



My turn.....

Henry Winokur, Editor, (editor@patacs.org)



Once again it is newsletter time...but where has the time gone between the last one and now? I dunno, but it's definitely gone, that's for sure.

First up, the annual report of the State of our Society, which you'll find on page 2. Thanks to treasurer Roger Fujii and president Paul Howard for putting it together.

Second, did/do you remember that if you have stuff you don't want, you can post it here in POSTS' classifieds? We haven't seen that feature in a while and I suspect that either we have nothing to get rid of, or the use of this forum was forgotten. In the last issue, I said that I would be changing my camera system to mirrorless, and so I have. The past 2 weeks has seen a lot of wonderful photo equipment fly out my door as I have changed from DSLR to mirrorless, but now I have gear that I need to sell...listed in the **classifieds** on page 14.

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PATACS Annual Financial Report, for Fiscal Year 2021

PATACS's fiscal year concluded on September 30th. The Society is in excellent financial condition. Results from Operations reflects \$959.92 from operations – greater revenues than expenses.

Amazon commissions via our website links were \$24.77, which was down considerably from prior years. This is due to Amazon unilaterally cancelling their referral program. This value is received from smile.amazon.com.

Donations are vital to the fiscal soundness of the Society. Member generosity accounted for 30 percent of our income. The total amount here has been impacted by lack of physical meetings.

PATACS is financially sound because of prudent planning and fiscal restraint. Membership stands at 93. We have opened an interest-bearing savings account, which makes our total interest income \$119.78. This will drop in the current year due to low interest rates.

Our reconciled account balances within our Quicken accounting system at the close of the fiscal year were: Operating Checking Account - \$4,089.82; Paypal - \$321.31; Savings - \$12,810.43; CD-F account - \$1,155.42; CD-G account - \$2,169.65.

This Annual Treasurer's Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2021 was approved by the Board of Directors of PATACS on 11/22/2021. The balances and the Cash Flow Report which follows are certified as correct.

Roger Fujii, Treasurer Paul Howard, President

The “organizational documents” area of our web site contains additional information about the user group’s financial operations, including prior years' Financial Reports for comparison purposes.

Category	10/1/2020-9/30/2021
INFLOWS	
Amazon Commissions	24.77
Donations	
Direct	1,342.00
TOTAL Donations	1,342.00
Dues	2,850.00
IntInc	119.78
TOTAL INFLOWS	4,336.55
OUTFLOWS	
Admin	
APCUG Membership	50.00
Bank & Paypal Fees	63.58
Legal	330.00
State Filing Fees	25.00
TOTAL Admin	468.58
Contribution	
OLLI	500.00
TOTAL Contribution	500.00
Insurance	475.00
Meeting	
Door Prize	300.00
TOTAL Meeting	300.00
Membership Services	
Advertising	168.00
Website	
DNS Reg, SSL Cert	127.02
Hosting Services	-62.37
TOTAL Website	64.65
TOTAL Membership Services	232.65
NewsLetter	
Assembly	84.26
Postage	270.00
Printing	1,046.14
TOTAL NewsLetter	1,400.40
TOTAL OUTFLOWS	3,376.63
OVERALL TOTAL	959.92

###

Letters

Facebook is Evil and It's Wrong to Use It

By Gabe Goldberg

So much has been written about Facebook being evil, corrupt, duplicitous, and greedy, that I can't add to that body of compelling evidence. So here's a very small set of articles (plenty more are out there) demonstrating why it's wrong to use it. Yes, I've heard all the reasons it can't be given up – it's needed to connect with family, friends, colleagues, clients, etc. But...

How did we stay in touch before Facebook? I stay in touch with plenty friends, relatives, clients, colleagues without it—using email, text, telephone, letters, greeting cards, and getting together. So can you.

So long, Facebook, this goodbye is forever. We are splitting over irreconcilable differences.

<https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2021/10/24/so-long-facebook-this-goodbye-is-forever/>.

D.C. Attorney General Names Mark Zuckerberg As A Defendant In Facebook Lawsuit

<https://dcist.com/story/21/10/20/mark-zuckerberg-facebook-lawsuit-karl-racine/>.

We Research Misinformation on Facebook. It Just Disabled Our Accounts.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/10/opinion/facebook-misinformation.html>.

