

AMERICAN RIVER FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT

RESOLUTION NO. 2021-06

PROCLAIMING A LOCAL EMERGENCY, RATIFYING THE COVID-19 STATE OF EMERGENCY, AND AUTHORIZING REMOTE TELECONFERENCE MEETINGS OF AMERICAN RIVER FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT PURSUANT TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT.

WHEREAS, the American River Flood Control District is committed to preserving and nurturing public access and participation in meetings of the Board of Trustees; and

WHEREAS, all meetings of the American River Flood Control District are open and public, as required by the Ralph M. Brown Act (Gov. Code, §§ 54950 – 54963) (“Brown Act”), so that any member of the public may attend, participate, and watch the District’s legislative body conduct its business; and

WHEREAS, Assembly Bill 361 added Government Code section 54953(e) to make provisions for remote teleconferencing participation in meetings by members of a legislative body, without compliance with the requirements of Government Code section 54953(b)(3), subject to the existence of certain conditions; and

WHEREAS, a required condition is that a state of emergency is declared by the Governor pursuant to Government Code section 8625, proclaiming the existence of conditions of disaster or of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the state caused by conditions as described in Government Code section 8558; and

WHEREAS, a proclamation is made when there is an actual incident, threat of disaster, or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the jurisdictions that are within the District’s boundaries, caused by natural, technological, or human-caused disasters; and

WHEREAS, it is further required that state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing, or, the legislative body meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health and safety of attendees; and

WHEREAS, such conditions now exist in the District, specifically, on March 4, 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist in California due to the threat of COVID-19; despite sustained efforts, the virus continues to spread and has impacted nearly all sectors of California; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Trustees does hereby find that the ongoing risk posed by the highly transmissible COVID-19 virus has caused, and will continue to cause, conditions of peril to the safety of persons within the District that are likely to be beyond the control of services, personnel, equipment, and facilities of the District, and desires to proclaim a local emergency and ratify the proclamation of state of emergency by the Governor of the State of California; and

WHEREAS, as a consequence of the local emergency, the Board of Trustees does hereby find that the District shall conduct its meetings without compliance with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of Government Code section 54953, as authorized by subdivision (e) of section 54953, and that the

Board shall comply with the requirements to provide the public with access to the meetings as prescribed in paragraph (2) of subdivision (e) of section 54953; and

WHEREAS, all meeting agendas, meeting dates, times, and manner in which the public may participate in the public meetings of the District and offer public comment by telephone or internet-based service options including video conference are posted on the District website and physically outside of the District office.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF AMERICAN RIVER FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT DOES HEREBY RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Recitals. The Recitals set forth above are true and correct and are incorporated into this Resolution by this reference.

Section 2. Proclamation of Local Emergency. The Board hereby proclaims that a local emergency now exists throughout the District, and the ongoing risk posed by the highly transmissible COVID-19 virus has caused, and will continue to cause, conditions of peril to the safety of persons within the American River Flood Control District.

Section 3. Ratification of Governor's Proclamation of a State of Emergency. The Board hereby ratifies the Governor of the State of California's Proclamation of State of Emergency, effective as of its issuance date of March 4, 2020.

Section 4. Remote Teleconference Meetings. District staff are hereby authorized and directed to take all actions necessary to carry out the intent and purpose of this Resolution including, conducting open and public meetings in accordance with Government Code section 54953(e) and other applicable provisions of the Brown Act.

Section 5. Effective Date of Resolution. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption and shall be effective until the earlier of (i) November 8, 2021 or such time the Board of Trustees adopts a subsequent resolution in accordance with Government Code section 54953(e)(3) to extend the time during which the American River Flood Control District may continue to teleconference without compliance with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of section 54953.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Trustees of American River Flood Control District this _____ day of _____, 2021, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

MEMORANDUM

TO: PUBLIC AGENCY CLIENTS
FROM: DOWNEY BRAND WATER GROUP
DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 2021
RE: AB 361 EXTENSION OF MODIFIED BROWN ACT REQUIREMENTS FOR REMOTE MEETINGS

On September 16, 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 361 into law, codifying certain modified requirements for teleconference meetings held by state and local public agencies, similar to those previously authorized and extended by executive order during the COVID-19 State of Emergency. This memorandum briefly summarizes AB 361 and describes what local agencies must do to utilize the modified requirements for holding remote meetings.

I. Background

The Ralph M. Brown Act (Brown Act), which governs local public agency meetings, traditionally permitted agencies to utilize teleconferencing (audio or video) for public meetings, subject to certain heightened requirements aimed to preserve public participation.

