

To Commissioners, Elected Officials, and Representatives of Riley County, KS:

The Riley County commission must live stream their meetings.

After some conversation with some other veterans in our community, it became clear to us that Covid-19 has become the center of our lives for the past few months. As veterans, all of us have experienced relatively similar circumstances to our current situation; supply shortages, confinement to certain locations, restricted activity and the like that reminded us of our prior wartime service. As we discussed our current circumstances in an effort to make sense of things, we also evaluated how our local community is responding to balancing the weights of personal freedoms with community health expectations. One thing became clear to us in particular, and that is there is an apparent lack of engagement with residents and stakeholders in our community, especially with the Riley County commission. The lack of community engagement and interaction by our county-level elected representatives only fractions the trust in the community, fosters feelings of panic, and ultimately correlates to a sense of deception. We need to know that we can trust our representatives to execute what is in the best interest of our health, safety, and welfare while maintaining the voice of the community, and at this time, we are unable to do so.

The City of Manhattan has clearly-posted updates on meeting dates, times, and is navigating the process of online-based communication as opposed to regular in-person meetings. They post on the City of Manhattan website, on facebook, and provide a method for persons to submit commentary. The system isn't perfect, but there is effort to adapt to modern technologies that require modern solutions. It's important to note that the City of Manhattan cannot bear the burden of all communication efforts nor can it speak for county-level decisions that affect our rural populations and those outside of city limits. Instead, Riley County should work on a comprehensive plan for community outreach that not only employs top-down information disbursement but moves further across the IAP2 Spectrum towards Involve, Collaborate, and ultimately to Empower its constituents. **As elected representatives, Riley County Commissioners should be very much versed on this engagement spectrum and understand that to empower communities is to retain the feeling of freedom that us Veterans fought for.**

The Riley County District Representatives have backgrounds including Congressional and Senate Campaigns (District 1), Marketing & Public Relations (District 2), and Radio Broadcasting (District 3) so the perception that they are unable - or worse, unwilling - to provide substantial communication to their constituents is disappointing.

Community engagement should be a priority.

With an annual budget of \$68 million, it is important that we have full transparency on the transactions and operations within that elected power - and we don't.

While the Riley County Health Department has posted helpful information, we aren't always sure when we will hear a live update nor do we have any way to submit questions, give feedback, or have a live interaction. In fact, that is the only department that is providing any outreach during this time, at all. By contrast the Commissioners meeting is held at 8:30 in the morning while everybody is mostly at work, is not televised or broadcast in any way, is not publicized, has no virtual interaction, and no opportunity for constituent interaction. The lack of access is by definition a violation of the KOMA, via Stevens vs City of Hutchinson. It also violates the interaction level defined in the KOMA KSA 2018 Supp. 75-4317a for Serial Meetings and KSA 2018 Supp. 75-4318(f) for any legislative body. These meetings leave people in the dark.

For the last month, Constituents of Riley County have felt a sense of anxiety, depression, and fear about our health, safety, and welfare. We have lost nearly all of our sticks and there are nearly none left in the bundle. We have been asking - now demanding - that the commission increase transparency by executing the requirements of the KOMA. Afterall, wasn't transparency a key requirement of a recent Commissioner's campaign? You aren't too busy, you've had time to look into it, and there is no need to vote on a by-right requirement already in violation. After months into a pandemic response, it has simply boiled down to fear of adaptation to modern technology, fear of change, and sheer laziness. You should not be fearful, too busy, or too lazy to do the job we elected you for and pay you to do.

Riley County Commissioners, Elected Officials, and Representatives need to respond to the public's need for true servant leadership as it is now their call to serve just as it was ours. We demand that there is

- 1) public notice of serial meetings
- 2) public notice of non-serial meetings
- 3) live, virtual broadcast with the ability for constituents and stakeholders to interact in real-time
- 4) bi-weekly serial evening open meetings during the time of pandemic response,
- 5) live or virtual meetings to be recorded, archived and filed with meeting minutes on the County's website,
- 6) the meetings include ASL and Spanish language
- 7) an increased social media presence, particularly during pandemic, and
- 8) the level of engagement to be maintained post-pandemic response

Failure to do so is failure to follow the law and serve the very constituents that elected you. A representative government is dependent upon an informed electorate. We appreciate your understanding how critical this is to the county, and that you will take swift action to make adjustments.

Thank you,

Richard Colwell, Corporal, USMC 2010-2015

Quinton Cox

Gabriel Colwell, Corporal, USMC 2010-2014

SSG Kerrigan USA RETIRED GW '81-'92

Jamal Carter A1C USAF

David Horner, Captain, US Army - '79-'90