

Sutter auditor puts board meetings online

January 24, 2009 12:24:00 AM - By Howard Yune/Appeal-Democrat

Sutter County supervisors' meetings are now online — but not yet with help from the county. The weekly sessions are available on the Internet. Their host is not the board's Web site but a separate page run by Robert Stark, the county's auditor-controller.

Meeting videos began appearing on Stark's site Dec. 31. "I don't know why the board hasn't put them on their page yet, but the taxpayers have been asking for this for quite some time," Stark said Thursday.

The webcasts offer county residents a third way to review supervisors' business. Meeting videos are available on DVD at the board clerk's office and the Sutter County Library, and Comcast Corp. has televised the meetings locally on tape delay for about 15 years, according to Chuck Smith, a county spokesman.

Stark said his past clashes with the county over posting information online — most recently, a "Citizens Report" criticizing the county pension program that led to a state reprimand — led him to launch the webcasts himself rather than wait for the county to do so. He also called the videos an attempt to help settle factual disputes over controversial issues.

"I read quotes from county officials that are not true to the events that have transpired," he said. "I'm trying to put authenticated source documents, including videos, on my site so that there isn't any confusion as to what really happened." Smith said the county's information technology staff has discussed posting meeting webcasts for least six months, but fears overtaxing the capacity of the file servers that store the county Web site's data. He suggested the county eventually might install a separate server for meeting videos, to prevent heavy usage from slowing or stalling other county Web pages.

"We're not going to do anything that'll slow down the Web site," said Smith. "The county relies on its servers to produce a lot of work, so we're going to be very careful. ... It's a project we want to do, and we'll do it when we find the right way at the right cost." Stark gets a copy of each meeting's video from the county's IT Department for his webcast video. These are the same copies sent to Comcast for broadcast on TV or are available to the public at Sutter County Library for viewing at home.

Sutter County's most recent online project was a video about the Mid-Valley's major floods of the 20th century, which appeared on YouTube last July. Whether through such public channels or its own site, the county hopes to eventually extend its reach beyond meeting broadcasts and into informational videos and possibly podcasts. But Smith dismissed any notion that Stark's move would put pressure on the county to move faster. "What actually develops, we'll see in the coming months," he said. "But there's no competition with Stark or anybody."

Comments from readers of this article:

ajdaller wrote:

Way to go Stark! You are a true maverick! 1/24/2009 12:40:32 AM

nancharp wrote:

What a great way to show that you are just looking out for our best interests. 1/24/2009 9:30:46 AM

georgeclayton wrote:

give 'em h*ll Stark at the very least they know you are watching for us. 1/24/2009 1:18:56 PM

guesswhoinsut wrote:

Too bad Howard didn't mention the url for Stark's site. Not all have the sense to do a search to find it. It would save many a lot of time wading through the listings by telling the people in the article. So I found it at <http://www.suttercountyauditor.org/>

A nicely done site with no nonsense. Lays it out for you to find what you are looking for pertaining to the county finance. 1/24/2009 2:01:23 PM

ichiban1 wrote:

uh oh, someone just took the door off the back room so all the wheeling and dealing will be out in the open and transparent to constituents. if they (supervisors) disliked Stark before, now they hate him! LOL Good to go Mr. Stark keep working on making them accountable if we can't make them honest. 1/24/2009 2:47:24 PM

piinyc wrote:

Bring on the popcorn and soda and have a seat, the best free entertainment in town at the click of your computer. It will make you laugh, it will make you cry.....but best of all you can see for yourself what takes place at the meetings. 1/24/2009 3:36:33 PM

seniorcitizen wrote:

A great way to keep up with what our Supervisor's do or don't do. Unfortunately we need to watch their every move and Mr. Stark appears to know how to do that. Keep doing the job you were elected to do Mr. Stark, we taxpayers desperately need you and certainly respect and appreciate you. 1/24/2009 5:36:20 PM

smarse wrote:

I just hope he's following the proper procedures and not planning on shafting the people for the expense. 1/25/2009 4:24:53 AM

poppy34 wrote:

Thank you Robert for providing a much needed service. I wonder why are we paying a PIO that tells us he doesn't have a site set up yet. The county seems to find money for increasing manager's salaries but can't find money for an adequate information server. Keep up the good work Mr. Stark. 1/25/2009 2:22:26 PM

rubicon wrote:

Thank you Mr. Stark for the web access to streaming video. We now have the ability to instantaneously access the pass Board meetings information without asking for a CD. This will certainly keep these pesky Supervisor's on their toes and simultaneously keep all the insomniacs in Sutter County entertained.

dmgdmg wrote:

"Sutter County's most recent online project was a video about the Mid-Valley's major floods of the 20th century, which appeared on YouTube last July." Nice video, but the meetings are more important. Money should be spent on basic public information before a flood pictorial. I couldn't find it on Sutter County's website but it's here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBf2AQCV-3s>

Not a great response from a public information officer. Perhaps the county can better use the \$66,000 they pay Smith to publish the meetings on its own website. 2-1-08: "The Board of Supervisors approved hiring Smith Tuesday night on a 4-1 vote at an advanced salary step of \$66,444 per year. Supervisor Stan Cleveland was the minority vote, saying he had opposed creating the position since its inception last year. "I'm not going to change that," he said. Two people in attendance also disapproved of the hire, with Yuba City resident Wade Arnold calling the job a "propaganda officer." Supervisor Jim Whiteaker was in disagreement on the need for an information officer. "I feel the county does a terrible job of getting information to the public," he said." What do you think now Whiteaker? Yeah, still a terrible job. 1/26/2009 12:23:28 PM

seabird wrote:

With Auditor publishing it is hard to have "missing tape" segments. Wonder how long it will take before Auditor is denied access to the copies. In the view of the County, too much information is dangerous--for them. Replays of "rip your head off," "shut up," "proudly ignorant," etc. could get a comedy of the year award--or make it as another reality show. Popcorn concessions offer the best job opportunity provided by the Sups in years. 1/26/2009 3:40:26 PM

piinyc wrote:

Whether you like Stark or not, he has done something that the county couldn't seem to do, but what else is new? And to think he did this without any costly study by an outside agency... 1/26/2009 4:15:20 PM