

Loudon County, Tennessee Commission Forum Plan

This document explains how Loudon County, Tennessee Government will satisfy the requirements in **Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 8-44-109**, relating to open electronic communication between members of a governing body by means of an Internet forum. The Loudon County Commission voted unanimously to pursue the use of an Internet forum on August 3, 2009. The statute's requirements are listed below, followed by Loudon County's compliance statement regarding each requirement. As long as the Loudon County Commission utilizes the online forum, the requirements of the plan must be met. If the Loudon County Commission chooses at any time to discontinue using the online forum, Loudon County Commission must give adequate public notice and notice to the Office of Open Records Counsel of its decision.

(a) A governing body may, but is not required to, allow electronic communication between members by means of a forum over the Internet only if the governing body:

On August 3, 2009, the Loudon County Commission voted unanimously to pursue the use of an Internet forum for open electronic communication between its members.

(1) Insures that the forum through which the electronic communications are conducted is available to the public at all times other than that necessary for technical maintenance or unforeseen technical limitations;

Once created and implemented, the Loudon County Commission Forum will be thereafter included as a part of the Loudon County, Tennessee Government website (loudoncounty-tn.gov) and accessible by the general public. The Loudon County website is in operation on a 24 x 7 x 365 basis and is publicly available on the Internet except during routine maintenance or in the rare event of technical difficulties. The website has historically been extremely reliable, and the County conservatively estimates that it has been out of service for routine maintenance or unexpected difficulties less than seven (7) percent of the time. To further support the website's reliability, the County plans to acquire a backup server that will drastically reduce the amount of time the website will remain inaccessible during a technical problem. The County website, including the online forum, is monitored continuously by Loudon County's Director of Information Technology, who will serve as the webmaster. The forum will contain a link to the webmaster for the public to report technical problems or user questions. The general Loudon County website will also contain a link to the webmaster, in the event that the forum site is unavailable.

(2) Provides adequate public notice of the governing body's intended use of such electronic communication forum;

Prior to the time the forum opens for use, the Loudon County Commission will publish a statement in the local newspaper and on its website explaining the forum's purpose and how it will be used. The Loudon County Commission Forum will include that notice statement in a

Loudon County, Tennessee Commission Forum Plan

forum post which will remain at the top of the list of forum topics so it will always be visible when visitors first access the Loudon County Commission Forum homepage. Visitors to the forum will be able to open this forum topic by clicking on the title and can then read the intended use of the forum. This forum post will remain available and visible to the public as long as the forum remains in operation.

(3) Controls who may communicate through the forum;

The forum provides an opportunity for Loudon County Commission members to communicate electronically, while satisfying open meeting requirements. Although available for viewing at all times by members of the public, members of the Loudon County Commission are the only individuals permitted to post comments or statements on the forum.

The Loudon County Commission Forum will be created with two types of accounts: "basic user accounts" with limited functionality, and "administrator" accounts with much broader privileges. Each County Commissioner will be assigned a basic user account and password. The rights assigned to these basic user accounts will be as follows:

- The right to create and post new forum topics
- The right to create and post comments to forum topics

These basic user accounts will not have the right to modify or delete *any* topics or comments (their own or anyone else's) once they have been posted to the forum.

Administrator accounts with additional capabilities, such as modify and delete rights, must exist on the forum to allow for the deletion or modification of user accounts, password resets, removal of topics or comments past the one year requirement, and general maintenance and administration of the forum infrastructure, and other necessary uses. Users will only be assigned a forum administrator account after demonstrating an understanding that they may not remove or modify any topics or posts made by any county commissioner until such posts are beyond the one year requirement. Loudon County plans to limit the administrator accounts to the IT Director and one designee, in case of emergency. All user accounts and administrator accounts will be required to change passwords at least once every six (6) months.

(4) Controls the archiving of the electronic communications to ensure that the electronic communications are publicly available for at least one (1) year after the date of the communication; provided, that access to the archived electronic communications is user-friendly for the public; and

The web server(s) used to host the Loudon County Commission Forum includes a database that will be used to store all forum communications. All website and database content currently is

Loudon County, Tennessee Commission Forum Plan

and shall be backed up nightly with the intent to be able to restore forum communications in the event of a server failure.

The database used as part of the Loudon County Commission Forum will be set up to, by default, display all forum communications for a period of at least one year. While a forum communication thread remains “open,” all comments will continue to be displayed, no matter the age of the comments. When matters are concluded, commissioners have the ability to “close” the discussion. Loudon County intends to display all comments or discussion for at least one year following the closing of the discussion topic, which ensures that all comments will be posted for at least one full year. When comments older than one year are removed from the forum, they will be stored electronically by the IT Director and will be available for inspection pursuant to an open records request. Topics are listed in the order they were added to the forum, with newer items appearing higher in the list. Comments posted to topics are listed in a similar manner. The forum will include a search engine that will assist users in searching for specific content.

(5) Provides reasonable access for members of the public to view the forum at the local public library, the building where the governing body meets, or other public building.

Currently the following public buildings have computers with Internet access that are available to any member of the public:

- Loudon Public Library
- Lenoir City Public Library
- Greenback Public Library
- Philadelphia Public Library
- Tellico Village Public Library

The computers designated for public use at these locations will have access to the Loudon County Government website and thus will have access to the Loudon County Commission Forum, except in the case of technical difficulties or maintenance. Members of the public will need to present identification in order to use the computers. Proper identification includes a driver's license or other official photo ID (such as a government-issued ID or military ID) or a library card. There is no charge to use the computers, and the library branches maintain regular business hours, which are posted at each branch location as well as the county website.