


From: 
To: [City Council](#)
Subject: Public Comments Debate
Date: Tuesday, April 2, 2024 10:19:03 AM

Hello, Council Members. Thank you for allowing me to voice my opinion on the recent debate over allowing public comment (on Zoom). I was not in attendance when the antisemitic comments took place so I won't comment specifically on that incident. However, any call to limit debate or curtail the right of free speech is very concerning to me. Too frequently these days, people equate hurt feelings or cognitive dissonance with hate speech. The first amendment protects speech whether or not it is offensive to even the majority of ears. The counter argument of labeling those with different points of view as racist or phobic does not justify the censorship of those views. Hate speech requires "real" harm not "feelings" of being harmed.

I understand your position and responsibility to conduct business and move the meetings along without disruption. The backdoor hacking of your platform is certainly a problem and suggests you need an IT solution. Until it is solved, you could ask the public to submit comments in advance that you can address on the air so the hacker can't completely take over the meeting. Once your backdoor issues are fixed, you can comfortably resume spontaneous comments. I think you currently propose a time limit on comments but you could also have a requirement to keep on topic while on the air but allow off-agenda comments submitted in a chat column that you can take under advisement.

Whatever you decide to do going forward, I implore you to respect the constitutional rights of citizens and uphold the first amendment. Our democracy is nothing without it.

Thank you,
Tina Stolberg
Sebastopol resident