

**Survey of Washington City Council Leaders**  
**Concerning the Effects of Television on Council and Community**  
**Bill Gothmann, Councilmember**  
**City of Spokane Valley**  
**1-25-08**



Survey of Washington City Council Leaders  
Concerning the Effects of Television on Council and Community  
Bill Gothmann, 1-25-08

**Introduction:**

This questionnaire was sent to 50 Washington City Council Chairs. The results are shown following:

Dear [Title] [Name]:

Spokane Valley is considering whether to televise and/or webcast our City Council Meetings. I understand that [City Name] provides this service at the present time. I would appreciate your insights in answering the following four questions by replying to this email. Your comments would greatly help us in making this decision.

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?
2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?
3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?
4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

Bill Gothmann, Councilmember  
City of Spokane Valley  
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Spokane Valley, WA 99206  
Phone: 509-688-0047  
bgothmann@spokanevalley.org

**Auburn**

**From:** Sue Singer [mailto:leeandsuesinger@comcast.net]  
**Sent:** Monday, January 21, 2008 10:02 AM  
**To:** 'Bill Gothmann'  
**Subject:** RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Hello Bill  
I would be happy to answer your questions. See below.  
Sue

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?

Auburn Council has a culture of civility, and that has not changed at all. I personally find myself more conscious of being as articulate as possible, which has improved my public speaking. We have one council member who likes to speak to "his constituents" - looking into the camera to explain something in detail to his audience. This frankly annoys the rest of us who are trying to get down to business.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?

The discussion is less open now. Any disagreements are handled in committee meetings. Every issue is now vetted through 2 council committees so 6 of 7 council members have had a chance to discuss it. Unless something comes up at the last minute there are no questions from the council. Some of this may be because our more shy members are less apt to speak up. We are also more conscious of the possibility of saying something that will get us into legal trouble.

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?

Many more people are interested in what we are doing. Strangers approach me regularly to comment that they saw me on TV. More people are expressing interest in running for office. There is far more understanding of what we are doing. We have a better opportunity to inform the community.

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

I feel it is an important service to provide because it better connects the people to their government. I would suggest asking your local cable provider to teach a class on how best to present yourself on camera.

By the way, we don't televise the audience participation part of the agenda. The Mayor thinks we would have too many people just wanting to see themselves on TV if we give them their "moment in the sun." I disagree with him. I think it makes us look like we just don't want anyone to hear us be criticized. We limit people to 3 minutes already so I think that would take care of the problem.

Hope this helps.

Sue Singer

## **Bainbridge Island**

Hi Bill,

I have left a message on your phone contact and looking forward to chatting with you regarding our TV coverage.....Bill Knobloch

City Council  
Bainbridge Island  
[www.billknobloch.com](http://www.billknobloch.com)

I called Bill at Bainbridge Island. The following are his comments from that conversation:

In the long run, use TV. You are going to have a problem. Some Council members will pontificate, initially, and use it as a soap box. The Chair must crack the whip. After a while, you will ignore the cameras.

There is no doubt that you should have TV. I get emails that say, "I watched you and ... ." If you want to operate in a vacuum [relative to constituents], don't use TV.

It influences the Council-community in a very positive manner. People feel part of the communications loop.

We have PEG. The City gets a franchise fee and passes it through to Bainbridge Island TV [non-profit corporation]. We now have two channels, and that second channel is very valuable. Right now we are renewing our contract with Comcast.

Don't exclude Public Comments from the broadcast.

A city your size -- you HAVE to televise.

Feel free to contact Scott Schmidt at BITV, 206-280-2980.  
-- Bill Gothmann

## **Bonney Lake**

**From:** Dan Swatman [mailto:danswatman@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, January 21, 2008 9:25 AM  
**To:** 'Bill Gothmann'  
**Subject:** RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Bill,

Thanks for asking I have included my thoughts below.

Hopefully it works for you and you can fill me in on the details if you go to AWC :)

Thanks,  
Dan Swatman

Spokane Valley is considering whether to televise and/or webcast our City Council Meetings. I understand that Bonney Lake provides this service at the present time. We do not currently do either, only the audio is available in a recorded from online which can be downloaded and played, its in MP3 format.

I would appreciate your insights in answering the following four questions by replying to this email. Your comments would greatly help us in making this decision.

