



Watch LIVE Local & State Government Meetings On Your Computer

By Veronica C. Valero, written for the Golden Gate Computer Society Newsletter

Did you know you can watch local and state government meetings and hearings on your computer LIVE while they're happening? And, at your convenience, you can also watch archived videos of meetings you could not attend. This is called "webcasting." It is also referred to as a "netcast," "streamed video," and "video streaming". Webcasting allows you to view a live or archived meeting on your computer as if you were watching it on TV.

Now, some may wonder, "Why watch such boring things...?" Well, if you care about what happens in your neighborhood, from development to flooding, and the in-between issues which affect us all—this is an opportunity for you to keep informed about your local government—at you leisure.

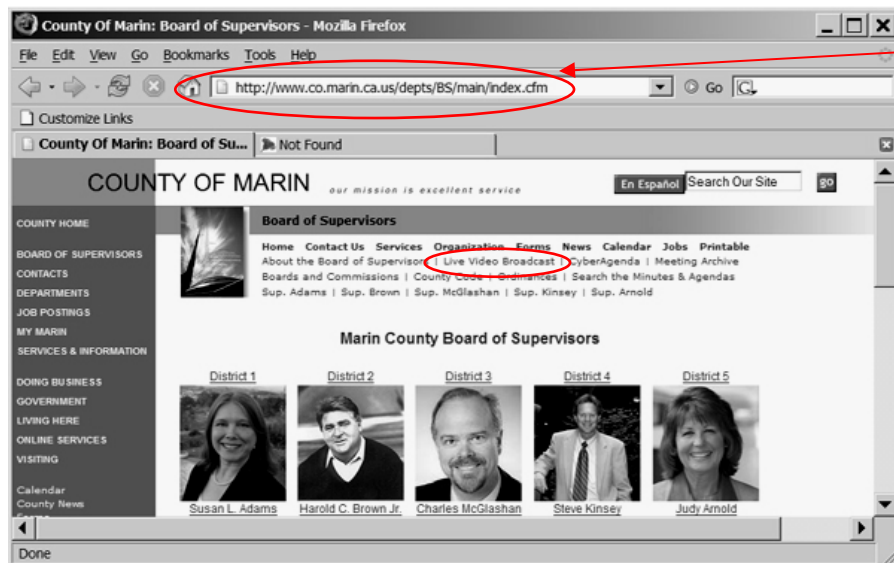
From the Marin County Board of Supervisors, to local city council meetings, to state legislative meetings and hearings, never has democracy-in-action been so convenient to observe!

With November elections just around the corner and hot issues in debate, you can not only hear your elected officials opinions on matters, but also those of your neighbors' who decide to attend meetings in order to share their opinions and concerns. Now you have no excuse and cannot say, "I didn't know?" or "Why did they do that?" because you have a way of finding out before it's old news in your local paper.

HOW TO BEGIN

Let's go to the County of Marin's website and see what's up with our Board of Supervisors.

1. Open the browser of choice on your computer (Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc.).
2. Type in www.co.marin.ca.us in the address bar at the top, then press the Enter key or the "Go" button.
3. Click on the "Board of Supervisors" link on the navigation pane found on the left side.
4. Then, click on "Live Video Broadcast": (*See Illustration*)



Most board meetings are held on Tuesdays. If no meeting is scheduled when you arrive at this webpage, you will see nothing. **Option:** You can also click on the "CyberAgenda" to subscribe to receive regular email notifications of board meetings and to view the agendas.

NOTE: If you have an older computer, you might not have the right "plug-in" to view the page. Hopefully the pop-up message can help you with this.



