

# The NC Grand Lodge Tech Committee Response to COVID19

*Prepared by the Committee on Technology with the help of the various brothers and committee members of NC. Submitted: March 27 2020AD*

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## Introduction:

The North Carolina Technology Committee has been charged with offering the Grand Lodge of North Carolina A. F. and A. M. by Grand Master Most Worshipful Shaun Bradshaw with a technology recommendation to allow Lodges to continue to function over the course of the year, should the need be determined for the good of the Craft. Most Worshipful Shaun charged the committee to answer basic questions around the Code, conducting business, a singular platform to offer the craft, and allow it to continue some business in a normalized fashion should it not be possible to gather Masons for an extended period of time.

## Problem Statement:

Restrictions for meeting in large groups have been placed on the citizens of North Carolina and look to remain in place for some time. As the Grand Lodge of North Carolina spans the state, hosting more than 350 lodges which support its charities, and offers support to lodge widows, orphans, and the at-risk members to the "COVID19" Virus. It is the charge of this committee to offer suggestions for consideration of the Grand Master and his various committee delegates. It is with respect that we thus recommend the following technical solutions for consideration.

## Method for selecting technologies:

This committee researched seven-teen (17) different online cloud-based service offerings for online collaboration through internet connected providers. A Gartner Report was used to determine the top four leaders in the industry based on Vision and ability to execute given the current state of the country. Ability to execute includes the financial support base necessary to quickly increase capacity. Gartner Evaluates the solutions based on the following categories

- Creating operational efficiencies
- Cost management
- Driving innovation
- Improving business process agility
- Enhancing decision making

Of the Top right 4 recommendations for product, those were evaluated for a further 13 categories by the committee.

- Offers Portal based administration
- Offers a telephone dial in bridge
- Is there a Free version?
- What is the licensing structure?
- How many users have access to set up meetings?
- Is a Web Cam Supported?

- Mobile Platform?
- Poor internet connection alternative?
- Offers a lobby.
- Can we use Mori for verification?
- Supports Polling for voting?
- Focused Discussion?
- Could it support a tiled lodge?
- What is the Administrative cost?

Gartner Results:



## Results of the Technology Evaluation.

Cisco Product: Cisco Webex

Product Demo: <https://www.webex.com/test-meeting.html>

Cisco offers several scaled levels of features, but during this time of crisis, they have enhanced their free level features that offer a cost-neutral solution. The potential downside is that throttling would occur on free platforms and less so on paid platforms if internet traffic problems increase.

The screenshot displays four pricing tiers for Cisco Webex:

- Personal:** \$0 per month per host. Features include up to 100 participants, unlimited meetings, and video conferencing.
- Small teams:** \$13.50 per month per host. Features include up to 50 participants, 5 GB of cloud storage, and recording transcriptions.
- Mid-size teams:** \$17.95 per month per host. Features include up to 100 participants, ability to assign alternate hosts, and 24/7 customer support.
- Large teams & businesses:** \$26.95 per month per host (minimum 5 licenses). Features include up to 200 participants, 10 GB of cloud storage, and Microsoft Exchange integration.

Offers Web	<a href="https://www.webex.com/pricing/index.html">https://www.webex.com/pricing/index.html</a>
Phone dial in bridge	Yes
Free version?	yes, increased features due to COVID-19
licensing structure how many users have access to set up meetings.	Based on # purchased accounts
Web Cam Supported	Yes
Mobile Platform	Yes
Poor internet connection	Offers Dial In bridge
Offers a lobby	Yes
Using Mori for verification	Yes, process will be same regardless of product.
Supports Polling	<a href="https://help.webex.com/en-us/n0pdj9x/Start-a-Poll-in-Cisco-Webex-Meetings">https://help.webex.com/en-us/n0pdj9x/Start-a-Poll-in-Cisco-Webex-Meetings</a>
Focused Discussion	Yes
Could it support a tiled lodge	Yes
Administrative cost	
Training	<a href="https://www.webex.com/training-online.html">https://www.webex.com/training-online.html</a>

## Zoom Product: Zoom

Offers Web	<a href="https://zoom.us/pricing">https://zoom.us/pricing</a>
Phone dial in bridge	Yes
Free version?	Yes Limited to 40 mins
licensing structure how many users have access to set up meetings.	Based on purchased accounts
Web Cam Supported	Yes
Mobile Platform	Yes
Poor internet connection	Dial In Bridge
Offers a lobby	YES
Using Mori for verification	Yes, process will be same regardless of product.
Supports Polling	Yes
Focused Discussion	Yes
Could it support a tiled lodge	Yes
Administrative cost	Will need admin to maintain portal , Yearly Opex
Training	<a href="https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/sections/201740096-Training">https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/sections/201740096-Training</a>

## Microsoft Product: Microsoft O365 E1/F1 Teams

- Web-based Office apps and business services. Office desktop apps not included
- Get email, file storage and sharing, meetings, and instant messaging
- Five layers of security and monitoring help keep your data safe
- Guaranteed 99.9% uptime
- Host online meetings—1:1, teams, live events up to 10,000 people—with consistent experiences across platforms.

