

City drops ZOOM call-in feature

March 29, 2024



Crescent City dropped its ZOOM call-in feature following a series of racially-motivated prank calls during the March 4 Public Comments agenda. During that meeting, six unidentified ZOOM callers made anti-Semitic and vile African-American hate comments under the pretense of offering opinions on unrelated City items. The Triplicate opted not to give voice to virulent so-called Free Speech and did not publish this news.

According to City Attorney Martha Rice, Hate Speech is protected speech allowed by the 1st Amendment to The Constitution and cannot be curtailed unless speech rises to a level of violence. The series of callers who remain anonymous were not identified as local individuals and believed to be pranksters. The calls did not spew out or incite violence.

At the Tuesday, March 18 Meeting, the Agenda displayed no reference to ZOOM for callers to contribute to Public Comments on any item on the Calendar. Prior to placing discussion / action item to consider the ZOOM feature, Mayor Blake Inscore who sets the Agenda, made the decision to pull the ZOOM call-in feature for last night's meeting, pending full Council discussion toward the end of the meeting.

City Attorney Rice spoke from the dais and shared with councilors ZOOM service began during the Covid era in 2020 as a way to allow citizens to access local government in a non-contact environment. Now, according to Rice, the Covid virus is no longer in Pandemic status and the Council may wish to reconsider the service which costs the City about \$2000, annually. Councilors discussed the service, both good points and bad, on the very challenging issue of discontinuing the ZOOM call-in feature. Councilor / Mayor Pro Tem Ray Altman and Councilor Isaiah Wright expressed dissatisfaction with the technical issues vexing good communication.

Councilor Jason Greenough introduced the motion to retain ZOOM; Councilor Kelly Schellong seconded the motion. Greenough and Schellong voted YES to retain ZOOM. Councilors Wright, Altman and Mayor Blake Inscore voted NO. After the 2-3 vote, Altman made the motion to discontinue the ZOOM feature, with Wright seconding. The vote to terminate the service was 3-2. Altman, Wright and Inscore voting AYE; Greenough and Schellong voting NAY.

The City will continue to offer live You Tube streaming or taped delay for those wishing to view the meeting at a later time.