Facebook Uses Deceptive Math to Hide Its Hate Speech Problem. The company publicly claims its AI is amazing at removing harmful content, but internal documents suggest they know the algorithm is ineffective. <https://www.wired.com/story/facebooks-deceptive-math-when-it-comes-to-hate-speech>.

Zuckerberg Never Fails to Disappoint

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/10/opinion/facebook-zuckerberg.html>.

Finally: <https://dilbert.com/strip/2021-08-01>

And even more finally: How to Permanently Delete Your Facebook Account

<https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-delete-your-facebook-account/>.

###

PERSONAL AUDIO SUPPORT IN LIVE MEETINGS

Your portable device and earbuds (or headphones) can help you hear

By John Krout, Potomac Area Technology and Computer Society (PATACS)

INTRODUCTION

During a group effort to upgrade audio-visual tech in the once-and-future classroom meeting space for PATACS in Fairfax, VA in June 2021, the president of PATACS casually mentioned that some audience members may need extra help hearing instructors and other speakers at meetings.

The room has six public-address loudspeakers installed, all conveying the microphone of the instructor. The audio volume on those speakers is necessarily limited to avoid audio feedback through microphones used by instructors.

I decided to look into it. I chose to focus on astute use of audience smartphones and tablets. Bring-along headphones or earbuds, run an app to receive meeting audio, and adjust volume to suit personal needs.

Since all PATACS meetings are made available to members via Zoom, initially I thought of using Zoom apps on portable devices while attending live meetings. I have had the Zoom app installed on my phone and tablet for more than a year.

AUDIO DELAY TIMING TESTS

However, there is an issue worth considering: Zoom audio is delayed a bit. When attending a meeting remotely, that delay is no big deal. I wondered if it would be annoying in a meeting while watching an instructor.

I did some timing tests to quantify the Zoom audio delay, using three different approaches: phone running Zoom and connected via WiFi, phone running Zoom and connected via the cell phone network, and phone not running Zoom but dialed in to the Zoom phone number for audio. I hosted a meeting on my desktop PC, and connected to that meeting using my smart phone and each of the three methods.

The shortest delay was **0.38** seconds. I think that is excessive. I set out to find other options.

I tried using the free **VLC application** on a computer to live-stream audio on Wi-Fi. I used the free **VLC** app on my Samsung Galaxy S10 phone to receive the streaming audio. I quantified that delay, too: 0.781 seconds, using HTTP protocol and MP3 transcoding. FLAC transcoding also worked, but resulted in progressively increasing delay, starting at 0.8 seconds and growing to 1.02 seconds after 60 seconds of audio. Neither offers smaller delays than Zoom.

Then I thought about this: why not have the portable device simply pick up meeting audio using its microphone?

There are apps for that.

SOUND AMPLIFICATION APPS

The apps for smartphones and tablets were created for several different needs. Some are specifically intended to be used by a classroom teacher, using the teacher's smartphone to amplify the teacher's voice in a traditional classroom environment. Some apps offer audio recording capabilities for meetings. But all do the work required: pick up meeting audio via the smartphone microphone, and provide that audio through headphones or earbuds, enabling the user to adjust the personal audio volume to suit their own needs.

I tried two apps. The good news is the audio delay using these apps is about 10 times *less* than the most minimal Zoom audio delay.

AN APP FOR ANDROID PORTABLES

The app I tested for Android devices, is **Safe Headphones**, published by **jApp**. You can see its icon in **illustration 1**.

The main screen of the app, shown in **illustration 2**, is very sparse and contains a small on/off switch. The switch is circled in the illustration. Tap that switch to turn on the audio feed from the device microphone.



Illustration 1

The text on the screen points out that this particular app is designed to let you listen to music on earbuds or headphones while also listening to the ambient sounds around you. However, the app also works well as a room sound amplifier when no other apps are producing sounds.

Since I had developed a system for testing audio delay, I used it for this app: on my Samsung Galaxy S10 phone, the delay was 0.014 seconds. Much better! Note that, as of mid-2021, my S10 is not the current top of the line from Samsung; later models with faster chipsets may further reduce the delay.

AN APP FOR iOS PORTABLES

The second, for Apple devices, is **Megaphone**, published by **Netviking**. You can see its icon in **illustration 3**.

The main screen of the app, shown in **illustration 4**, depicts a cardioid microphone with an on/off switch, which is circled in the illustration. Tap the switch (in the app) to hear what the device's microphone hears.

