page as a means to receive input during the virtual town hall meeting.

The proposed method allows citizens to be a part of the Virtual Town Hall meeting with minimal technical issues to the citizens and at no cost to the County. The review of other technologies found that there is often a requirement for other specialized software to be downloaded to an individual’s home computer or Internet-based electronic device (at a cost to the County for each participant). The approach recommended requires no special software to be downloaded to the citizen’s device and no concerns about the citizen’s user experience because of their connectivity type and speed, and the size/age/robustness of the user’s computer. Vendor-specific solutions may have service quality and functionality issues when impacted by large numbers of audience members.

Staff believes the proposed recommended solution is the best initial direction to immediately increase access to County townhall meetings for the citizens of Leon County. This direction provides the County a solid foundation to build upon for additional options with expanding technology in the future.

Options:

1. Schedule a Virtual Town Hall Meeting for Tuesday, June 5, 2012 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.
2. Schedule a Virtual Town Hall Meeting for an alternate date.
3. Do not approve to schedule a Virtual Town Hall Meeting for June 5, 2012.
4. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1.

VSL/AR/PC/JB