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all? This is one of the main questions we also wrestle with, we have a slim majority which will just not buy into televising meetings. The best ideas I have heard around this is that council use the council meeting for more of the public information time. We have four meetings each month two of them being workshop discussion type meetings were most of the issues are hashed out. The official council meeting is the main one which makes sense to me to televise (our public cable system time is shared via an agreement we have with Rainer communications, they manage public access for many cities in our area) because we are charged for the time. Thus with all the possibly contentious debates not happening at the official formal council meeting it becomes a great forum for informing the public what the city is doing for them, how they are doing it and why they are doing it. As you might guess I see TV as a great tool if used carefully for getting information to the public.

Many cities large and small in our area do broadcast their meetings including Sumner, Orting, Fife and Tacoma are a few I know of.

Since we have not yet broadcast our meetings I can't tell you the effect of it on our city but I am a huge fan and firmly believe the value greatly out ways the possible bad effects of making some uncomfortable. My main issue is the transparency of government what better way to allow the public to see their government at work, no doubt TV is a sharp tool and it needs to be handle by adults.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

While I really like the idea of web casting it would seem to be more of a better solution of recording and latter playback not live, though there are many nice things you can add to it such as agenda scrolls and other overlays.

**Burien**

From: Joan McGilton [joanm@burienwa.gov]

To: Bill Gothmann

Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?

This was of some initial concern when the council decided to telvise. I think it puts us on our "good behaviour" the majority of the time. We do get some grandstanding by select councilmembers when they are not of the majority opinion. I also notice campaigning on screen during election season. But we have a very forthright council who are willing to dicuss and debate on camera. I think this kind of open discussion gives the community some sense of how difficult some of ;these decisions can be.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?

Yes, I was there. After the first few months, things settled in for the most part. The council member who was most pleased to be televised was not reelected, either time he ran.

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?

We are a small community, 31,000 residents that incorporated in 1993 but we have 3 and 4 generations who know us and are not afraid to speak up. We are recognized personally when we are in the public arena. TV may give us some more visibility but, generally, when I am stopped at the grocery store or post office, the comments that I get are positive and helpful. I don't think we get any more "naysayers" than we did before we were televised. The same folks who don't like government don't stay away because they can watch us on TV. They still come to council and confront us directly.

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

We started out just televising the regular council meetings to save money but we found that our study sessions deserved the same air time. We are on 4 times per month live and then the weekly tapes get played several times during the week.

The other piece that is a lot of fun is when we invite people to give a 5 minute presentation on the cool stuff that they are doing. The high school kids are the best. We had a "Trash" fashion show with young women from the Occupational Skills Center. We try to get school district representatives on occassionally as well as our non-profit groups and boards and commissions. We hope to do more of this through our public access TV group but they don't do it for free.

Anyone of us on council would say that TV is a critical part of our community outreach, both on our good and bad days. .

Good luck. My home phone is xxx-xxx-xxxx. Joan

### **DuPont**

From: Jennifer Crouse [jrcrouse@ci.dupont.wa.us]  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Subject: RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Dear Councilmember Gothmann,

Thank you so much for your inquiry, it is my pleasure to respond. I hope my answers below are of help. If you have any further questions, please feel free to write again.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Crouse

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?

When we first started telecasting I noticed a change in the tone of the meetings, everyone was very careful about what they said and somewhat nervous. It stopped a lot of the chitchat and made the meeting proceed more formally. Once we got used to having the cameras there though, it was easy to forget them, especially when discussing a hot topic. I also noticed that we all paid more attention to our appearance for those meetings. We only televise the first meeting of the month.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?

There is one councilmember who seemed to choose only the televised meetings to introduce sensitive topics and make speeches. Otherwise, I didn't notice any change in the discussion.

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?

I must say that this has been a way to increase the level of communication between the council and the community significantly. I was not expecting so many people to watch, and I was often surprised by people commenting that they had seen me on tv.

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

I would strongly urge you to do this, making council meetings available on tv or streaming video online is an effective way to increase communication and participation. Many people are uncomfortable coming to sit in on a council meeting or have other priorities for their time. Making the meeting available for viewing from their home and at their convenience has been incredibly well received.

### **Ellensburg**

From: "Nancy Lillquist" <lillquis@kvalley.com>  
Date: Tue, 22 Jan 2008 10:48:57 -0800

Mr. Gothmann,

I recently replaced Obie O'Brien as mayor of Ellensburg and was asked to respond to your questions.

1. Most of the time I personally forget the camera is on and interact with the people in the room as I would normally. The camera probably does make some difference, however. Some people may bring issues and make statements to the Council because they know they have "air-time", which can be useful for publicizing community events. The Council enforces rules regarding slanderous speech, promotional speech, and keeping topics to those the Council at least has some authority over. The camera may make others more uncomfortable and shy about speaking.

