

PALOS  VERDES

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City Says Lights, Camera, Internet

*By Josh Cohen
News Staff Writer (December 1, 2001)*

RPV - The minds at Rancho Palos Verdes City Hall and PV on the Net have devised a new way for residents to watch their elected officials in action. The best part is, it only takes a mouse.

Starting with the Tuesday, Dec. 4 City Council meeting, residents who own a simple computer will be able to watch live webcasts from the comfort of their own home.

"This will really benefit those people who have a computer that is connected to the Internet at a certain time at night who aren't near a television, or don't get government access Channel 3 on Cox Cable," says RPV Finance Director Dennis McLean. "Live webcasting will allow those people to view a live council meeting."

McLean and Ted Vegvari, PV on the Net director, have run with an idea that they say Councilman John McTaggart dreamed up years ago.

"This is a technical partnership between PV on the Net and the city of RPV" says Vegvari. "We've had requests for years from residents to do this. Many of them didn't have cable or couldn't attend the meetings, or maybe they missed a meeting on Cox Cable and didn't know when it would be replayed."

According to Vegvari, 40 percent of the residents on the Hill don't get Cox Cable, and therefore can't access Channel 3 to watch their local government in action.

"This will not only be a benefit to residents, but to city staff to review meetings," says Vegvari.

Now, in addition to attending a meeting or watching on Cox, residents can simply turn on their computer and get live broadcasts on their monitors at home.

To access the live webcasts, residents simply go to the city's web site [www.palosverdes.com\rpv](http://www.palosverdes.com/rpv). Once there: all one needs to do is click on the City Council section of the page, then click on "Watch City Council Meeting." It's that simple.

"Any basic computer can do it," Vegvari says. "Any computer that can run Real Player software and has at least a 56k modem can watch this."

If a resident doesn't have Real Player, the city's home page provides a link to a web site that gives away the software for free. From there, residents can whip up a batch of popcorn, kick up their feet and watch council meetings as if they were in the audience.

Currently being produced as a pilot program, Vegvari hopes "webcasting will remain in perpetuity."

Past Programs

In addition to watching live broadcasts of RPV City Council meetings, residents will also be able to access archives that show past council and Planning Commission meetings, called on-demand video replays.

"We currently have meetings going all the way back to March," says Vegvari.

On-demand video replays are displayed applying the same technique that residents would use to get live webcasts. Replays of City Council meetings are usually ready by 11 a.m. the next day. Planning Commission meetings, which are not broadcast live by Cox, take a little longer – about two days, says Vegvari.

Viewers of live webcasts and on-demand video replays are seeing the exact same thing as those watching on Channel 3, explains Vegvari. A producer from Cox sits in a small room in council chambers, operating the remote control cameras and mixing the show live for TV viewers.

"We're going to take the same signal and convert it digitally, live on the fly, and send it out to ... however many people want to watch it on the Internet" says Vegvari. "Whatever that operator does is what you see."

The signal can also be pulled off video tapes, which allows for on-demand video replays of past council and Planning Commission meetings.

McLean and Vegvari are also trying to devise a way by which webcast watchers can send correspondence through e-mail to staff members as they view the live transmission. The city has also set up a suggestion box for residents, which can be accessed at feedback@rpv.com.