Note there are many other apps in the store with the word megaphone in their names.

I tested the **Megaphone** app on my ancient, retired iPhone 5 using iOS 10.2.4. The delay experienced using this app was 0.042 seconds. Also much better. I suspect that newer iPhones with faster chipsets may further reduce that delay.

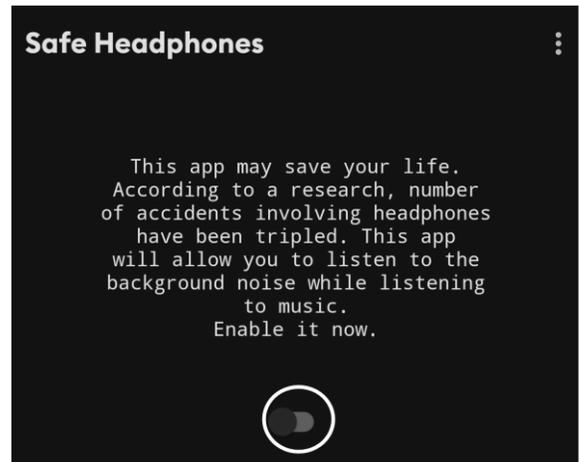


Illustration 2



Illustration 3



Illustration 4

BATTERY CONSIDERATIONS

If the meeting you attend is very long, you may wish to carry along a power bank battery for charging your smartphone while using it to amplify meeting sound.

Another way to conserve battery power on your smartphone is to use a different device, such as a tablet or a retired smartphone, to run the app of your choice for personal audio support.

OTHER METHODS

There are at least two other methods of audio distribution for personal use that could be tried. Both of these methods require some effort and expense by the meeting organizer.

Low-power FM radio transmitters are available online. These became very popular during the pandemic, especially for church services in church parking lots. The basic problem in a meeting room is on the audience side: portable FM receivers are no longer very popular. However, portable FM receivers are available for as little as \$10 online. Some MP3 players, such as the Sandisk Sansa Clip and iPod nano, have FM receivers built in.

FM receivers are great to have on hand when the phone network is down. I recall that the phone voice network was down in Washington DC for a couple of hours after the 2011 earthquake of 5.8 magnitude. While the phone voice network was down, the cell tower data service was overloaded, so I could not use my smartphone to check news sites. I would have been very pleased to have a portable FM receiver in hand for listening to the all-news radio station while forced to stand outside my office building for a couple of hours.

Another approach uses **induction coils** to transmit sound directly to the T-coil inductor contained in some hearing aids. The IEEE.org web site provides an article describing in detail a do-it-yourself approach, but the cost of even that approach is hundreds of dollars at a minimum, and not every hearing aid includes a T-coil. There is also a physical challenge: installing the transmission coil close to the audience but isolated from other electronic devices that might be affected by the transmission coil.

John Krout has been writing about creative uses of personal computers since the early 1980s, and now covers portables including smartphones, tablets and digital cameras. He is retired from a long career as a C/C++ software engineer, and lives in Arlington VA.

###

3 for a Quarter – Tips & Tricks

By Debra Carlson, Editor, CVC Computer Club [cvc.computer.club \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:cvc.computer.club@gmail.com)

Number 1 – Refurbs

Buying **refurbished** items seems like the perfect solution. Products labeled “refurbished” are fully functional but can’t technically be sold as “new” for reasons that vary by manufacturer.

Refurbished can mean something different depending on the manufacturer. However, it usually means that a product was purchased by a customer and eventually returned while still under warranty because the buyer had an issue. The machine is “repaired” and resold. The amount of upgrade/repair differs by manufacturer.