Phone dial in bridge	Yes
Free version?	yes, increased features due to coniv19
licensing structure how many users have access to set up meetings.	6 months free - still waiting on 501 C investigation. Working on a strati forward donation and E1 Licensing of office365 350 licenses 8-10\$ a user(able to create a conference bridge)
Web Cam Supported	Yes
Mobile Platform	Yes
Poor internet connection	Offers Dial in bridge
Offers a lobby	yes
Using Mori for verification	Yes, process will be same regardless of product.
Supports Polling	Yes
Focused Discussion	Yes
Could it support a tiled lodge	Yes
Administrative cost	Portal based, Depends on licensing model
Training	<a href="https://support.office.com/en-us/article/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7">https://support.office.com/en-us/article/microsoft-teams-video-training-4f108e54-240b-4351-8084-b1089f0d21d7</a>

LogMeIn: Product: Go to meeting

Offers Web	<a href="https://www.gotomeeting.com/meeting/pricing">https://www.gotomeeting.com/meeting/pricing</a>
Phone dial in bridge	Yes
Free version?	No, \$5 per month if we subscribe for 300 accounts. @ 1 account per Lodge to host meetings
licensing structure how many users have access to set up meetings.	No, \$5 per month if we subscribe for 300 accounts. @ 1 account per Lodge to host meetings
Web Cam Supported	Yes
Mobile Platform	Yes
Poor internet connection	Yes
Offers a lobby	Not Available. The product that has this is expensive compared to competition.
Using Mori for verification	Yes, process will be same regardless of product.
Supports Polling	No
Focused Discussion	Yes
Could it support a tiled lodge	Given we don't have waiting room in Goto meeting unless we subscribe to the more costlier Webinar, I don't think this is possible
Administrative cost	\$5 per license for 300 accounts. licenses can be revoked and reassigned
Training	<a href="https://www.goto.com/resources">https://www.goto.com/resources</a>

Conclusion

It is the conclusion of the Committee that 1 of 2 Solutions be selected based on functionality and ability to deliver our needed feature set at the least potential cost. Microsoft teams or Cisco WebEx.

## Recommendations for use

### Immediate Use

It is the recommendation of this committee for immediate action, that brothers in the community use whatever technology is at their disposal to adhere to the GM and Board of Custodians recommendation on what is appropriate in what context so long as those technologies include the required technologies to meet their needs and include ALL brothers in the conversation. Peer to Peer communication tools such as WhatsApp and Skype are available for free to members wishing to coach or host quick face to face conversations in addition to the above technologies.

### Further Use.

While this technology is built for hosting collaborative meetings, it is generally recognized that the customary in person lodge meetings according to our traditions, usages, and customs do not match the technology platform. Further, our meetings are private and not meant for the profane ear. However, there is a recognized need to conduct limited business necessary to support our brothers during this health crisis and as well meet and converse as a community. The Committee has laid out possible solutions for some of the perceived limitations for the consideration of the Board of Custodians and Brothers at large.

### Social Dynamics

Keeping in mind that some brothers are limited by last mile service limitations, missing skillsets and lack of technology we ask that consideration be given that a conference bridge be set up to allow those with telephones to join via phone. Before conducting any official call, setting up a 1 on 1 practice session with those less familiar with the tech is recommended. The Master and Officers of the lodge should make every effort should they choose to utilize technology to aid and assist those unable to use it. Including ensuring conversations and business be communicated to those brothers verbally over the phone or via mailing. We also recommend that meeting platforms be opened at least one-half hour before and after to facilitate social interaction and fellowship.

### Supporting the community – Aid and Mutual Benefit

Historically the Lodge has served as a centerpiece for the mutual benefit of the members and surrounding community. Allowing war bond sales, events for blood drives and other community support mechanisms in a time of need is one of the core tenants throughout the last century of our purpose. It is the opinion of this committee that this platform would allow the lodge to continue to serve in that spirit. By allowing the lodge to address and voice community needs in a time that we are most needed this will offer a safe platform for these types of discussions.

