

AGENDA ITEM REQUEST FORM

Department: Rent Program

Department Head: Nicolas Traylor

Phone: 620-6564

Meeting Date: August 17, 2022

Final Decision Date Deadline: August 17, 2022

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE: On March 17, 2020, Governor Newsom signed Executive Order N-29-20, which suspended certain portions of the Ralph M. Brown Act (Cal. Gov. Code § 54950 et seq.) related to the holding of teleconferenced meetings by City legislative bodies. Among other things, Executive Order N-29-20 suspended requirements that each location from which an official accesses a teleconferenced meeting be accessible to the public. These changes were necessary to allow teleconferencing to be used as a tool for ensuring social distancing. City legislative bodies have held public meetings via videoconference and teleconference pursuant to these provisions since March 2020. These provisions of Executive Order N-29-20 expired on September 30, 2021. Prior to its expiration, California legislators passed Assembly Bill 361 (Rivas), which, among other things, continues to permit public meetings via videoconference and teleconference, where the Board makes findings of the circumstances justifying the continuing need to meet via videoconference and Teleconference. This item requests that the Board review the circumstances of the continued state of emergency posed by the spread of COVID-19, and find that the state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the public and members of Board to meet safely in person, that holding public meetings in person would present imminent risks to the health and safety of attendees, and that state and local officials continue to promote social distancing, mask wearing and vaccination.

INDICATE APPROPRIATE BODY

- | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| ☐ City Council | ☐ Redevelopment Agency | ☐ Housing Authority | ☐ Surplus Property Authority | ☐ Joint Powers Financing Authority |
| ☐ Finance Standing Committee | ☐ Public Safety Public Services Standing Committee | ☐ Local Reuse Authority | ☒ Other: <u>Rent Board</u> | |

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| ☐ Presentation/Proclamation/Commendation (3-Minute Time Limit) | | |
| ☐ Public Hearing | ☐ Regulation | ☒ Other: <u>CONSENT CALENDAR</u> |
| ☐ Contract/Agreement | ☐ Rent Board As Whole | |
| ☐ Grant Application/Acceptance | ☐ Claims Filed Against City of Richmond | |
| ☐ Resolution | ☐ Video/PowerPoint Presentation (contact KCRT @ 620.6759) | |

RECOMMENDED ACTION: ADOPT a resolution making the required findings pursuant to Government Code Section 54953(e)(3) and determining that as a result of the continued threat to public health and safety posed by the spread of COVID-19, City legislative bodies shall continue to meet via videoconference and teleconference – Rent Program (Charles Oshinuga 621-1202).

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AGENDA REPORT

DATE: August 17, 2022

TO: Chair Finlay and Members of the Rent Board

FROM: Charles Oshinuga, General Counsel

SUBJECT: Resolution Making Required Findings Pursuant to the Government Code and Directing the Rent Board to Continue to Meet Via Videoconference and Teleconference

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:

On March 17, 2020, Governor Newsom signed Executive Order N-29-20, which suspended certain portions of the Ralph M. Brown Act (Cal. Gov. Code § 54950 et seq.) related to the holding of teleconferenced meetings by City legislative bodies. Among other things, Executive Order N-29-20 suspended requirements that each location from which an official accesses a teleconferenced meeting be accessible to the public. These changes were necessary to allow teleconferencing to be used as a tool for ensuring social distancing. City legislative bodies have held public meetings via videoconference and teleconference pursuant to these provisions since March 2020. These provisions of Executive Order N-29-20 expired on September 30, 2021. Prior to its expiration, California legislators passed Assembly Bill 361 (Rivas), which, among other things, continues to permit public meetings via videoconference and teleconference, where the Board makes findings of the circumstances justifying the continuing need to meet via videoconference and Teleconference. This item requests that the Board review the circumstances of the continued state of emergency posed by the spread of COVID-19, and find that the state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the public and members of Board to meet safely in person, that holding public meetings in person would present imminent risks to the health and safety of attendees, and that state and local officials continue to promote social distancing, mask wearing and vaccination.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

ADOPT a resolution making the required findings pursuant to Government Code Section 54953(e)(3) and determining that as a result of the continued threat to public health and safety posed by the spread of COVID-19, City legislative bodies shall continue to meet via videoconference and teleconference – Rent Program (Charles Oshinuga 621-1202).

