

Public notices belong in newspaper

Every few years some legislature somewhere in the nation decides it can save money by not publishing public notices in newspapers of general circulation in the affected area.

Usually the argument follows one of a couple of patterns: the notices can be placed for public inspection at the governing body's clerk's office or could be put online, both of which would save money while keeping the public informed.

While such methods to get the public the information they have every right to know and many times needs to know would save money, it would leave the vast majority of the public in the dark as to what its government is doing for it or, more dangerously, to it.

Very few members of the public actually would go to a clerk's office and read the public notice, even if the members of the public had knowledge there was a notice there for them to read. And, as hard as it is to accept in this age of instant-access technology, not everyone has a computer or high-speed Internet access that would permit them to read the notices online ... again if they knew the notices were available to be read and where to find them to read.

The most recent attempt to keep the public in the dark occurred in Arizona where a House panel finally rejected a bill calling for the posting of government notices, public meetings, budgets, government actions, etc., on an Internet site instead of being published where the vast majority of citizens would have the opportunity to know what their representatives are doing.

Maybe the best argument against such a Star Chamber-type philosophy came from state Rep. Bruce Wheeler, D-Tucson, when he summed it up by saying, "I simply do not trust government to keep me informed. That's so vital, and I could not possibly support this kind of legislation."

Public notices may be tedious to read, but they provide information that is vital to the operation of government and to informing the public about such things as:

- \* Bids for construction
- \* General public improvements
- \* Community facility improvements
- \* Street and highway improvements
- \* Increase in water or sewer rates
- \* Zoning ordinances
- \* Award of contracts
- \* Notice of intent to contract

- \* Calls for bids on district bonds

- \* Election of board directors

- \* Delinquent taxes

It should be remembered surveys of voters in several states repeatedly have found the public supports having those hard-to-read and sometimes boring public notices in the newspaper, with the majority having read a public notice in a newspaper and about 80 percent thinking publishing such notices helps keep them informed and public officials more honest and more careful how they spend public money.

But, it still falls on the public to actually take the time to read the notices if they wish to be the informed voters and citizens we all should be.

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