

Keep the notices

State lawmakers probably have a lot of sympathy for cities and counties these days.

After all, the state has already pulled back vast amounts of funding that had been promised in both 2008 and 2009. In fact, the City of Windom had to hastily call a special December meeting to address state Local Government Aid cuts—money that Windom had, in effect, already spent.

So it should come as no surprise that some local government lobbyists are pushing lawmakers to repeal “unnecessary” state mandates. Among the targets are public notices.

While we agree it’s a tough situation for local governments, lets not create a new problem by “solving” another.

Obviously the solution most often offered regarding public notices is a simple posting on a city or county website. On the surface, some may see this as a cost effective solution. However, the cost of maintaining and loading a website can be substantial.

Moreover, as the following points made in a recent [Minnesota Newspaper Association](#) opinion piece suggest, the website option has its pitfalls:

- Do we really want government to have sole responsibility and control over dissemination of its own notices?

Publishing notices in a newspaper ensures that notices are distributed by means that are totally independent of government—and prevents government from deciding when the notice is published, what information is published—and whether information

is changed after it is published.

- Public bodies can give little assurance that their websites will be consistently reliable, available, permanent or secure.

Much experience over the past several years shows that government web operations around the state often suffer from technical problems, are out of date and are difficult to navigate. Even some of the most important government websites in the country have had problems with hackers. Properly maintaining a “secure” website can be expensive.

- State statutes require several public notice requirements, often subject to strict time lines and other conditions.

What happens when a government website shuts down, or doesn’t function properly? There could be serious legal consequences for the failure to properly publish.

Yes, local governments face the tough prospect of cutting services to make ends meet. Let’s not make the public’s right to know one of them.

— Rahn Larson

■ QUICK VIEWS

- Still smarting from state funding losses, lobbyists for local governments are looking to repeal rules regarding public notices.

- While it may save a few pennies in certain instances, there are countless hidden costs—both real and in areas such as security, access and reliability.