TO VIEW VIDEO ARCHIVES

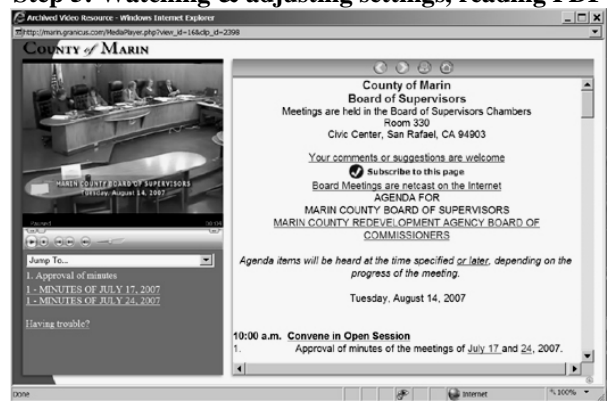
So you were in Cancun or the Swiss Alps when an important issue came before the Marin County Board of Supervisors. Have no fear. Once you've come down from the mountain or out of the warm waters, turn on your laptop or a borrowed computer and follow steps 1-3 above, then:

1. Click on "Meeting Archive" located at the top of the page.
2. Locate the date of the meeting you want to view.
3. Click on the "Video" link of your choice (*see Illustration*)
4. A window will pop up and the video will stream to your computer. It takes a few minutes.
5. Start watching from the beginning. The volume control, pause, forward, and reverse buttons are under the video. And, on the right side is the agenda. You can scroll down to a specific item and click on one of the blue underlined hyperlinks to see the supportive documents in a readable PDF format! (*See Illustration*)

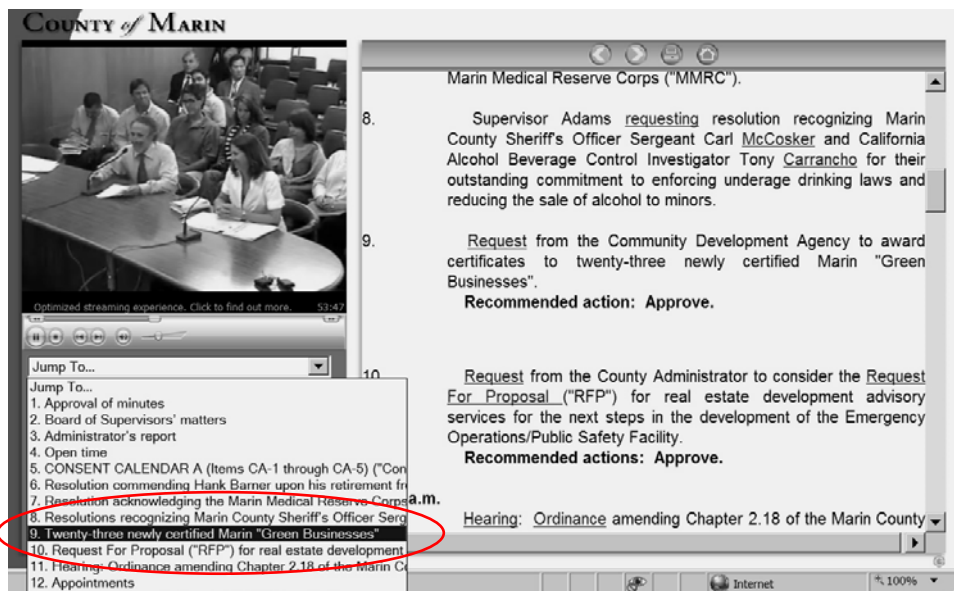
Step 3: Click on Video Link



Step 5: Watching & adjusting settings, reading PDF



6. Or, skip ahead to see a specific agenda item by using the drop-down menu under the video and select the specific agenda item. It's that simple and it's actually quite interesting!