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact.

DISCUSSION:

Background

On March 17, 2020, Governor Newsom signed Executive Order N-29-20, which suspended certain portions of the Ralph M. Brown Act (Cal. Gov. Code § 54950 et seq.) related to the holding of teleconferenced meetings by City legislative bodies. Among other things, Executive Order N-29-20 suspended requirements that each location from which an official accesses a teleconferenced meeting be accessible to the public. These changes were necessary to allow teleconferencing to be used as a tool for ensuring social distancing. City legislative bodies have held public meetings via videoconference and teleconference pursuant to these provisions since March 2020. These provisions of Executive Order N-29-20 expired on September 30, 2021.

Prior to the Expiration of Executive Order N-29-20, on September 16, 2021, Assembly Bill 361 (Rivas), was signed into law by Governor Newsom, amending a portion of the Brown Act (Government Code Section 54953) to authorize the Board, during the state of emergency, to determine that, due to the spread of COVID-19, holding in-person public meetings would present an imminent risk to the health or safety of attendees, and therefore the Board must continue to meet via videoconference and teleconference. Assembly Bill 361 requires that the Board must review and ratify such a determination every thirty (30) days.

Discussion

COVID-19 continues to pose a serious threat to public health and safety. There are now Approximately 33,802 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and at least 182 deaths in the City of Richmond. That is an increase of approximately 1,328 confirmed Covid cases and 2 Covid-related deaths in 30 days. The City of Richmond has one of the highest infection rate total and the third highest death total in Contra Costa County.

Within the U.S and Contra Costa County, positive Covid cases have steadily increased over the past few weeks, as a new Covid-19 variant has arrived. Scientist are concerned the variant has the ability to escape preexisting immunity, thereby increasing the rate of infections and potential hospitalization. The impact of this variant has been felt as the City of Richmond, and many other Contra Costa cities have been placed in the “purple” tier category, representing the worst category of Covid-19 prevalence. This has prompted local city officials to send out emails advising employees of the need for social distancing, constant mask wearing, and vaccinations. Additionally, City Council has continued to pass its Resolution under AB 361, rightfully finding that holding public meetings in the Council Chambers would pose an imminent risk to the health and safety of the public.

Given the aforementioned statements and the fact that this Board holds meetings in the same chamber as Council, it's clear that holding Board meetings in person would present imminent risks to the health and safety of the public and members of Board. Therefore, public meetings cannot safely be held in person at this time.

The attached Resolution would enable the Board to continue to hold public meetings via videoconference and teleconference in order to continue to socially distance and limit the spread of COVID-19.

Recommended Action

Given the continual presence and impact of Covid-19, the need to take adequate precautions to limit the spread of the virus and subsequent death, is greater now more than ever. As such, staff members recommend that the Board adopt a resolution making the required findings pursuant to Government Code Section 54953(e)(3) and determining that as a result of the continued threat to public health and safety posed by the spread of COVID-19, City policy bodies shall continue to meet via videoconference and teleconference.

DOCUMENTS ATTACHED:

Attachment 1 – Resolution 22-09

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RESOLUTION NO. 22-09

**MAKING FINDINGS TO ALLOW CONTINUED USE OF TELECONFERENCING FOR
MEETINGS OF THE RICHMOND RENT BOARD PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS OF AB
361**

WHEREAS, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor adopted a series of Executive Orders allowing the legislative bodies of local governments to meet remotely via teleconference through September 30, 2021 so long as other provisions of the Ralph M. Brown Act were followed; and

WHEREAS, on September 16, 2021, the Governor signed into law as an urgency measure, AB 361 a bill that amends the Brown Act to allow local policy bodies to continue to meet by teleconferencing during a state of emergency without complying with restrictions in state law that would otherwise apply, provided that the policy bodies make certain findings at least once every 30 days; and

