

Please post for 18-0114 Administrative Procedures Act, Electronic posting.

From: Gregory Popa <gpopa@stowereporter.com>

Sent: Friday, February 9, 2018 8:40 AM

To: mftownsend@comcast.net; Maida Townsend

Subject: Legal notices in newspapers

Dear Rep. Townsend,

The recent push by VTDigger and the Vermont League of Cities and Towns seems to be a solution in search of a problem. What's the impetus behind removing the requirement to have government post its legal notices in the one place where the most citizens will find them?

Why is the Legislature seeking to allow government agencies to take public notices/legal advertising out of printed newspapers? Nothing in current law prevents any governmental agency from posting notices online. But they will never have the reach or power of printed notices, most notably in towns served by a local newspaper.

This smacks as a reward for financially struggling online news organizations to grab much needed capital from state and municipal sources. Yes, print newspapers now enjoy that support, but then we provide the type of hyperlocal coverage that no online news organizations does, and that's not likely to change, with or without this infusion of advertising. That's why folks look for legal notices in the publications that most directly affect their lives — print newspapers.

Local, state and the federal government should do everything possible to keep the public informed, not make it harder for citizens and voters to find out what their governments are up to. Printed legal notices do just that.

We own five newspapers — Stowe Reporter, Waterbury Record, Shelburne News, The Citizen, and News & Citizen. We reach just about every resident and business in all of the communities that we serve. That's about 35,000 people in Lamoille County; Hinesburg, Charlotte and Shelburne in Chittenden County; a few towns in Orleans and Caledonia counties; and Waterbury in Washington County. We're growing readership.

What electronic outlet is ever going to come close to providing those numbers? Town websites? VTDigger? Front Porch Forum? As good as Digger is, is it really the appropriate place for legal notices about what a state agency or the town selectboard is doing in Eden Mills? We all know

that social media like FPF, Facebook, Instagram, etc., have never delivered the kind of reach that they promise. They become narrow avenues for sharing information with small groups of people.

How does that satisfy the reason for publishing notices in the first place, to ensure our government entities are keeping their constituents informed, and that the citizenry can, in turn, ensure that their elected officials do the people's business.

Satisfying those very important goals do not exist on the web.

Respectfully submitted,

Greg Popa

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