

NEWS

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Board meetings go live on the Internet next week

On Tuesday, for the first time ever, the public can watch a live meeting of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors without having to be present at the meeting.

As part of the board's ongoing effort to make county government more accessible, the county will launch CountyVision, a new feature on the county's Website that plays videos of live and archived meetings of the Board of Supervisors, meetings of other county-affiliated public agencies, messages from individual supervisors, press conferences, and other county video content.

Internet users throughout the world can view live board meetings and CountyVision's other video content starting Tuesday by visiting www.sbcounty.gov and clicking on the CountyVision link. The Board of Supervisors meets at 10 a.m. on most Tuesday mornings.

"Because we're the largest U.S. county in the lower 48, attending board meetings means hundreds of miles of travel for many of our residents," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane, who conceived CountyVision. "This is a major step forward in our continuing effort to make county government directly available to the people we serve."

The county will also debut another component of the board's accessibility initiative on Tuesday by making county officials' financial disclosure forms available on the Internet for the first time. The county introduced the first component of the program in October when it began offering free e-mail updates for various types of county information, including news releases and meetings agendas. Future elements of the initiative include on-line viewing of campaign finance data and a searchable database of Board of Supervisors agendas.

"The county is making good on its promise to bring government closer to the people," said Board of Supervisors Vice Chairman Gary Ovitt, a primary architect of the board's accessibility initiative.

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The county has tried for many years to broadcast live meetings of the Board of Supervisors to television viewers in the county, but affordable technology that would allow the county to send live signals to the county's many cable providers does not exist. Many cities are able to broadcast their public meetings live because each city generally has only one cable provider with which city hall has a wired connection.

In July 2002, the county began videotaping meetings and offering the tapes free of charge – including overnight delivery – to any broadcaster interested in airing them. Since then, TV viewers in several San Bernardino County communities have been able to watch taped meetings on their local cable stations.

The county will use the launch of CountyVision as an opportunity to streamline Board of Supervisors meetings and agendas.

Effective immediately, the county will no longer issue revised and supplemental agendas. One final agenda will be released on the Friday prior to each Board of Supervisors meeting. The county will continue to exceed the requirements of the state's open meeting laws and be one of the few California public agencies to make agendas and all backup materials, such as contracts and studies, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week online.

The implementation of CountyVision made this change necessary because the new video archive system only allows two documents to be linked to each meeting – one agenda and the fair statement. The change will also serve to eliminate the confusion sometimes created by having various versions of the same meeting agenda in circulation.

Also, beginning on Tuesday, reports from individual board members will be conducted near the conclusion of each meeting rather than at the start, reducing the wait time for residents who wish to comment during public hearings or on specific agenda items.