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OUR VIEW: Indiana legislature is failing us with public notices

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Story

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Posted: Wednesday, September 2, 2015 5:30 am

For decades local government units have published proposed budgets and notice of the hearings where the public has the opportunity to question or offer opinions concerning the planned collection of tax dollars, expenditure of those funds and estimated impact on property tax rates.

State law required the publication of this important information as a paid public notice advertisement. Paid notices give the government unit control over what is printed and prevent the newspaper from adding any editorial spin on the text or delete any of the budget information. To collect the fee, the newspaper has incentive to make sure the notice is published error-free and on the designated date to give you time to make arrangements so you can attend a budget hearing if you so choose.

THAT ALL CHANGED with passage of H.E.A. 1266, authored by Rep. Dan Leonard, R-Huntington, in the 2014 legislative session. Suggested by the state Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF), the act eliminates the publication requirement that placed that budget information into the hands of 3.8 million Indiana newspaper readers (based on a 2014 American Opinion Research survey of Hoosiers' attitudes on public notice advertising).

The budgets are now posted on the DLGF website, a website that contains a wealth of information, but has a fraction of the reach of newspapers. In fact, only 4,633 unique visitors clicked onto the portion of the DLGF website where local government budgets are posted during the last six months of 2014.

Paid published notice of the date and time the various local government unit governing bodies will allow you to speak out on their budgets is no longer required of these units. They now are only required to post the notice of their office location and inform media outlets of meeting times so that editors can determine whether they have a reporter available to cover the public meeting.

IN KILLING AN ATTEMPT during the 2015 legislative session to restore requirement to publish the notice of budget hearing, House Ways and Means chairman Rep. Tim Brown, R-Crawfordsville, took the position that if newspapers believe the information is important, they should publish it for free.

That's not a fair or practical position. Space in any newspaper is a limited quantity and paid notices guarantee placement of information in this newspaper. Newspapers provide a service by connecting the government message to a maximum number of Hoosier in the most economical fashion. Newspapers are limited in what they can charge government units for published notices.

We believe the Legislature erred in moving the budget information out of newspapers and your hands, unintentionally hiding the information in plain sight on a state agency website that few people will ever find.

THE LEGISLATIVE RATIONALE confuses the concept of available to the public with public notice. Putting something on the Internet makes it available to the public, but hardly means the public will see it. The publication of public notices puts the information in Hoosier hands without the need for any to take a second step and track down additional information on a government website.

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that has already been pointed out, local
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legislation would come up with this prac

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Scott Andrews1
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form of media? Newspapers are HISTOR
websites. Not the desperate Goshen Ne

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FredMark 1 day ago
When the legislature spends our money responsibly the News normally applauds. Just because the money is coming out of newspapers' pockets is no reason why the editorial staff should change their standards. The removal of these notices from the newspaper is good news. Here's why:

Notices in print waste our money.

Notices in print waste paper and thus are environmentally unfriendly.

Notices will be posted faster on line rather waiting for the print deadlines of newspapers.

The DLGF website is free. People don't have to spend money to subscribe to newspapers to read the notices. (so we , as taxpayers save money twice! a double bonus)

The notices remain on line forever as opposed to the newspaper which we throw out the next day.

And Tim Brown is correct. If the newspapers think these notices are so important, they should publish them as news.

Congratulations Indiana. We have a progressive responsible legislature that has saved us some money.

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