



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

PHN 2020-16

To: All Local Housing Authorities
Local Housing Authority Board Members

From: Ben Stone, Associate Director, Division of Public Housing

Subject: Remote Public Meetings during COVID-19 Emergency

Date: April 10, 2020

On March 10, 2020 Governor Baker declared a state of emergency in the Commonwealth to respond to the spread of COVID-19. For the duration of the state of emergency, Local Housing Authority (LHA) board meetings and other public business of state-funded public housing should all now take place in a virtual setting to protect public health while continuing to provide access to the public. This notice provides more details on how LHAs can conduct public business using various technologies while complying with public meeting requirements.

What to Know

1. LHA boards should meet remotely but must make meeting accessible to public;
2. LHAs should post board meeting access information publicly;
3. LHAs may use a variety of services to meet these requirements; DHCD has procured GoToMeeting video conferencing licenses for all LHAs that need it;
4. All other LHA business, including grievance hearings and Local Tenant Organization Meetings, may be held in same manner during state of emergency;
5. Boards may vote approval of payments through virtual meetings and LHAs may make approved payments online.
6. DHCD suspends signature requirements for submissions to DHCD.

PUBLIC ACCESS REQUIREMENT: As previously noted in [PHN 2020-11](#), LHA Board Meetings should continue in order to conduct LHA business. Pursuant to the [Governor's Executive Order on March 12](#), however, these meetings should be virtual and therefore no longer needs to have an in-person quorum. **The meeting must take place through a teleconference, video meeting, or other medium that allows for transparency and public access and participation, with a quorum of board members participating remotely.** The LHA should always include a call-in number (generally available through the web-based platforms) to allow participation by those without computers or smartphones. The medium should also allow for public comment, especially resident participation as called for in [760 CMR 6.09 \(3\)\(o\)](#). LHAs should continue posting meeting minutes on LHA and/or town/city website.

HOW TO ADVERTISE A PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON VIDEO OR BY PHONE: A notice should be published in a timely manner on the LHA’s website (or the City/Town website if the LHA does not have its own website), and emailed to any Local Tenant Organizations. This notice must tell members of the public how they can access the remote meeting. If feasible, LHAs should also post meeting notices on the exterior of the main entrance of the LHA’s offices and common entranceways of LHA developments.

EXAMPLE – Notice for board meeting using the GoToMeeting teleconferencing system:

The Anytown Housing Authority will meet virtually on Friday, April 10th at 3 pm. Due to social distancing guidelines related to the COVID-19 state of emergency, this meeting will be held remotely, not at the AHA’s offices. The public is invited to view and/or listen to the meeting via phone, computer, laptop or tablet. To do so, download the “GoToMeeting” app in any app store or at www.gotomeeting.com. At 3 pm on April 10th, if you are using the App, enter the meeting ID number and click the JOIN button. If you are using the website, click on the “Join” link in the upper right-hand corner, enter the meeting ID number and click the JOIN button. The meeting ID number is **123-123-123** or use the link <https://gotomeeting.com/join/123123123>. You may also join by calling conference line at t xxx-yyy-zzz at 3 pm on April 10th and enter passcode 123456 followed by the # sign. The board chair will instruct participants on the appropriate time and manner for public comment during the meeting.

EXAMPLE – Notice for board meeting using the Zoom teleconferencing system:

The Anytown Housing Authority will meet virtually on Friday, April 10th at 3 pm. Due to social distancing guidelines related to the COVID-19 state of emergency, this meeting will be held remotely, not at the AHA’s offices. The public is invited to view and/or listen to the meeting via phone, computer, laptop or tablet. To do so, download the “Zoom Cloud Meeting” app in any app store or at www.zoom.us. At 3 pm on April 10th, click on “Join a Meeting” and enter meeting ID number **123-123-123** or use the link <https://zoom.us/j/123123123>. You may also join by calling conference line at t xxx-yyy-zzz at 3 pm on April 10th and enter passcode 123456 followed by the # sign. The board chair will instruct participants on the appropriate time and manner for public comment during the meeting.

EXAMPLE – Notice for board meeting using the Phone Only Teleconference:

The Anytown Housing Authority will meet virtually on Friday, April 10th at 3 pm. Due to social distancing guidelines related to the COVID-19 state of emergency, this meeting will be held remotely, not at the AHA’s offices. The public is invited to listen to the meeting via phone, computer, laptop or tablet. To do so call the conference line at xxx-yyy-zzz at 3 pm on April 10th and enter passcode 123456 followed by the # sign. The board chair will instruct participants on the appropriate time and manner for public comment during the meeting.

