

Honorable Board of Supervisors and Ms. Dukett:

Yesterday I expressed my dismay that this week's update from Dr. Doohan was only available on Facebook, and that the notice of the changed time was also only available on Facebook. I understand that the day was changed because no one is working on July 3, ahead of a holiday that is celebrated by activities that are completely illegal in Mendocino County right now.

Aside from the fact that the public does not consist solely of people who have agreed to allow an unethical company to monetize their personal information, I would have thought the county would be especially concerned with reminding people to stay safe over the weekend. Instead, we have entrusted what should be a democratic, informational briefing to a company that has actively undermined democracy all over the world by sowing misinformation.

Recently, I went to a public meeting that was actually open to the public, included hours of public comment, both in person and remotely, and where just about everyone observed safety protocols very closely. The June 22 Fort Bragg City Council meeting, where everyone weighed in on whether or not to put a name change on the ballot, was a model of a safe, successful democratic process.

Almost everyone, inside and outside the Town Hall building, was masked. People who wanted to comment lined up outside the door to the courtyard, around the corner, and all the way onto Laurel street, standing on X's that were taped onto the sidewalk at six-foot intervals. They went in the courtyard door and stood at the podium behind plexiglass, under the microphone and at a distance from the Council members, who were also behind plexiglass and wearing masks. When they were done, they went out another door, onto Main Street. There were big electronic speakers on Laurel Street and in the courtyard, so people outside could hear what was going on. A few elderly people and a local reporter sat inside, at the back of the room and at a distance from one another. When the people who were physically present finished commenting, the Council took comments from the public remotely, which always has some glitches, but for the most part, people who didn't feel safe about coming to the meeting in person got to participate, too.

The meeting was very responsibly handled, by the city staff, the elected representatives, and the members of the public, who were not treated like their opinions and their right to know what was going on only mattered if they were customers of a private company. The entire event was geared toward responsible, adult citizens of a democratic society, who are well aware of how to meet their health and civic obligations safely.

We are becoming dependent on Facebook and an overall lack of transparency and participation. This fear-based reflex is completely inappropriate in what is supposed to be an advanced democracy where we have learned about how to protect ourselves from this virus. It will be a difficult habit to break, it will take courage and resolve, and I suggest strongly that we do it now.

Thank you.

Sarah Reith