2. The meetings were televised long before I joined the Council 6 years ago.

3. I am frequently surprised by how many people watch the proceedings. I'll hear "yeah, I saw that discussion on TV last night.." I believe it helps people to stay informed about City issues and how their Council operates. And it's helpful for people who want to follow a topic or discussion but don't want to leave home to sit in the Council Chambers in uncomfortable chairs on cold snowy evenings.

4. Do it. It's good for the community. I cannot think of a downside.

Nancy Lillquist

Mayor, City of Ellensburg

### **Enumclaw**

From: kmahelona@comcast.net

To: Bill Gothmann

Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Bill,

My answers to your questions are noted below. Feel free to request additional clarification on any point.

Regards,

Kevin

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all? Neither has had any impact on our council discussions or decisions.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)? Telecasting predated my term however webcasting is relatively new. As noted in question 1 - there has been no impact to council discussions.

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations? It has not influenced the tone or nature of community relationships. It has been surprising to find out how many households do watch our council meetings - either live or delayed broadcast. The feedback I've received from our citizens is they appreciate not being required to come to city hall to find out what is going on and not relying on the newspaper's version of events.

The additional advantage of webcasting is it makes our meetings accessible to those who reside outside of our city boundaries but who have business or other interests within city limits.

Making council meetings readily accessible to your community via telecast or webcast is a visible and tangible commitment by the council to meeting the intent of the open meetings act and transparency in governmental activities.

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting? You should move forward with this.

### **Everett**

Dear Councilman Gothmann:

The City of Everett has been televising its City Council meetings on a tape-delay basis for many years. We recently switched to "live" telecast, and we continue to air the tape-delay format at various times during the week.

I will attempt to answer your specific questions by number:

1 & 2. When the program first began, I was not here but I understand that the Council members were somewhat "nervous" about saying/doing something that would be viewed by their constituents (the citizens asked for the meetings to be televised, and the Council at the time reluctantly implemented it). Since few citizens attend our meetings, many people only see our proceedings by watching them on television. I am sure most of my colleagues would agree that we are sensitive to the fact that our comments/conduct are on public display, but it doesn't override the discussion or the comments we make. We have had instances where certain Council members seem to use the television to "posture" on specific issues or to stir up controversy, particularly during election cycles, but this has been very minimal. We are more likely to experience a special interest group or some other organization's attempt to advocate their cause at our meeting, perhaps because they know it will be aired (although the presence of the written media correspondents would insure that their point, if interesting/controversial, would be printed anyway).

3. The community has viewed our telecasting in a very positive way and we have received praise for our recent addition to live-casting. I have many citizens comment that they "saw me on TV . . ." and I receive email and phone calls from citizens who was the meeting on TV and either did or didn't like what I said. So, I think it has been a very positive influence on community relations. Incidentally, our IT department is currently evaluating how/when we can webcast our meetings.

4. No other comments. Good luck!

Brenda Stonecipher  
Everett City Council

**Kelso**

From: David Futcher [David@futcher-henry.com]  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Subject: RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Bill,

Thanks for your message. Our meetings are shown on a local public access cable channel. They replay them on Saturday and on our 'off' weeks in between meetings. We fund the public access group with some of the franchise taxes we collect on the cable services. I'll give you my formal answers to the questions you posed; if you want any off-the-record reflections, feel free to give me a call. ;)

1. The council usually has few attending the meetings, so the 'big brother is watching' feeling probably helps keep the proceedings more formal and focused than they might otherwise be. Of course, the potentially larger audience also can result in some slight grandstanding.
2. The meetings were televised prior to my time on the council, so I can't speak to any change that may have occurred when they started.
3. I believe televising the meetings has given community members an opportunity to feel like they can 'keep an eye' on us without having to come sit in on the meetings. It also gives us another forum for disseminating information that we think is relevant to a large portion of the population.
4. My advice would be to embrace this or any other opportunity that helps demystify the council meetings for your citizens. I'm a believer in open government being a win for both the community and the electeds. Better communication, regardless of the medium, will make your life easier in the long run.

Good luck as you consider this opportunity!

David

Futcher-Henry Group, PS

David Futcher, CPA

**Kent**

Council member Gothmann,

To answer your questions:

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?  
Honestly, it hasn't influenced our discussions at all - most council members weren't even aware when we made the transition.
2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?  
No - we were already accustomed to having our meetings video-taped and shown over and over on TV so having them live really didn't have an impact.
3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?  
So far, the community seems to be really enjoying it- seeing things in real time. We get more immediate feedback.
4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

Go for it - I think it is a good thing.