PLATFORMS YOU CAN USE FOR VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETINGS: There are many platforms available to meet this requirement. Each comes with its own instructions and tutorials for use. DHCD does not require the use of a particular source, except that the meeting technology must allow for robust public access of at least the number of participants who typically attend an LHA board meeting.

Commonly used options include:

- **GoToMeeting (<https://www.gotomeeting.com/>):** All LHA executive directors received an email on March 26 from DHCD’s Richard Brouillard titled “DHCD NEW Training Offering-- Working Remotely Using GoToMeeting”. Per this email, DHCD is immediately offering to all

LHAs free online training by CyberSense on how to use the GoToMeeting video conferencing applications. Upon completion of training each LHA receives a 15-month “Business-level” license to use GoToMeeting, funded by DHCD. This will support meetings of up to 250 participants. GoToMeeting is the software used for many Cybersense trainings, so most LHAs already have some familiarity with it. Please refer to the March 26 email for information on how to sign up for the training.

- **Other platforms include ZOOM videoconferencing (<https://www.zoom.us/>); RingCentral (<https://www.ringcentral.com/>); WebEx (<https://www.webex.com/>); Microsoft Teams (<https://products.office.com/en-US/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>), and many others.**

LHAs, board members and residents can hold other meetings using the above technology, including grievance panel hearings and Local Tenant Organization meetings. With regard to grievance panel hearings, if a resident requests an in-person hearing after a video or teleconference is offered, the LHA must offer this but can defer until after the state of emergency has ended.

HOW TO APPROVE PAYMENTS REMOTELY

With LHAs conducting virtual board meetings, DHCD is allowing LHAs to approve and pay bills remotely during the state of emergency. This practice supports social distancing and will allow LHAs to approve and make payments in a timely manner. To ensure proper internal controls through segregation of duties and establishing an adequate audit trail, the LHAs must follow the following procedures:

- 1) Present all invoices and supporting backup documentation to the Board at the Virtual Board Meeting, through email and/or the document and screen share function in video conference platforms such as GoToMeeting
- 2) The Board must formally vote approval and record in the board meeting minutes in order to authorize the executive director or designated staff person to pay the invoices online. The board approval and any accompanying email approvals should be kept with payment file.
- 3) Designated staff person pays authorized bills online. LHA must maintain the receipt of payment with the confirmation number on file as back up documentation of payment made. Either save the confirmation electronically or print and file with invoice and supporting backup documentation.

HOW TO APPROVE SUBMISSIONS TO DHCD REMOTELY

- 1) Similarly, for submissions to DHCD that require board approval such as budget certifications, Executive Director Calculation worksheets, Capital Improvement Plans, and grant applications, DHCD will suspend the requirement for signature by all board members.
- 2) The board vote must still be recorded and included in the meeting minutes; the board meeting minutes extract should be attached with any submission.
- 3) **Budget Certification:** The Certification must be completed, the board vote must be recorded, and the Executive Director must sign the Certification as the Secretary Ex-Officio certifying the Certification is a true and correct copy of the resolution adopted at the meeting and is on file and is recorded at the LHA. The executive director will continue to upload the Certification to submit to DHCD for review and acceptance after which they may upload operating budget.
- 4) Where signature is required from Executive director:
 - a. If you have access to a printer/scanner, please sign the relevant document, scan it and Send via email to dhcdhafiscert@mass.gov. Please also send an original copy of the document to the following address within the next 30 days:

- b. If you do not have access to a printer/scanner, please: electronically sign the attached document (for example, placing a digital copy of your signature, an S-signature (“/s/ Jane Doe”), etc.); and Email dhcdhafiscert@mass.gov a copy of the signed document with the following statement included in the body of the email: “This is to confirm that I have placed my electronic signature on the attached document with the intent of signing the document. I understand that my electronic signature has the same effect, validity, and enforceability as manually executed signatures to the extent and as provided for under applicable law.”
- 5) **Executive Director (ED) Salary Calculation Worksheet:** DHCD suspends requirement that chairperson sign the ED calculation worksheet, and instead only requires that the ED present worksheet to board along with operating budget for approval, and submits approved worksheet alongside operating budget. The Budget certification will stand as approval of the ED salary calculation worksheet.
- 6) DHCD will notify LHAs when the temporary relaxation of signature requirements end.