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Attorney General Fox Issues Guidelines For Conducting Pub Meetings During State Of Emergency

Montana Attorney General Tim Fox issued a letter of advice in response to a request for guidan how government entities should conduct open meetings during the COVID-19 state of emerge

"The COVID-19 pandemic and social-distancing measures taken to contain its spread have crea unique challenges for public participation in their government," Fox said. "It is imperative that st local agencies adapt to the new circumstances while upholding Montanans' constitutional right access and participation. These guidelines are intended to assist public officials as they work to navigate the present challenges that have changed daily life for all of us."

The Attorney General's Office issued the letter of advice in response to a request from Wyatt Gl Custer County Attorney and president of the Montana County Attorneys Association, as well as Bozeman City Attorney Greg Sullivan. The letter of advice was drafted in consultation with the Montana Newspaper Association.

The guidelines are as follows:

Cancel Non-Essential Meetings. During this national and state COVID-19 emergency, and in lig Executive Directive Implementing Executive Orders 2-2020 and 3-2020 providing measures for operation of local government issued March 24, 2020, local governments should take all steps

possible to indefinitely suspend all non-essential public meetings of any board, agency, or com of the local government other than the governing body.

Limit Public Meetings to Critical Items Only. If a local government determines that a public m must be held, local governments should strive to limit the meeting to only those items necessit immediate or timely action by the governing body. The local government may consider using a "consent agenda" or other methods for allowing for the quickest and most efficient meeting pos

Determine Type of Meeting. In accordance with current public health and safety protocols anc national or state directives, the local government should determine the best method for holdin public meeting while protecting public health and safety. During the COVID-19 emergency, a pu meeting may be held through remote means.

Noticing the Public Meeting. The notice of any public meeting held during the COVID- 19 eme should also include information on the method by which the meeting will be held, including information about how the public may participate remotely and how documents to be discusse during the meeting can be accessed by the public.

Meetings by Remote Communication. If a meeting will be held in whole or in part through rem attendance and participation, the local government should strive, if possible, to provide a remo communication system that provides the members of the local governing body and the public ability to see, hear, and reasonably participate in the meeting.

Detailed explanations are in the full letter of advice: https://dojmt.gov/wp-content/uploads/L March272020.pdf

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