Starting this January we have a new council president - Council member Debbie Raplee. I will ask her to respond to your questions as well.

Good luck,

Debbie Ranniger

**Kirkland**

**From:** James Lauinger [mailto:JLauinger@ci.kirkland.wa.us]  
**Sent:** Monday, January 21, 2008 12:05 PM  
**To:** Bill Gothmann  
**Subject:** RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all? *I really do not think that the telecasting has effected our discussions .We have used video for some time, and moving to a live broadcast and web really did not effect our rich and candid discussions.*
2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)? *No, none whatsoever. I actually never really think about it.*
3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations? *I know that all CC members take the endeavor seriously...we will often ask for staff clarification or explanation of an acronym for both the "visiting audience and those tuned in at home." We hear regularly that citizens get a substantial amount of public knowledge from our televised meetings. Viewing is fairly high, too.*
4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting? *We believe it to be a significant additional service that brings the citizen closer to their government and to their electeds. We are always looking for positive additions to services that have an immediate public benefit. This, along with the city's ability to access all government documents electronically as well as the week's Council Packet underscores an open local government process....something that local government may be as the only governmental body accomplishing today! Hope this is of a help, Jim*

### **Lynnwood**

#### **MEMORANDUM . . .**

**DATE: February 1, 2008**

**TO: Council Member Bill Gothmann  
City of Spokane Valley, WA**

**FR: Council President Loren Simmonds  
City of Lynnwood, WA**

**RE: Telecasting/Web Casting Council Meetings**

#### **COMMENTS:**

**Thank you for your e-mail dated January 21, 2008. My hoped is that my response will be helpful in your deliberations.**

1. In what manner does telecasting /web casting influence the character of

**Council discussions, if at all?**

**Lynnwood only provides delayed TV broadcasts of business meetings – not work sessions. The items on the business meeting agenda have all been**

**discussed in work sessions from one to several times. This cuts down discussion time in front of the TV camera. We also encourage Council Members to limit responses to 90 seconds to avoid possible monopoly of time – works most of the time pretty well.**

- 2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the telecasting?**

**The discussions have become more issue oriented and fewer personal attacks; more professional and orderly. The Council has to discipline itself and allow the other Members to request “edits” when deemed necessary. Either the Mayor or the Council President is usually the first to speak up if a situation arises.**

- 3. In what manner does telecasting/web casting influence Council – Community Relations?**

**To the best of our knowledge, 25-30% of our citizens watch the delayed video on a regular basis. These folks know the “players” and the “issues” and form the foundation of the voting block in our community. They also serve as informal ambassadors to others in the community – be that positive or negative.**

**The City web site also carries agendas and support documentation for those really interested plus a delayed audio recording of the meetings including the work sessions. This seems to cut down on public information requests.**

- 4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley?**

**Our current budget for TV broadcasts is about \$15,000 per year. It is worth every penny in my opinion. Please note we only have a weekly local paper in Lynnwood and no radio or TV. Our City newsletter comes out quarterly.**

## **Pasco**

Upon receipt of the survey, Mayor Joyce Olson of Pasco asked me to call her. The following are my notes from our conversation:

We have no regrets we spent the money [on televising]. The public expects and demands transparency in government.

There was a volunteer citizen who videotaped the entire Council meeting and then gave it to our public TV station to broadcast. However, because Council ran more than two hours and the station only permitted two hours, we found he was editing the media – at times to favor his view. Also, there were a couple of Council members who played to the camera. We decided to have our own camera in a fixed position that showed a panoramic view of the entire Council. This stopped the showboating. However, the disadvantage is that you cannot see the personal expressions of the Council members.

It has been a positive change. In the past, some member shot from the hip. Now, you must do your homework and understand the issue. It has eliminated showboating. You have to be polite and courteous. It makes the meetings more productive.

More people are now watching the meetings. We are closer to our constituents. New people are seeing the meetings.

The biggest issue is cost.

We anticipated soapboxing during public comment periods being an issue but it just never happened. There was only one person and we permitted him to make his pitch. We have not had people coming to meetings just so they can be on TV.

We have had TV for two years.

One individual who regularly attends wants us to ship a large rock to Israel (for world peace). Now, when he gets up to speak, I ask him if it is about the rock. When he says it is, I tell him the Council has made their decision, and I do not invite him to the podium.