### Location of the lodge – Time and Place

It is the recommendation of this committee for existing lodges to use this platform in the form of a emergent communication and therefor all business transacted could adhere to regulation 45-3 of the Code unless otherwise ordered by the Grand master, approved by the Board of Custodians and relevant committees. This would allow masonic education, request for aid and assistance and general communication around the enabling community to meet its needs.

Time and place of this emergent meeting would have to be announced and accessible to all members of the lodge. Via Phone /or Web. Images of the flag and the three great lights can easily be displayed for



those attending virtually if this is acceptable to the Grand Master and the Board of Custodians. Enabling the lodge to function as a center for the community would keep in spirit the needs of the community at its center.

#### Keeping a tiled space

Our meetings are to be confidential to the members. We currently and routinely have confidential meetings between brothers outside of a lodge where the secrets of masonry are discussed. These are called 'coaching sessions'.

For a Virtual Lodge meeting, we can charge each brother to tile their own space as if in a 'coaching session', and the Tyler's role would be to see that no one entered the meeting without an appropriate passcode (sign in numbers or login credentials). As a practical matter the meeting software will handle this and the Tyler's position will be largely ceremonial, but that will be little different than it is now in a regular Tiled lodge or than it is at a Grand Lodge Meeting. Each member is responsible for tiling their own space as with coaching sessions. The use of headphones could solve a lot of the concerns for tiling individual space.

Not all Brothers will have a computer set up that will allow them to tile a space for a meeting so that non-master masons cannot hear what is said. This could be solved using headphones. The Brother taking up the word should also satisfy himself that the Brother desiring to attend can adequately tile his space. If the Brother taking up the word is not satisfied that the Brother seeking admission to the virtual lodge can and will adequately tile his space, then the Brother taking up the word should decline to provide the pass code. If a Brother's space appears inadequately tiled, the Master may move the Brother to a Waiting Room feature where the Master will designate one of the officers to privately help the offending Brother come into compliance. Thereafter, with the cooperation of the Brother, he can return to the meeting room.

#### Options for authentication or taking up the pass for tiling a session

We have several ways that we could take up a password. The lowest tech way would be a phone call between a member(s) of the lodge designated by the Master and the brothers. If the designated brother recognizes the number and voice of the brother seeking to attend and the Pass is right, the brother desiring to attend could be invested with the log in number for the meeting which would then be used in place of the pass to enter the meeting. Another would be for a brother(s) designated by the Master and the brother desiring to attend to meet in a private virtual meeting and the designee could take up the pass and invest the brother with the log in number as above. To avoid taking these steps for each meeting the lodge could use the same pass code for each meeting.

For those brothers using OLP there is an option for eliminating the step of taking up the pass. To eliminate manual verification of every visitor, lodges could post the link to their meeting on the meeting invite on OLP, it will serve as automatic method of verifying membership as only OLP members who authenticated via MORI credentials will have access to as the meetings are available only to members to respond. Further Meeting codes could be implemented. Members without smart phones or computers could be called directly by the officers of the lodge and given the bridge number. They would have to announce themselves once joining the bridge.

While the app only lets users to see events from our own jurisdiction. Desktop version of OLP can be used to navigate to other jurisdictions on OLP and look at lodges. Please refer to below screenshot.

It is recommended that the grand lodge ask mori if they can make this more seamless user experience by allowing users to change jurisdiction to see and accept meetings from other jurisdictions too.

The screenshot shows the OLP website interface for Cannon Memorial Lodge #626 A.F. & A.M. The browser address bar shows the URL [ourlodgepage.com/app/clubs/626-nc](http://ourlodgepage.com/app/clubs/626-nc), with the ID '626-nc' circled in red. The page features a blue header with the 'OLP' logo. On the left is a navigation menu with links for Home, Calendar, Posts, Files, and Photos. The main content area includes a Masonic logo with the letter 'G', the lodge name 'Cannon Memorial Lodge #626 A.F. & A.M.', and the address '704 S. Main St., Kannapolis, NC 28081'. Below this, a description states the lodge is in Kannapolis, North Carolina, part of District 28. The meeting schedule is 'Meets: 1st & 3rd Tue Monthly @ 7:00 PM'. The 'Next Event' section displays 'Tuesday, April 7, 2020' at '7:00pm' for a 'Cancelled: Stated Communication', with an 'Attending?' button.

