

To: Members of Dublin City Council
From: Dana L. McDaniel, City Manager
Date: August 2, 2022
Initiated By: Jenny Delgado, Clerk of Council and Michael Farrar, Director of Information Technology
Re: Audio Visual Solution Review for Council Chamber

Background

At the request of Council, Staff investigated options regarding A/V technology that currently exists in the Council Chambers. Staff was also asked to review hosted solutions that could potentially be implemented to provide a clearer, visual experience for users watching remote or via YouTube post council meetings.

As part of this investigation, the Staff looked at other municipalities and solutions that use remote director/management systems, like Swagit. The City of Westerville was specifically reviewed to understand their in-person director solutions. Shared Vision Communications and 543 Production Studio of Westerville were also engaged for their professional opinion and recommendations regarding Dublin's the current solution.

Hosted Remote/In Person Director Solutions

Swagit, an industry leading organization, is a remote director solution where a team based in Texas would remotely control the feed of the cameras and live stream. Their solution would require new hardware installation, which would break the integration with WebEx for remote participation. Utilizing Swagit would require an upfront investment of \$57,000 and an annual service cost of \$15,000 to remotely direct and produce our videos. Cost could be negotiated based on specific needs but would be complicated. Swagit also does not integrate with the Granicus Live Manager software currently being installed. Swagit was recently purchased by Rocksolid and would not work with any of our current infrastructure. Additionally, Swagit had concerns with the size of the Council Chambers. Swagit informed us that their camera system does not reach those distances to provide clear video feeds. To move forward with their hosting solution, the City would have to move away from Granicus to the Rocksolid solution.

543 Production is a local video production company that is based in Westerville Ohio and currently provides an in person director solution for the City of Westerville's Council meetings. A.J. Fox, owner and operator of 543 Studios, came out and assessed the current setup in Council Chambers. Their service would be an in person solution where a team member of 543 Studios would control the feed of the cameras/audio during the meetings.

Like Swagit, they would require different hardware as the currently installed hardware is not compatible. Again, we would also lose the direct integration with Webex for remote participation. 543 Studios would require an upfront cost of \$37,000 and a yearly cost of \$11,000. These operating costs would be for only Council meetings, any additional meetings would be \$450 per meeting plus any ongoing equipment upgrade costs. We would, however, be able to keep using our Granicus solution with the in person director options.

Challenges with utilizing these services would be the loss of remote participation via WebEx and replacing the currently installed Cisco cameras and codec with a new technology provided by the supplier. These solutions would both require a person to act as the director, remote or in person, to operate all meetings functions and to operate the camera/audio functionality. Additional cost will be required to set up, run new cabling and purchase new camera solutions that would work with the director's solution. Finally, these costs quoted only cover the cost of Council meetings and additional money would be required for any other Board and Commission meetings that would need to be streamed.

To fully understand the scope of switching solutions, Staff engaged with New Era to determine what the total cost would be to remove existing solutions and automated equipment. Total cost of removal of existing cabling, cameras and codec would be around \$80,000.

The current Cisco solution installed in the Council chambers represent a total investment of \$425,000. With the additional cost to remove equipment, \$80,000, this would put the total of investment in the council chambers at \$505,000, before we spend any additional funds on implementing a new solution. Moving to a Swagit solution with their cameras and hardware to be set up would be roughly \$72,000 investment with a 15,000 yearly cost for the two council meetings a month, and \$80,000 to remove our current solution would take our first year costs to \$152,000. Any other meetings would require additional investment. Furthermore, having 543 studios implement new cameras and cabling would be around \$48,000, removal of the current solution would be \$80,000, with the \$12,000 yearly cost and \$450 per additional meeting including any upgrades to equipment as we move forward would take our first year costs to \$128,000.

Professional Engagement

Staff consulted with both Shared Vision and 543 Production Studio regarding our current feed and video quality. We asked them to provide their professional recommendations, as well as any potential improvements. Both agreed audio quality was exceptional and video quality was very good considering the system was 100% automated. They agreed a rear static fourth camera would help with the production and overall operations of the meeting for wide-angle shots when multiple people are talking. That recommendation was implemented and is operational. Additionally, some programming to preset the focusing values on each camera position would help with the transitioning between shots. Further,

they each cautioned that there will always be glitches or issues that pop up from time to time, even with in person director solutions. Their bottom line assessment was the improvement in quality vs cost would be very marginal.

Recommendation

Based on the information provided, it is Staff's recommendation to keep the existing system and continue to work with New Era to improve the issues. Staff further recommends the hiring of a full time, dedicated resource to own and manage all AV solutions across the City. This new position would be requested during the Operating Budget process for 2023. Finally, as the Legislative Affairs team finalizes testing with Granicus's Live Manager, they would be able to tag the agenda and playback of the video, making it easier to navigate council meetings postproduction.

These recommendations come from a team of City of Dublin Staff representing the offices of the Clerk of Council, the City Manager, Communication and Public Information, and Information Technology, gathered together to review the options and evaluate the potential opportunities. Staff felt that the loss of integration with WebEx for remote participation would be detrimental to the success of meetings. Additionally, the professional feedback from Shared Vision and 543 Production Studio regarding the marginal improvement to quality from removing the existing \$425,000 investment was not favorable. The team felt that the investment of removing the existing solution and implementing a new solution could be better used by further investment with New Era and the authorization of a new position within IT to manage all AV equipment across the City and provide dedicated support all Council, Board and Commission meetings.