Many people assume all of the following definitions, seen on outlet sites, are refurbished. They are not. Here is the list of terms to help --

- Shipping and/or exterior damage: Dents, scratches, or other surface damage.
- Open box: Purchased, used, then returned by a customer. They might show small signs of wear and cosmetic damage but are considered “refurbished” because they were examined and found to be in resale condition.
- Unopened/returned: A return that was never even opened.
- Demo models: Products used in stores, displayed at trade shows, or loaned to reviewers might be repackaged and eventually sold as refurbished items.
- Renewed models: Generally, preowned machines have been cleaned and, perhaps, loaded with a new operating system for resale.
- Check with your retailer and for the certifications and warranties offered on machines (note: some open box machines, only carry what is remaining on the original warranty. If this was a display machine, the warranty might be almost over by your time of purchase.). Retailers that don’t offer a return policy are best avoided since you have no guarantee that you’ll actually get your money’s worth or have support if something malfunctions. Refurbished items being sold “as-is” are a gamble, so you have to weigh your purchasing decisions carefully.
- Good refurb machines can be great for trips or students where there is a higher possibility of breakage. They can also be great for learning “deep dives” before spending money for a new computing adventure.
- Remember to check out the current supported technology level and look at the life expectancy for the device. For example, if it is a certified refurb, but the model will not support operating system upgrades after two years, the device has a 2-year life. Is it worth the price you are paying with this in mind?

Number 2 – Google Privacy and other checks: <https://myaccount.google.com/data-and-privacy>

Go to the link above when you are logged in to your Google account, and you might be surprised at the number of options available for your customization.

Take the Privacy Checkup

This step-by-step guide helps you choose the privacy settings that are right for you



Privacy & personalization

See the data in your Google Account and choose what activity is saved to personalize your Google experience

[Manage your data & privacy](#)



You have security recommendations

Recommended actions found in the Security Checkup

[Protect your account](#)



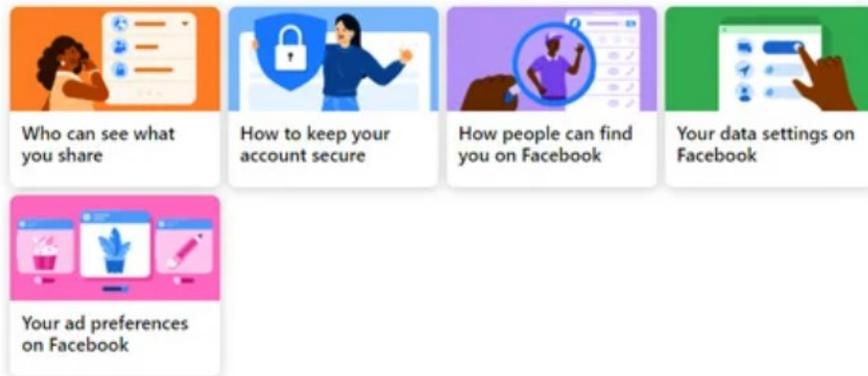
[Get started](#)

If you've never been through this area and you have a Google account, DO IT NOW. The Google home page will have taunted you to do it – you may have even gotten emails about it. DO IT.

The Privacy checkup will walk you through all the settings. Not a Google customer? How about Facebook?

Privacy Checkup

We'll guide you through some settings so you can make the right choices for your account. What topic do you want to start with?



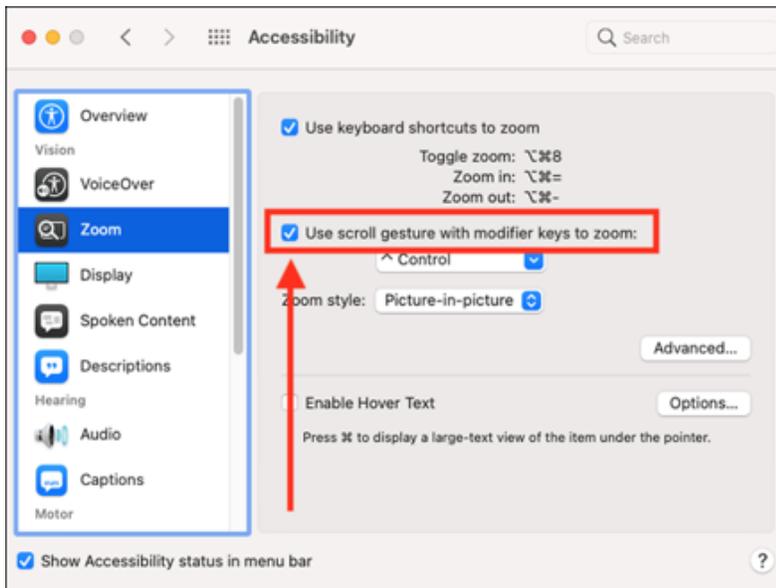
You can check more privacy settings on Facebook in [Settings](#).