WHEREAS, the Richmond Rent Board is a local governmental body that was established as an independent agency and vested with broad powers of administering and executing the provisions of the Fair Rent, Just Cause, and Homeowner Protection Ordinance; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Richmond Municipal Code Section 11.100.060(m), to ensure the integrity and autonomy of the Rent Board, Measure L mandates the Rent Board “be an integral part of the government of the City [of Richmond]”, and establishes that the Rent Board “shall exercise its powers and duties under [Chapter 11.100] independent from the City Council, City Manager, and City Attorney, except by request of the [Rent] Board”; and

WHEREAS, as an independent agency, the Richmond Rent Board operates independent from and is not subject the City of Richmond City Council’s Resolutions governing boards, commissions, and other local policy bodies; and

WHEREAS, given its degree of independence and autonomy from City Council, the City of Richmond Rent Board has separately considered the current state of health guidance related to public meetings in Contra Costa County and finds it necessary to continue with remote meetings for the next 30 days to promote public health and safety; and

WHEREAS, in its future considerations of whether remote meetings are still necessary, the City of Richmond Rent Board shall consider and take into account the City of Richmond City Council’s decision on whether to continue remotely, prior to reaching its ultimate findings on the issue; and

WHEREAS, the entire State of California remains under a proclaimed state of emergency as declared by the Governor of the state of California related to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, the California Department of Public Health continues to require the use of face coverings for the unvaccinated in indoor settings in order to help stop the spread of the virus. The Health Officer for Contra Costa County published “Recommendations for Safely Holding Public Meetings” on September 20, 2021. Those recommendations “strongly recommend” on-online meetings, that local agencies should provide options for the public to participate without having to attend meetings in

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person, and that social distancing should be used, including six feet of spacing between all in attendance; and

WHEREAS, without limiting any requirements under applicable federal, state or local pandemic-related rules, orders or directives of the Health Officer of Contra Costa County, who has advised that for group gatherings indoors, such as meetings of city council's, boards and commissions, people can increase safety and greatly reduce risks to health and safety of attendees from COVID-19 by maximizing ventilation, wearing well-fitting masks, using physical distancing where the vaccination status of attendees is not known, and considering holding the meeting remotely if feasible, especially for long meetings, with many attendees with unknown vaccination status and where ventilation may not be optimal; and

WHEREAS, the City of Richmond has maintained its declaration of a local emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic and recommends masks wearing, and social distancing while indoors; and

WHEREAS, the City of Richmond Rent Board has met remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic and can continue to do so in a manner that allows public participation and transparency while minimizing health risks to members, staff, and the public who would be present with in-person meetings while this emergency continues.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the City of Richmond Rent Board finds as follows:

1. As described above, the State of California, and the City of Richmond remains in a state of emergency due to the COVI-19 pandemic. At this meeting the City of Richmond Rent Board has considered the circumstances of the state of emergency; and
2. As described above State and County, and local officials continue to recommend measures to promote physical distancing and other social distancing measures, in some settings; and
3. As described above meetings of this body in person would present imminent risks to the safety of attendees, and the state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of members to meet safely in public; and:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That the City of Richmond Rent Board approves the continued use of teleconferencing for public meetings of City legislative bodies for the next 30 days based on the findings required by Government Code Section 549539(e), as amended by AB 361; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That at least for the next 30 days, meetings of the City of Richmond Rent Board will continue to occur exclusively by teleconferencing technology (and not by any in-person meetings or any other meetings with public access to the places where any policy body member is present for the meeting). Such meeting of the City of Richmond Rent Board that occur by teleconferencing technology will provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the body and will otherwise occur in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the public attending the meeting via teleconferencing, and;

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That the Executive Director of the Rent Program is directed to place a resolution substantially similar to this resolution on the agenda of a future meeting of the City of Richmond Rent Board within the next 30 days.

APPROVED by the City of Richmond Rent Board at a regular meeting on August 17, 2022 by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTAINED:

ABSENT:

RENT BOARD CHAIR

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

ATTEST:

GENERAL COUNSEL

RENT BOARD CLERK

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