

March 16, 2017

From: Cynthia Prairie, editor and publisher of The Chester Telegraph

To: The Senate Government Operations Committee

Re: S. 97

The Chester Telegraph is a six-year-old newspaper that is published – but never printed. Delivered - but never tossed onto the lawn.

The Telegraph is a newspaper. A newspaper that is totally online.

Some say that a newspaper has to be printed with ink on paper. But think about it.

What does the word “newspaper” mean when we still “dial” our smart phones to talk and we “hang up” when we're finished; when we use buttons to “roll down” our car windows and we “tape” interviews on devices that have no tape?

As our idioms have changed; so has the newspaper business. Venerable old papers have retrenched and consolidated, laying off reporters and retreating from covering the small towns that lie between the cities.

These are now news deserts and that's where The Telegraph has come in.

We report the news of six communities in Windsor and Windham counties. We cover Grafton – even when there are no industrial wind projects. We cover Londonderry – even when a crime wave abates. And we cover complex and contentious Act 46 issues when no other newspaper shows up. We're at the Select Board to keep government accountable and inform our readers and at the school plays to celebrate our children.

- In our six years, *The Chester Telegraph* has reported and written more than **1,200** news articles that have generated more than **1,300** reader comments.
- We have also edited and published more than **2,000** community, arts and business events columns comprised of more than **15,000** press releases from charitable organizations, arts groups, businesses and police departments.
- Our regular publishing schedule is Monday through Wednesday, but in reality, we have published seven days a week when important news breaks.
- In our communities, we *are* THE newspaper and that's why our readership goes up by double digit percentages every year. As of yesterday, we are **52% ahead of last year's readership.**

We have given select boards bids for legal notices that could have saved their taxpayers thousand of dollars. And boards have told us they know *The Telegraph* is where their constituents get their local news, but their lawyers tell them to be conservative and name a traditional print source as the paper of record.

An objection to internet- based legal notices has been “not everyone has a computer.” While this is correct, the growth in the number of homes that have some form of computer has continued to grow for decades and will continue to grow.

In 2013, the Census Bureau's American Community Survey found that **more than 90 percent of Vermont homes** had a computer and **more than 80 percent** had access to high speed internet. And those numbers have surely continued to move toward 100 percent. (<https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/2013computeruse.pdf>)

In the meantime, most jurisdictions provide internet access through their municipal libraries. The same libraries have long subscribed to paid circulation newspapers where legal notices are published. What is the difference?

So what is the tipping point? Should municipalities have to buy high priced print ads until every single person in town has a computer? And what about those people who never read conventional newspapers? We may find ourselves disenfranchising a large segment of our communities that we wish to retain – our Millenials and GenXers.

Questions/Comments

1. P. 2 Line 10 & 11 - Why would it be necessary to publish property notices (vs. others) in a pulp and ink newspaper
2. P. 2 Line 19 & 20 – What is meant by accessible? The Telegraph is accessible to every county in Vermont and around the world. In addition, second homeowners (who pay taxes and are potential residents) come to The Telegraph for news.
3. P. 3. Line 5 - 7 – Is there a comparable requirement for conventional newspapers? We do not see one in statute. If a conventional paper
4. P. 3. Line 10 – Not all newspapers in the state automatically send tear sheets for public notices.
5. P. 3. Line 11 – Does “physical form” mean a paper printout?