- Agendas must identify each teleconference location
- Agendas must be posted at each teleconference location
- Physical access for the public must be provided at each teleconference location
- Board actions must be taken by roll call vote
- One board member must be physically present at each meeting location and quorum of the board must participate within the agency's jurisdictional boundaries
- Members of the public must have an opportunity to address the Board from any teleconference location

(Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(3).) However, the rising spread of COVID-19 and the imposition of stay-at-home orders made some of those teleconference requirements untenable, leaving many public agencies unable to hold meetings at all.

On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom proclaimed a State of Emergency due to COVID-19. Pursuant to that State of Emergency Proclamation, the Governor issued a series of executive orders (N-25-20, N-29-20, and N-35-20) which, among other things, provided several exceptions to the normal Brown Act teleconference rules to permit local agencies to continue meeting while stay-at-home orders were in effect or where meeting in person would pose a risk to health or safety. The executive orders allowed agencies to meet without first identifying or providing public access to each teleconference location, and without maintaining a physical presence of members within agency boundaries, though roll call votes and public participation were still required. On June 15, 2021, as vaccinations increased and in-person restrictions eased, Governor

Newsom issued Executive Order N-08-21 which provided the Brown Act modifications would expire on September 30, 2021.

II. AB 361

With the State of Emergency still in place and variant cases on the rise, AB 361 was introduced to provide a longer-term solution for teleconference meetings during states of emergency, effective until January 1, 2024. While not limited to COVID-19, the legislation mirrors many of the allowances made under the Governor's executive orders. AB 361 amends Section 54953 of the Government Code to allow the legislative body of a local agency to meet remotely without complying with the normal teleconference rules for agenda posting, physical location access, or quorum rules. To do so, one of three scenarios must exist, all of which require that the Governor has proclaimed a State of Emergency pursuant to Government Code section 8625:

- A. State or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing;
- B. The agency is holding a meeting for the purpose of determining whether meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees; or
- C. The agency is holding a meeting and has determined that meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(Gov. Code, § 54953(e)(1).)

An agency that holds a meeting under either of the three scenarios must continue to post its agenda in the time required by the Brown Act, and ensure that the public is able to address the board directly through teleconference means. (*Id.* at subd. (e)(2).) If a disruption prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting or receiving public comments in real time, the board may take no further action until those functions are restored; any actions taken during such a disruption are subject to legal challenge. (*Id.*)

Assuming the State of Emergency remains in effect and an agency wishes to continue meeting under the modified rules, it must adopt an initial resolution within 30 days of the first teleconference meeting (which applies retroactively to that first meeting), and then must adopt an extension resolution at least every 30 days thereafter. (*Id.* at subd. (e)(3).) The resolutions must contain findings stating that the agency has reconsidered the circumstances of the State of Emergency and at least one of the following circumstances exist:

- i. The State of Emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the members to meet safely in person; or
- ii. State or local officials continue to impose or recommend measures to promote social distancing.

(*Id.*) The requirement for agencies to affirm by resolution every 30 days that the State of Emergency continues to necessitate remote meetings did not exist under the executive orders, and may present a logistical challenge for agencies that meet quarterly—or even monthly when meetings are separated by more than 30 days. Where an agency is not able to rely on regular

meetings to adopt extension resolutions within that time frame, the agency has two potential options:

- Hold a special “AB 361” remote meeting within the 30-day window simply to re-authorize the AB 361 exceptions.
- Allow the initial resolution or extension resolution to lapse and approve a new initial resolution at the next agency meeting, subject to the same substantive and procedural requirements as the first.

It should be noted it is not entirely clear from the text of the statute that an agency may simply adopt a new initial resolution after failing to adopt an extension resolution within 30 days, and still take advantage of the retroactive application of the modified teleconference rules for that meeting. For a number of practical reasons, including the variability of active COVID-19 cases and the development of new state or local recommendations and orders, it might become necessary to do so. A conservative approach, and the one we recommend, would be to avoid lapses by holding a special meeting every 30 days to reauthorize the modified teleconference rules.

Once AB 361 authorization lapses, the normal Brown Act rules will apply and an agency seeking to hold a teleconference meeting will once again be required to post agendas and provide public access at each remote location, identify those locations in the agenda, and maintain a quorum of the board within agency boundaries. If a meeting is not held in conformity with AB 361, board members may not teleconference from their residences or other locations which are not open and accessible to the public.

III. Clarification on Implementation Date

Upon its signing on September 16, 2021, AB 361 became effective immediately. However, on September 20, 2021, the Governor issued Executive Order N-15-21, clarifying that the changes in AB 361 shall be suspended until October 1, 2021, when the modified Brown Act provisions under Executive Order N-08-21 are set to expire.

IV. Conclusion

AB 361 provides relief to many agencies that have grown accustomed to the modified Brown Act teleconference rules under the emergency executive orders, though the 30-day authorization window could require agencies to hold more special meetings. Without the AB 361 exceptions, agencies will be obligated to return to normal in-person meetings or provide public access at each remote location under the traditional teleconference rules, starting October 1, 2021.