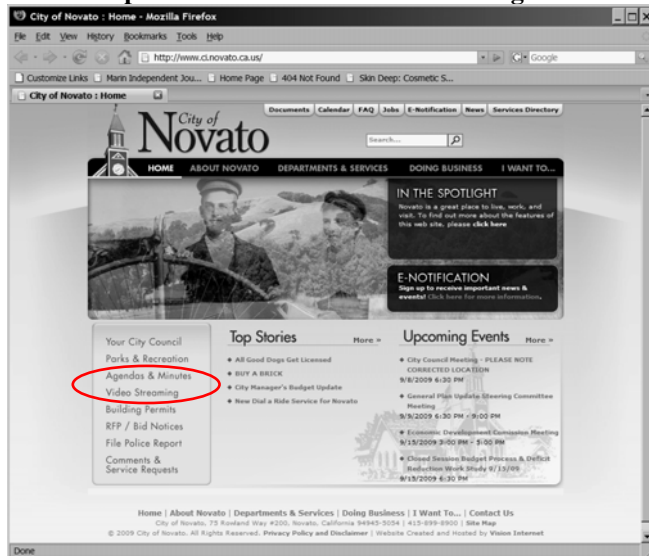


OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

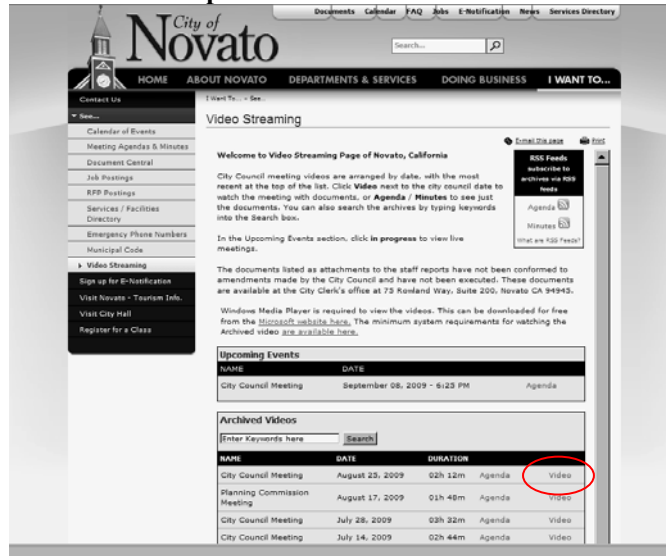
NOVATO: If you are a Novato resident and you cannot go to a City Council Meeting and you don't have access to the TV Public Access Channel, you can go to the City of Novato website and watch it live. Or, if you missed the live meeting, you can click on the Archived video link and watch it on-line.

1. Go to www.cityofnovato.org
 Click on the "Video Streaming" link on the left side.
2. If the council meeting is live, you will see a link to click to view it. It will take a minute or two to connect.
3. If you want to see an archived City Council, Planning Commission or other meeting, Under the Archived Videos section, scroll down to locate the meeting then click on the "Video" link to select.
4. A new window will appear. It will take a few minutes for the video to upload. As you wait, you can scroll down to view the agenda. If you see any links, clicking on them will bring up supportive documents for the agenda item. To learn how to adjust volume control and to "jump" to another section, see steps above under: "View Video Archive."

Step 2: Click on the "Video Streaming" link



Step 3: Click on "Video" link



GET TO KNOW YOUR CITY WEBSITE: In my search, no other cities in Marin County had a webcasting feature to watch council meeting via your computer. Hopefully this will change in the future. But, all city websites do have a lot of resources! Visit your website and take time to browse and see your city at work and what it has to offer. You will find the Parks & Recreation activities guide, a list of events, building permits documents, and information on the various committees and commissions—including information on how to be involved and make a difference in YOUR community.

CALIFORNIA: At www.legislature.ca.gov, you can search for a bill, a resolution or constitutional amendment. You also can watch current hearings and events or watch archived material.

Don't forget to visit your state legislators' websites and see the bills they authored, votes they took, and issues they are campaigning. And, Gov. Schwarzenegger's website is www.gov.ca.gov.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: Visit these sites: www.senate.gov, www.house.gov, and www.whitehouse.gov and watch recent or past speeches, read press releases and legislative documents, and even learn about our government history!

Also get to know your representatives and don't forget to send them an email or two letting them know about issues that concern you. Your opinions do matter, and your voice does get heard. Being a participating citizen has never been so easy. Now, go out and make a difference!

Veronica C. Valero started her own computer tutoring business seven years ago in Marin County, California. She is member of the Golden Gate Computer Society www.ggcs.org and had been writing book and software reviews for GGCS for over seven years. She also co-led the Small Office Home Office Special Interest Group (SIG) for two years. For more info www.ComputerTutorMarin.com or 415-897-2302.