Most online platforms let you choose at least some of your information that others can see or search. Review this often. Your information should be yours to control.

Number 3 – Zooming with a Mouse

If you have a mouse with a scroll wheel, holding down your CTRL key in Windows and most Windows-compliant apps will **zoom in** or **out** (up for in, down for out). Great for viewing small print on one part of a page.

For Mac desktops, go to Accessibility in System Preferences, and click the box shown below.



Note: this will zoom the currently viewed area of a page, so you will need to **zoom out** to move to another area of the page.

###

Accuvoice V100 "Mini" TV Speaker

By George Harding, Treasurer, Tucson Computer Society

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actuary110 (at) yahoo.com

I was given an Accuvoice V100 M "Mini" TV Speaker for review. It is a product made by the ZVOX company (<https://zvox.com/>).

It is an addition for your TV, smart or otherwise. It is smaller than the sound bars I've seen in retail stores, and it fits nicely below my TV, beside my Dish controller.

The kit comes with a remote (yet another one!) with five buttons: power, sound up and down, mute, and Accuvoice. That last button has a remarkable ability to increase voice when a program has both music and voice, and it is hard to hear the voice. In addition, there are six levels of music suppression, so you can get more voice and less music when you want it.



I've never seen this feature on any other device, but it may become more popular as users realize that such a device is available.

The kit also has several connectors. Only one is used, but you must refer to the brief manual to determine which one to use to connect to your TV set. I had some trouble with this and had to call their support to get the job done. Support was extremely helpful and very patient.

The soundbar includes its own speakers, which are a bit better than my TV's speakers.

My Dish remote turns on both my TV and the Dish controller. The ZVOX's remote turns on the soundbar. Two LEDs let you know what the status is. One is blue, which indicates power on, volume down, or mute, and the other is amber, which indicates volume up. When you push Accuvoice, the blue LED shows briefly.

A standard power cord and plug power the soundbar. The sound bar's dimensions are 10" X 2.5" X 3".

The company provides free shipping and a 60-day free home trial. In addition, the product has a one-year parts-and-labor warranty.

I'm very satisfied with this product. It provides a measure of relief for those situations where the program's voice is nearly unintelligible because of the overriding music or other background sound.

ACCUVOICE AV100 "MINI" TV SPEAKER

<https://zvox.com/collections/accuvoice/products/av100-accuvoice-speaker>

Price \$100 (Editor's note: price checked on 12/17/21)

###

Amazon Smart Devices Share Your Internet Connection with Your Neighbors

By Kurt Jefferson, Editor, Central Kentucky Computer Society

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I know several people who refuse to buy a smart speaker because they fear it will “listen in” on their supper-table discussions, their side of phone conversations, and even their interactions with their family pets.

The New York Time's website, the [Wirecutter](#) has garnered praise for its accurate testing on everything from ponchos to microwave ovens, and addresses the issue with the headline: “**Amazon Sidewalk Will Share Your Internet With Strangers. It's Not As Scary As It Sounds**”. The [Wirecutter](#) says you need to know four points:

- You can turn off Sidewalk at any time.

Now news reports may seal the deal and reinforce their objections so they will never invite a smart speaker into their homes.

These reports have to do with Amazon smart devices. In June, the company launched a program called Amazon Sidewalk.

It requires owners of many Amazon Echo smart speakers and Ring security cameras to automatically share a portion of their wireless Internet connection with their neighbors.

How do you stop this? The only way is for you to turn off Sidewalk.

You have to opt-out of the program. Amazon defends Sidewalk by saying it makes sure that its devices that are out of reach of a Wi-Fi connection keep operating.

The concept behind Sidewalk is to turn home Wi-Fi connections into a “mesh network” that can extend Internet coverage to areas that residential Wi-Fi can't reach. Amazon's Echo and Ring devices work in unison to create this network by taking a small portion of bandwidth from home Internet connections.

But news reports indicate some security experts are frowning. They say the technology is so new that potential risks to one's security and privacy are unclear.

Connecticut's attorney general even warned consumers that Amazon's approach is "uncharted territory" and urged people to opt-out of Sidewalk unless they are absolutely sure their privacy and security will be protected.

Others praise the technology.

A computer science professor in France tells The Washington Post that Amazon's network would make it easier and less expensive to use Internet-connected devices as long as the system is open and accessible.