--Bill Gothmann

## **Port Orchard**

From: Michelle Merlino [mmerlino@ci.port-orchard.wa.us]  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Hi Mr. Gothmann

Our Council meetings are currently being broadcast by our local cable channel. I have answered your questions below:

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all? We have seen no change in the character of the Council discussion.
2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)? I attend all City Council meetings, as the City Clerk and have not noted any change in the discussion.
3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations? Again no noted change has been identified.
4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting? The only comment I can make is we have more citizens attending our meetings. Also because you cannot see the cameras, the Council and audience do not even realize they are being filmed.

I hope this answers your questions, please let me know if you have any further questions.

Michelle Merlino  
City Clerk  
City of Port Orchard

### **Port Townsend**

Hi Bill

I apologize for the delay in my reply, I have been down with the flu. Thank you for asking about our televised meetings. In my opinion there is the good and the bad that comes with being on TV, but that extends to having the media of any form in on meetings. Having the television on them can cause councilors to be circumspect in their comments or on a soap box depending on the character of the councilor. Many councilors will play to the camera. I have been on the council for 6 years and the meetings have been televised for the entire duration (they started in the late 1990's), so I don't have knowledge of the change (if any). I believe the community appreciates that the meetings are assessable, though for

us we only do local cable programming and not web streaming, which I think is really a must these days. We hope to have that soon along with the ability to search the web streaming by agenda items, with a software program we have researched. Given that we are only on cable that has limited the audience and in fact the number has gone down over the years (what with the proliferation of satellite dishes). I have seen citizens on several occasions get out of bed or off the couch come down to testify about an item under debate because they saw us on TV- that obviously is the good news! Good Luck with your decision. Open government is always the goal in my opinion. Best, Michelle Sandoval

Michelle Sandoval  
Mayor City of Port Townsend, WA

### **Redmond**

**From:** Nancy McCormick [mailto:nmccormi@halcyon.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 22, 2008 10:55 PM  
**To:** Bill Gothmann  
**Cc:** Michelle McGehee; Patrick Hirsch  
**Subject:** ebcasting Council Meetings

Mr. Gothmann,

I will be happy to try to answer your questions from my perspective but I have also forwarded your email to the staff member who does the actual work.

Redmond has televised our meeting, both regular Council meetings and study sessions since 1996.

The first few weeks there was probably some nervousness over "being televised" but Councilmembers and staff quickly got over that and I think it is rare that anyone even thinks about it anymore. The TV cameras are on the wall, so unlike in the beginning, you don't have the cameraman at the back of the room to remind you your every word is going to be on tape. I don't feel that being on live TV has affected our discussions at all; there have been a few times where someone may search for a better word to use that the first thing that came to mind, but overall, being televised has not limited discussion at all.

#3 - It is amazing the number of people in the grocery store etc., or especially if you're out doorbelling, when someone will say to you, I know who your are or I saw you on TV last week.

I think the having the meeting televised has increased community awareness of issues a great deal. Not that we'd be at the top of the ratings, but a significant number of people do watch. Our meetings are replayed three or four times a

week after the initial "live" meeting. In addition, Planning Commission and Arts Commission meetings are also televised.

4. Having the meetings on a tape, provided by the cameraman is nice for those times when someone misses a Council meeting; they can watch the tape and be caught up with their fellow Councilmembers discussion, see what the public might have said under Items from the Audience at the beginning of the meeting. In general, I view having the meetings televised (and webstreamed as of a little over a year ago) a huge plus for our citizens, a very positive experience. Go for it, especially as a newer City. Also, please feel free to contact Patrick Hirsch for any more technical questions you may have, [PHIRSCH@REDMOND.GOV](mailto:PHIRSCH@REDMOND.GOV) I am also forwarding Patrick's email to me.

Nancy McCormick  
Redmond City Councilmember

**From:** [Patrick Hirsch](#)  
**To:** [Nancy McCormick](#) ; [Talley Hudson](#)  
**Cc:** [Jane Christenson](#)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 22, 2008 5:47 PM  
**Subject:** RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

I would be most happy to respond however it appears these questions are directed more towards the possible effects cablecasting may have on councilmember/public relationships and the legislative process in general.

Based on my experience in nearly a dozen jurisdictions the net effect is pretty minor as far as the "electeds" are concerned, as the novelty tends to wear off pretty quickly (electioneering aside).

As far as public impact, it ebbs and flows with the tenor and scope of the issues but tends to remain a highly valued method for keeping in touch with local government and lends legitimacy to the perception of transparency.

Feel free to have Mr. Gothmann or staff to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Patrick

**Richland**

From: John Fox [jfoxishere@charter.net]  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Dear Mr. Gothmann,

Background:

Richland began televising council meetings before I joined the council; I believe it was about 2000 or so, in conjunction with a cable TV franchise agreement which dedicated a channel for use by the city and school district in exchange for an additional fee or tax on cable customers with the proceeds paid into a restricted fund for the city's TV production operation.

