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Can't attend city meetings? Watch live Web broadcasts

Common Council webcasts offered

*By Michael Valkys
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City of Poughkeepsie residents who want to catch their elected officials in action, but can't make it to city hall, can now watch them from home.

Poughkeepsie has started broadcasting live, gavel-to-gavel coverage of Common Council meetings on the city's Web site. Webcasts will be archived on the site for viewing anytime. The first live webcast from city hall was the council's Feb. 17 session.

Chamberlain Deanne Flynn said new equipment the city acquired could eventually be used to broadcast other meetings as well, including zoning and planning board sessions.

"We're going to start out with the council," Flynn said.

Governing bodies in the mid-Hudson Valley and around the nation are increasingly turning to technology to better serve constituents and increase government transparency.

Residents can be informed

Betty Chapland attends many council meetings in person, but can't make it to city hall for all of them. She said the new live broadcasts will allow those interested in local government to follow the latest council developments as they happen.

"I think it's good for a lot of people who can't get out," said Chapland, head of the Poughkeepsie Taxpayers' Association.

She hopes the broadcasts prompt residents to get in-volved in community affairs.

"More people should be interested in what's going on in their city," Chapland said.

Flynn said the new webcasting system will cost the city about \$6,000. She said funding comes partially from money the city will receive under its new cable television franchise agreement with Verizon. The rest will possibly come via a grant.

The city's new broadcasting equipment is from New Paltz-based Total Webcasting. Company President Robert Feldman said his business also provides webcasting services to the Dutchess, Ulster and Sullivan county legislatures.

"It's really catching on," said Feldman, a former New Paltz elected official.

He said Poughkeepsie opted for a webcasting system that does not need constant attention during

meetings.

"We installed a fixed system, so it doesn't actually require anyone to tend to it," Feldman said.

Flynn likened the system to "government webcasting in a box. It's really self-sufficient."

Councilman Joseph Rich, D-2nd Ward, said archives are set up so viewers can click on the portion of the meeting that interests them.

"You don't have to see the whole meeting if you don't want to," Rich said.

According to its Web site, Total Webcasting was founded in 2000. Officials said clients include New York state government, the New York State Bar Association and the Las Vegas Ice Center.

Flynn said Total Webcasting will continue to provide technological support to city staff as webcasting moves forward in the coming months.

"They archive it for us and do all the maintenance," Flynn said.

Additional Facts

Where to watch

n To view a City of Poughkeepsie Common Council webcast, visit www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com.

n For information, call city hall at 845-451-4200.