- Compatible devices automatically will have Sidewalk enabled.
- Your involvement is totally optional.
- Your Internet Service Provider does not like Sidewalk and could flag you for using it.

The Wirecutter points out, "Crucially, you will never know who is sharing your signal (or when), and vice versa- your devices will never be able to tell which Sidewalk device you're connected to when you leave home."

The Wirecutter describes how a Tile tracker on a child's backpack or dog collar may allow you to follow his/her path as he/she connects or disconnects from all of the Amazon Sidewalk-connected devices in your neighborhood.

Amazon says it alerted customers in emails last November and in May that Sidewalk was on its way.

If you'd like to disable or enable Sidewalk, Amazon provides instructions [here](#). It says you can use the Alexa app to change the settings. (You cannot use your desktop Mac or PC to make the changes.)

I suspect Sidewalk will push folks who don't trust smart speakers even further into the category of those who will never buy one of these gizmos. This is because they don't trust them. They don't favor them. They don't want them in their homes. Period.

Read more about Sidewalk at [Tom's Guide](#), [PCMag](#), [TechHive](#), [WIRED](#), and [C|net](#).

Let me add: We're going to hear plenty more about Amazon Sidewalk. The discussion about the pros and cons of this technology has only just begun. Stay tuned.

###

And now, the classifieds!

Hardly-used **Canon EF 70-300 f/4-5.6L IS USM** Lens with **Canon ET-73B hood**, F & R caps, comes with a **Breakthrough Photography X4-67mm-UV-MRC16-nano-tec-Shott B270 filter**, **Canon Tripod Mount Ring C(W II)** and **67 to 77mm step-up ring**. \$900 obo.

MIOPS Flex (brand new, never used) 16GB for Canon 5D: Camera Gadget for Creative Photography
Timelapse videos, lightning strikes, flying foods, popping balloons, breaking glasses, high-dynamic-range images. More info: <https://www.miops.com/products/flex>. \$225

Sunwayfoto L-bracket for Canon 5D Mark IV: \$30

Spyder LensCal (a lens calibration system for DSLR or other camera with capability to store lens auto-focus corrections in the camera). A fast, reliable method of measuring and adjusting the focus performance on your camera and lens combinations. See <https://www.datacolor.com/photography-design/product-overview/spyderlenscal/> for additional information. \$35

1 each **B&W 77mm 010 UV-Haze filter 1xMRC** (Brass) \$30

2 each **B&W 77mm 010 UV-Haze filter MRC Nano** (Brass) \$30 *each*

Sunpack PF20XD Electronic Slave Flash (GN @ ISO100, 65 ft @ 35mm position) \$25

Peak Design Slide Camera Strap (Ash) 1³/₄" wide \$35

Transcend CF/SD Card Reader USB3 (TS-RDF8K) with 12" cable \$5

6-pouch data card holder with 4 each SanDisk Extreme 32GB Compact Flash UDMA7 120MB/s cards (\$25 each), and 1 each SanDisk Extreme 64 GB Compact Flash UDMA7 120MB/s card (\$30), and 1 each SandDisk ExtremePro 64GB SDXC 170MB/s card (\$8)

Hardly used Canon EOS body caps (3 ea.) \$5 each

Never-used Canon 5D Mark IV strap \$5

If interested in any of the above items, get in touch with Henry at photos@henrywinokur.com or call 301 320 2104.

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Publicity: Volunteer Needed

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The next issue will be in about 7 weeks—**Mid February, 2022**

PATACS, Inc.
201 S. Kensington St.
Arlington VA 22204-1141

First Class

AFFIX
FIRST
CLASS
POSTAGE

TEMP-RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

As our monthly meeting schedules start to revert to pre-pandemic types, be sure to check the web site (below) for up-to-date information. Meeting time & locations listed below are either *Zoom-only* (Z) or Hybrid (in-person & Z) marked by an (H).

General Meeting in Arlington	7:00 – 9:00 PM	1 st Wednesday	H
Board of Directors Meeting	7:00 – 9:00 PM	3 rd Monday	Z
Fairfax General Meeting	12:45 – 3:30 PM	3 rd Saturday	H
Technology & PC Help Desk in Arlington	7:00 – 9:00 PM	4 th Wednesday	H

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PATACS Event Information

Call 703-370-7649 for Meeting Announcements

Web site: <https://www.patacs.org>

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