Our operation funds a staff of 1.7 FTE technicians at a 2007 annual cost of about \$150K. We now televise the regular twice monthly council meetings and the monthly meetings of the planning, parks & rec, and utility advisory commissions. In addition, we have a monthly schedule of interviews with council members, senior staff, community events or special interest meetings. Programs are rerun at different hours of the week. Available cultural TV programs are shown in the remaining time to provide a full daytime and evening schedule. Pasco now televises its council meetings, but Kennewick does not. now, to answer your questions.

1. It has made them more civil and less contentious. Members are well aware they are on TV and rather more careful in wording. Staff is more sensitive, though, about criticism or sometimes even raising a lot of questions about a staff recommendation or, say, a street project well behind schedule.

2. I attended some council meetings before TV as a member of the parks and planning commissions, and saw some rude and insulting discussions. At present, we can disagree on particular issues without personalizing them.

3. It's surprising to me how many people watch and comment on it. It increases emails some. A certain segment of the community pays attention to it, though there is some migration to satellite TV now among those viewers. We have some recent requests for showing workshops "where everything is decided, anyway"!

4. I recommend it. It is a positive influence on council member behavior, at least in the meetings and in our community a good connection with those in the public having a serious interest in community affairs. Our meetings are also shown in Kennewick, and I have had comments from people there and even visitors who have seen it in their hotel.. I don't see a downside, except cost. will be interested to hear what you decide.

John Fox

**Sammamish**

From: Lee Fellingge [<mailto:lfellingge@ci.sammamish.wa.us>]

Sent: Monday, January 21, 2008 1:05 PM  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Cc: City Council; Ben Yazici; Tim Larson  
Subject: RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Dear Councilmember Gothmann,

We initially had concerns that this might change our discussion, but for the most part it has not. I think that most of us forget it is there. The only exception would be close to election time there were some longer comments by some of those running for re-election.

I think that televising council meetings is positive for community relations since it provides more openness which increases trust and understanding. We have had a number of comments from citizens who did not realize all the issues we deal with and the complexity of those issues. It also provides an avenue to reach citizens who are not able to attend meetings but are interested in city government.

I think it is a plus and would recommend that you give it a try.

Best wishes,

Lee Felling, Mayor  
City of Sammamish

**Seatac**

**From:** Ralph Shape [mailto:rshape@ci.seatac.wa.us]  
**Sent:** Monday, January 21, 2008 12:44 PM  
**To:** Bill Gothmann  
**Subject:** RE: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Dear Councilmember Gothmann

In answer to your questions:

1. Initially we were quite concerned. We brought in a consultant who told us about dressing properly, sitting up, talking correctly and avoiding side comments. The first meeting we tried all of that but since then we have almost forgotten that the cameras are there. I would say there is almost no influence to Council discussions.

2, We do have one or two Councilmembers who sometimes get carried away and may be playing to the TV audience. But that's all right. Discussions still get heated sometimes. Only rarely have we had to edit out the bad words, but that's all the editing we do.

3. Telecasting has greatly enhanced community relations. I hear from many people how much they enjoy watching the meetings. Many of our citizens are elderly and can't get out so this lets them see what's going on with the city. Many learn the procedures and are more apt to attend meetings to express their concerns.

That's all good. The more citizen input the better.

4. We were initially concerned about people coming in to make public comments and using the time for political or commercial uses or just rambling on about anything. We have not had one case of that occurring in the year we have been broadcasting. I would urge any city to do this because the public benefit is so great.

We have not yet purchased cameras for a permanent installation. There is a local company which we contract with who comes in each meeting, sets up the cameras, makes the recording and then we play it on our local TV channel. We wanted to see how it worked before making a major purchase and will continue this for another year.

I hope this helps.

Ralph Shape, Mayor, SeaTac

### **Spokane**

From: Shogan, Joe [JShogan@SpokaneCity.org]

To: Bill Gothmann

Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Bill, in answer to your questions, here is my reply:

1. We hardly notice the fact of telecasting in our debates.

2. I was not on the Council when telecasting started.

I suggest you contact Al French or Steve Corker about this.

3. I am confident that telecasting has a positive effect on Community relations by enhancing our contact with the Community and providing actual real-time information to the Community about decisions made by the Council.

4. I suggest that you contact our Channel 5 staff (John Delay at 625-6355 or Jaye Nordling at 625-6359) for a wealth of information on telecasting.