The screenshot shows the OLP website interface for Queen of Sheba Lodge #226 F. & A.M. The browser address bar shows the URL [ourlodgepage.com/app/clubs/226-ny](http://ourlodgepage.com/app/clubs/226-ny), with the ID '226-ny' circled in red. The page features a blue header with the 'OLP' logo. On the left is a navigation menu with links for Home, Calendar, Posts, Files, and Photos. The main content area includes a Masonic logo with the letter 'G', the lodge name 'Queen of Sheba Lodge #226 F. & A.M.', and the address 'Main Street, Antwerp, NY 13608'. Below this, a description states the lodge is in Antwerp, New York, part of JEFFERSON-LEWIS. The meeting schedule is 'Meets: 2nd & 4th Wed except JAN,FEB,JUL,AUG'. The 'Next Event' section displays 'Wednesday, March 25, 2020' at '7:00pm' for a 'Stated Communication', with an 'Attending?' button.

If lodges post the link to their meeting on the meeting invite in OLP, it will help keep the meeting distribution to only dues paying members as the meetings are available only to members to respond.

For visitors from jurisdictions outside our jurisdiction, The Secretary or Junior Deacon should follow the normal process of investigation before sending out the meeting invite. Ultimately any one joining the lobby would have to be investigated if not recognized by the Junior Deacon.

As a further measure of security, Lodges should not re-use the same link for every meeting but set up a new link every time. This of course would require going through whatever steps are adopted for taking up the pass in advance of each meeting.

### Ritual Use

As the use of the ritual is the province of the Board of Custodians, we can only describe what might be done with the current technology. With the current technology a lodge could open and close by the OSW with the exception of taking up the password as provided for above and tiling as at a Grand Lodge meeting modified to accommodate the virtual meeting.

### Voting:

Most voting in a lodge is done by show of hands in compliance with Reg. 63-3. If a matter is before the lodge for a vote, brothers can turn on their mics and seek recognition. When asked to vote by a show of hands, all members voting can show their hands. The vote can be counted as with any other show of hands vote. Everyone in the meeting can see how everyone votes on the issue just as if they were sitting in a lodge meeting.

If a written ballot is to be taken, then the members can vote using the Chat features or a polling features of the platform. Written ballots are not secret ballots and there is no Code limitation on anyone knowing the results of a written ballot. Only secret ballots are secret. Only secret ballots carry penalties for disclosing how someone votes a secret ballot. The Chat vote or the Polling vote can be counted, and the results reported just as we now do with a paper ballot.

### Secret Ballot

The Committee recommends that a polling app embedded in the meeting could take place of the Ballot box. Its use would allow anonymity. However more investigation is needed at this time to prove its use if there should be a contested vote. 3<sup>rd</sup> party Polling platforms could be employed to host a secret ballot. However as there currently is no way to host a degree or installation this business should be deferred until such time as the lodge can reconvene in person. Great care would be needed to train officers on how to use the polling platform to avoid confusion or contesting its results.

### Conferencing large audiences

It is the recommendation of this committee that if not donated, the Grand lodge purchase enough licenses and Hardware to broadcast large meetings to our membership. Whatever hardware kit used will be dependent on the selected software vendor. An example Polycom "POLY G7500" should be purchased and set up in the main conference room in the grand lodge if Teams is selected. This will "video enable" the room at a cost of an estimated \$6000-\$12,000 dollars and allow the Grand lodge to broadcast to its membership with professional quality results. As it could be used for future conferences it could be considered an investment as a capital project.

## Recommendations for code evaluation by the Board of Custodians

Given the context of the Committee report above we ask for consideration by the Board of Custodians the following.

- Can an emergent communication be called online within the bounds of the code?
- Can pictures of the flag, ornaments or furniture of the lodge be used in place of the flag, ornaments or furniture of the lodge keeping in mind these are extreme circumstances?
- What business could be conducted given we could tile in the above proposed method?
- Could lodges be temporarily allowed to be opened in ample form with slight ceremonial variations to accommodate a virtual lodge format and to carry out the business agenda of the lodge as determined by its Master?
- Could a lodge be allowed by vote of its membership to conduct its regular meetings virtually until such time as the Grand Master determines that lodges may again resume meeting in regular form?

The Technology Committee will continue investigating getting a service donated to the GL for the remainder of the year, however we also recognize that this technology could be used to allow the Formation of virtual lodges as some other jurisdictions host. Thank you to the brothers who have offered assistance over the last week to produce this document and keep masonry functional.