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NC Senate gives initial OK on legal notice options

TUESDAY APR 23, 2013 | THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

More local governments allowed to post legal notices themselves in North Carolina Senate bill

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — More local governments would be allowed to post legal notices online rather than in newspapers to comply with North Carolina law in a bill narrowly given tentative approval Monday night in the state Senate.

The Senate voted 26-23 in favor of legislation that would give 10 counties and nearly all the municipalities within them the option to place notices for things like proposed zoning changes, public hearings and lists of delinquent taxpayers on government web sites instead of in local newspapers. They also can use both communication methods.

The counties include Wake, Mecklenburg and Guilford and several in the mountains. Some municipalities already had the online option. Supporters call the change a money-saving measure for governments seeking to avoid the high cost of newspaper advertising as more people have access to the Internet.

"It's about government efficiency and government choices," said first-term Sen. Tamara Barringer, R-Wake, one of the bill sponsors, adding that "this truly is a local bill that gives municipalities options."

The North Carolina Press Association opposes the measure because it says people wouldn't see the notices and rural newspapers would be hurt by a loss of steady revenue. Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange, said she talked to operators of small papers in her district who told her they receive \$1,500 to \$3,000 a week on the legal advertising.

"The loss of revenue could put some of these small newspapers out of business," Kinnaird said, potentially cutting off a vital method for small communities to learn about their government and each other.

The bill would require that governments post in newspapers at least once a month for 12 years instructions on how people can access the legal notices online. The notices also must remain on the web site for at least a year.

The bill needs one more Senate vote before going to the House.

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