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Editorial: The public's right to know

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Hoosiers support the right to know what government at all levels is up to, and they believe public notices in community newspapers are a trusted source of that transparency.

A recent survey by the Princeton, New Jersey-based American Opinion Research asked state residents their thoughts on the importance of public notice advertisements in local newspapers. The study was commissioned by the Hoosier State Press Association’s board of directors and surveyed 1,000 Indiana residents. The findings, published in the Nov. 13 edition of The Indiana Publisher, were overwhelming:

- 85 percent supported publication of public notices as a way to inform residents of government actions.
- 64 percent said governmental entities should be required to publish these announcements, even though they cost them thousands of extra dollars per year.
- 61 percent said they had read or seen public notice advertising in a newspaper.

Last year, state legislators placed a “sunset” to the requirement that local government agencies publish their budgets as part of the notice of budget hearings. There will be no such requirement next year, unless the Legislature reverses itself in the next session that begins in January.

The change in the budget-publishing requirement was sought by the Indiana Department of Local Government Finance. Removing budget details from newspaper public notices reduces resident access to this important information. Hoosiers would read public notices less frequently if they were placed on the DLGF site.

The American Opinion Research shows Hoosiers agree on the importance of public notice advertisements. It’s pretty difficult to keep tabs on governmental entities if one can’t even find basic information on where and when they are set to meet, or the annual budgets they will debate.

In the coming legislative session, state lawmakers must act to keep annual budgets a part of the notice of budget hearings.

Such a requirement puts information in the one place where local residents are likely to find it: the community newspaper.

Kokomo Tribune editorial board

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