Good luck, Joe

## **Tacoma**

From: Baarsma, Bill [bbaarsma@ci.tacoma.wa.us]  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Thanks for your communication. I would say that televising our meetings does, in fact, attract what I would characterize as "season ticket holders" to our council meetings. To keep their comments under some control, we have public comment--up to five minutes depending on the number signed up--at the beginning of each council meetings. Once those comments are completed, we consider each resolution and ordinance without additional comments from the public. This was done after some of the regulars would speak on every issue--just to get camera time. Obviously, under these circumstances, elected officials also play to the cameras--from time to time. But despite all of this, I support the televising of the meetings. (On the first Tuesday of every month, after all business is completed we allow for a citizens' forum session where topics not on the agenda and pertinent can be brought to the council's attention. Again, the regulars use this session as well.) We are now broadcasting all of our budget workshops which are presentational discussions involving the manager's budget requests. These are very useful, I believe. There are no public comments during these sessions--although once the budget comes before us, the public can weigh in. We have been televising all council meetings for the past 15 years at least. Webcasting is new and it remains to be seen as to its impact. But the more we get information out there the better, I will put you in contact with our media people for any additional information, Bill Baarsma

## **Tumwater**

Hi Bill, this is in reply to your 1/21/08 e-mail. Sorry for the delay.

We have been broadcasting our regular city council meetings (1st and 3rd Tuesday evenings) for many years now. We do not broadcast subcommittee meetings or council worksessions (worksessions are generally the evening of the 1st Monday of the month; committee meetings typically occur every other week during the day). This has worked well for us. I've had a lot of people come up to me and say they had seen us on TV. Mostly people who would never attend a City Council meeting. So it is working from a community outreach and education perspective. I find myself explaining why I'm taking a position on an issue a bit more when I'm aware we are on TV. Mainly because I see it as a teaching opportunity for people who don't follow us closely and want to make sure they understand what we are talking about. Other than that, I don't think it's inhibited us at all (at least not me). If there is really something you'd prefer to discuss off camera, you can arrange to have it discussed first at a council worksession or subcommittee meeting. When we first looked into this, there was some concern

the Council wouldn't discuss issues openly or play up to the camera. In general, I haven't seen this as a problem. Certainly not for me.

Olympia has had a problem with some fringe community members coming on TV during the public comment period of the council meetings to read the bible and do stuff like that. They had to put a time limit on public comment to control that. Fortunately, we have not had that problem.

We do not use makeup or anything. I believe some councils do. I do tend to dress up a bit more and shave before an evening meeting (avoid the 5 o'clock shadow effect) since I know we are on TV and should look professional.

We started out with only one meeting a month being televised and cameras on tripods being brought in. Kind of a trial basis. Once we realized it didn't create a problem, we invested in permanent cameras and some lighting. That makes it less intrusive but isn't necessary. The public TV station has a truck they park outside City hall to connect to and control the cameras. Olympia has a broadcast booth in the back of their council chambers but again you don't need that to get started. Eventually, we may install a control booth.

I'd certainly encourage you to consider broadcasting meetings. I think it has helped us connect with our community.

Hope that is helpful.

Pete Kmet  
Tumwater City Council

### **Vancouver**

**From:** Pollard, Royce [mailto:Royce.Pollard@ci.vancouver.wa.us]

**Sent:** Friday, February 01, 2008 4:23 PM

**To:** Bill Gothmann

**Subject:** FW: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Dear Councilmember Gothmann,

Thanks for your inquiry about televising City Council meetings. I wasn't here when we began televising meetings so have consulted with our staff about our history and our experience. I hope these thoughts will be of help to you.

We have been televising our Council meetings since 1984 on our local government cable channel, CVTV. We began televising our pre-council

workshop sessions in approximately 1991. We added webcasting of all of our CVTV programming in the fall of 2005. (You can view our council meetings or any of our programming by going to [www.cvtv.org](http://www.cvtv.org)) We have always seen the televising of our meetings, and now the webcasting, as an extension of the public meetings process.. a window on local government.

Initially I am told, televising the meetings prompted a more professional demeanor by all Councilmembers.(Prior to 1984 Councilmembers routinely smoked during council meetings and at least two members would knit or do needlework during sessions. That all stopped when the meetings were televised although nothing was ever said!) There was concern at the time that televising the meetings would encourage more people to run against incumbents (which is not a bad thing!), however, we have seen no increase or decrease in the number of people who run for City Council.

We have a time for citizen communications at the beginning of council meetings where people can talk about any topic that is not related to an agenda item. There are some people who use this time to get their message “out to the public” because the meetings are televised, but this has not been a huge issue. Plus, we limit these comments to 3 minutes per person.

