

MORRIS COUNTY

Dover mayor defends virtual council meeting, blasts critics: 'They're here for the money'

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Key Points

Dover's town council met in person but went ahead with a controversial decision to only allow the public to attend virtually.

Mayor James Dodd said the move was in response to a disruption last month that highlighted safety concerns.

[Dover's town council](#) went forward Tuesday with a controversial decision to bar the public from attending its meetings in person, opting to limit outside participants to a virtual session.

Mayor James Dodd and the council met for their regular session in council chambers on June 24 with cameras streaming, while members of the public participated remotely — some appearing to log in from the steps of Town Hall, just feet from where officials were meeting.

The four-hour meeting had some technical issues, with some audio from the chamber hard to hear. Critics, meanwhile, questioned the legality of limiting public access.

“This decision to move this meeting to a virtual format, paired with a last-minute announcement and requirement that residents register by 4 pm, if they want to speak, creates a barrier that simply should not exist in a town that values its

people,” said Daniella Mendez, a former Dover school board president [now running for the council](#).

The move online was made after the council's [last meeting on May 27 when an individual showed up in a head-to-toe burqa, concealing their identity](#). This individual was identified by Dodd as Edward "Lefty" Grimes, a Bayonne resident and disability activist who's been a frequent critic of the mayor's.

Grimes' stunt shut down the May meeting for about 40 minutes, as he refused to leave the podium. It was the culmination of months of disruptions by activists protesting Dover policies. A fed-up Dodd, citing potential safety threats, convinced the council to ban the public from future meetings, at least for now.

Why Dover moved meetings online

At the start of the latest meeting Mayor Dodd addressed the change and referenced the burqa incident.

“This deceptive and erratic behavior was documented. While no direct harm occurred during this event, it has highlighted a potential vulnerability in our meeting environment,” Dodd said. “In a time when elected officials across the country are facing rising threats, acts of violence and even [politically motivated assassinations](#), we must take these matters seriously.

He also said that that the change is temporary and will be “continually reviewed.”

The meeting was held on Microsoft Teams. The meeting ID and passcode were posted as part of the agenda shared both on the Dover website and on the town Facebook page.

That post also requested participants to provide their name, phone number, and date of the meeting to the clerk's office by 4 pm for requests to speak in the meeting. It's unclear how closely the town enforced that requirement.

Around 60 participants were present virtually. Microphones were disabled and to speak during public comment sections, participants were asked to raise their hands electronically. Speakers were required to have their video on to address the council.

Technical difficulties

At times, the meeting felt like a re-enactment of early COVID sessions, when towns hastily embraced virtual technology out of safety concerns. There were technical problems on both sides. Some participants, including Grimes, had trouble turning on their microphones and camera and were unable to speak during public comments.

There were also times when it was difficult to hear the council members as well as some frozen screens for viewers online. According to the mayor, the meeting was held using a temporary broadcast system; a new system was not purchased because of the cost, which would be an "\$80,000 investment," he said.

"This is a temporary system. It gets through this temporary situation until we resolve the problems that we're faced with here," said Dodd.

More: [After bizarre burqa stunt, Morris County mayor says no more public meetings](#)

Some participants said they had trouble following the proceedings.

"I'm sorry counselor, I can't hear you. And in fact, all of us, there's, there's an elder here who didn't even know the meeting was virtual," Karol Ruiz, a former town councilman who appeared to be one of the individuals calling from outside town hall. "We are having a really hard time hearing you, even those of us that have brought headphones."

Toward the end of the meeting, the mayor again defended the virtual setup.

"I didn't cause this, you did. And so, I want the public to recognize the people that created this," he said. "We have these individuals that want to come to this meeting, from Connecticut, from South Jersey, from other areas, just to promote themselves

on YouTube clicks. They're here for the money, the fame, and the glory, and I won't take it, I won't tolerate it."

During the meeting, the council approved new parking regulations for the town, including a requirement to obtain parking permits for certain areas and times.

The council also approved a new interim town administrator, tapping current Chief Financial Officer Edward Ramirez. He was approved after a closed executive session, which was not streamed. Ramirez will step in after Dover's previous administrator, and the official chosen to temporarily replace him, both **abruptly resigned**.

The council also approved a 30-year tax exemption for a redevelopment project at 333, 371 and 341 East Blackwell Street where the property owner will pay 10% of its gross revenue as an annual service charge. This fee will increase by 1% every 10 years.