In light of recent federal and state agency warnings related to COVID-19, cities need to conduct city council and board/commission meetings electronically. This is permitted under Section 21.8 of the state code, and a recent press release from the Iowa Public Information Board (IPIB) offers guidance on how to comply with the law.

In most cases in the past, the use of Section 21.8 was to allow a single council member to join a meeting electronically from a remote location (typically via conference call). However, the state code does permit an electronic meeting where all members participate remotely when an in-person meeting is "impossible or impractical." In either case, the city must ensure there is public access to the meeting, and the notice requirements still apply (at least 24 hours before the meeting, a notice and agenda must be posted). Minutes of the meeting must also be taken and include a statement detailing why an in-person meeting could not be used. If a conference call or video conference is to be used, providing call-in details or a link to the online meeting to the public can help provide reasonable access.

For cities doing electronic meetings, here are a few ideas to help ensure they are successful:

- Research and choose a platform that suits the city's needs. There are numerous conference call and web conferencing options, including Zoom, GoToMeeting, WebEx and more.
- Assign a city official to manage the meeting software.
- Test the meeting software prior to the meeting.
- List the electronic meeting details on meeting agenda/notice to the public include call-in and web conference details, provide instructions to the public on how they can join the meeting.
- At the beginning of the meeting, the mayor announces how the public can participate (if applicable), procedures for making comments and have all speakers identify themselves before speaking.
- The meeting manager should be prepared to mute/unmute remote speakers as necessary throughout the meeting to minimize interruptions.
- Use roll call voting to ensure each council member vote is easily understood.
- If possible, record the meeting so it can be shared with the public, this does not replace the requirement to complete minutes of the meeting.

Related to this is the possibility of needing to hold a meeting without providing 24 hours' notice for emergency purposes. This is permitted under Section 21.4 of the state code, which says if 24 hours' notice is impossible; the city shall provide as much notice as possible. Also, the city must explain in the minutes the reason for holding the meeting without providing 24 hours' notice.