There are times that I feel some council members have “played to the cameras” through the years, but we need to remember if something is appropriate or not appropriate to do because a meeting is being televised, it would be appropriate (better explanation of staff reports, for example) or not appropriate (side conversations that are not conducted in public) if the meeting were not being televised.

Televising our meetings is how we do business in Vancouver and it is an accepted and expected part of the culture of our community. At any given time, our surveys indicated that at least a quarter of our cable subscribers watch and depend on Council meetings being televised. It makes the process of government easier to understand for the average citizen and makes government more accessible. Adding the webcasting feature has only made local government that more accessible for non-cable subscribers. Believe me, when there is an occasional problem with a computer server and folks miss a webcast, we hear about it!

Perhaps one of the best testimonials for the value of televising public meetings for the public is the fact the Port of Vancouver began televising their commission meetings last year through a contract with CVTV. Commissioners were concerned that televising the meetings would interfere with the informal nature of their meetings. Yes, some of that informality is gone, but the value to the community far outweighs any inconvenience to staff or the Commissioners, and they are now vocal advocates for televising their meetings.

As you can tell, I am a huge advocate for televising our meetings as a way to better connect with our community. Our citizens would tell you the same. I hope that these thoughts have been of help to you. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have more questions, or feel free to contact Donna Mason, our Media Services/Cable TV Director, who has overseen CVTV since it began.

Royce

## **Woodinville**

Dear Mayor Hageman:

Spokane Valley is considering whether to televise and/or webcast our City Council Meetings. I understand that Woodinville provides this service at the present time. I would appreciate your insights in answering the following four questions by replying to this email. Your comments would greatly help us in making this decision.

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?

It does not seem to influence the character of council discussions to any great degree. There may be the occasional councilmember who may grandstand or the occasional citizen who may be trying to play to the larger audience, but in general, the cameras fade into the background and business gets done in the usual fashion.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?

One councilmember who was new to the council seemed to be playing to the camera at times, but his behavior was an anomaly. With the council members who were on the council before the telecast, I did not notice any significant change in their behavior or the discussions. Yes, I have been on the council since before we implemented this technology and was very supportive in getting it to happen.

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?

I think the influence is a positive one. There may be a bit less intellectual risk taking or throwing ideas at the wall to see what sticks during council discussions as some members don't want to get sound bit as a community member may only tune in for a few minutes of a discussion. However, our community has been very receptive to it and appreciates that we are doing it for their convenience. It has

been a benefit to help us educate our citizens to the process of their government. I would endorse it for council meetings at all levels of government. If you do it, you will be surprised to find how many citizens will tune in to it. I know I was.

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

It is not an easy process to implement, but with a substantial amount of funding from Comcast, it was not expensive for our city. Best wishes, Scott

## **Yakima**

From: Edler, Dave [dedler@ci.yakima.wa.us]  
To: Bill Gothmann  
Subject: Re: Telecasting/Webcasting Council Meetings

Bill,

We have been telecasting our meetings the entire time that I have served on our council. It has been a valuable tool for our community. It allows citizens to see what is happening in our city and provides an opportunity for us as a council to cast vision as to where we are going. The only down side that I see is that there are times when individual members use the "spot light" to push a personal agenda. All in all it has been a great asset.

Dave

## **Seattle**

Dear Council President Conlin:

Spokane Valley is considering whether to televise and/or webcast our City Council Meetings. I understand that Seattle provides this service at the present time. I would appreciate your insights in answering the following four questions by replying to this email. Your comments would greatly help us in making this decision.

1. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence the character of Council discussions, if at all?

I THINK AT FIRST IT WAS A BIT INHIBITING, BUT NOW I THINK IT DOES NOT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE. IT GIVES A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EVEN IF THERE ARE FEW PEOPLE ACTUALLY IN THE CHAMBERS.

2. Did you note any change in the discussion after your city started the practice of telecasting/webcasting (If you were there when this occurred)?

NO

3. In what manner does telecasting/webcasting influence Council-community relations?

IT GIVES PEOPLE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO SEE WHAT WE ARE DOING, AND HAS BROUGHT US A LOT OF GOODWILL --

4. Do you have any further comments or advice for Spokane Valley about webcasting/telecasting?

I WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO GO FULL STEAM AHEAD -- IT IS A GREAT WAY TO BUILD BETTER CITY-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

**Sunnyside**

[From a councilmember]

"I have no problem with what we do and certainly don't let the possibility of someone watching our meetings on the webpage change the way I do my job. Bottom line, a non issue for me."