

The new “ZoomRoom” facilities for medium-sized hybrid meetings

With the Covid pandemic subsiding, we may soon be able to hold most of our committee meetings in person if we wish. From our pandemic experience, we’ve learned that Zoom meetings can be quite effective, and some committees may well decide to continue to meet entirely on Zoom. There will also be committees that want to use a “hybrid” format, with some people meeting in person, and some participating via Zoom (either because they can’t attend in person, or because they prefer not to).

Hybrid meetings are easy to handle with up to 3-4 in-person participants and a similar number on Zoom. The in-person participants can huddle around a laptop, and that will allow both groups to see and hear each other. With larger groups, though, hybrid meetings are trickier and may require additional equipment for a satisfactory experience. Kendal-Crosslands (KCC) is in the process of installing a technology suite called “ZoomRooms” to make it easier to hold medium-sized meetings.

ZoomRooms. The ZoomRoom systems that KCC is installing involve some special technology that supports the “room extension” approach to hybrid meetings. It incorporates a special version of the Zoom software and a suite of special-purpose equipment that is permanently mounted in a room. The ZoomRoom software supports special features (such as a shared “whiteboard” capability and room scheduling). On the Zoom website, [ZoomRooms are described](#) as “conference rooms that make it easy to run or join video meetings with the tap of a button.”

When the ZoomRoom system is used, the Zoom participants appear on a screen at one end of the room. Also at that end of the room are loudspeakers that let the in-person participants hear the Zoom participants and a video camera that lets the Zoom participants see the room. A microphone to pick up the voices of the in-person participants is also provided.

A ZoomRoom license is more expensive than a standard Zoom license, and it requires a hardware configuration (available from several different vendors) costing several thousand dollars, so this is not a solution for individual Zoom users. But it makes sense for corporate use, and KCC is starting to adopt it. It is currently installed in the Conference Room on each campus, and is available for resident committees to use.

Using ZoomRoom for meetings in our Conference Room. I recently did a test of the ZoomRoom setup in our Conference Room. Connie Dilley is in charge of it, and she showed me the procedure. It is straightforward. Here are the steps:

- Schedule a Zoom session using your own Zoom account. Make a copy of the Zoom link. (I assume you know how to do that; if not check with your neighborhood Zoom guru.) Any Zoom account can be used.
- Make a room reservation for Conference Room, using the [reservation form on the KRA website](#).
- KCC keeps a schedule for each room in Microsoft Outlook. When the front-desk person receives the reservation, they will copy the Zoom link into the Outlook calendar for the room you have reserved. This is the only manual step in the process.
- There is a small computer tablet on the table in the Conference Room that is part of the ZoomRoom system. It displays the scheduled events for the room. When you arrive for your

scheduled ZoomRoom session, you need to select your meeting from the schedule that is displayed.

- The tablet then provides the option to start or join the Zoom meeting. When you click on that, the Zoom display opens on the wall-mounted display. You will be able to see and hear other participants, and (once they have joined the Zoom session) they will be able to see and hear you without any additional steps. All the normal Zoom functions are available. The Conference Room will show up as a single participant on the screens of the remote Zoom users.
- The tablet also has features to turn the camera from side to side and to do limited optical zooming. Those features could optionally be used to zero in on whoever in the Conference Room is speaking.
- If you want to use screen-sharing, or if you want to host the meeting from the Conference Room instead of from a remote Zoom user's computer, bring along a laptop and use the Center's WiFi service to log into the Zoom meeting. You'll want to mute and silence the laptop so that it doesn't interfere with the ZoomRoom microphone and loudspeakers.

With the help of Connie Dilley, my wife Jan and I recently did a test of the ZoomRoom in the Kendal Conference Room using our Zoom account. I was present in the Conference Room with Connie, while Jan launched and hosted the meeting from our cottage. It worked just as advertised.

You don't need to use ZoomRoom for a medium-sized meeting if you are willing to connect up a laptop to a big screen or video projector and you know how to deal with the loudspeaker, video, and microphone issues yourself. The advantage of using a ZoomRoom is that the equipment is provided and nothing needs to be connected.

Right now, ZoomRoom facilities are available in the Conference Rooms on the two campuses. James Craig, who heads the IT Department for KCC, tells me that there are plans to add ZoomRoom facilities to the Multipurpose Room and the Training Room later this year.

You'll still need someone to host. For anything more than the simplest Zoom meeting, someone to serve as a dedicated host will be needed. The Zoom host may need to mute a participant's computer when they step away from their desk to answer the door or an unanticipated guest enters the room. In some cases, a host will be needed to launch the meeting, to bring in participants from the waiting room, or to rename them. From time to time, a user will have a technical issue that the host will need to address using the chat function. The host needs to be a Zoom participant, but does not need to be present in the in-person gathering—in fact, having the host there in person may be a distraction.

As the size of the meeting increases, it is increasingly likely that the host will not have time to play a significant role in the content of the meeting. A different person (the moderator) will need to run the business of the meeting. The Zoom host needs to be reasonably savvy about the Zoom technology and user interface features; the moderator does not.

I think residents will find the ZoomRoom facility helpful for meetings of up to perhaps 30 people, with up to 20 of them present in the Conference Room (once gatherings of that size are permitted, which they currently are not). Even larger meetings will be possible once the Multipurpose Room and the Training Room are equipped.