

Talking Points Against Replacing Newspaper Public Notice with County Website Notice

- While the new state law allows the county to publish legal ads solely on their own publicly accessible website without newspaper notice, we feel this is a bad result for the public. But even if it is adopted, we think the notices should continue to be published in both formats--the newspaper and the publicly accessible website set up by the county.
- By continuing to publish in the local newspaper, the county will keep its citizens much better informed about its activities. Why is that so? There are several reasons.
- First, newspaper websites possess a larger audience due to a wealth of information across a breadth of issues. A newspaper's web audience is typically many times larger than most city or county websites. Without newspaper media outlets housing public notices, there will be less written information provided to the people--whether it be an environmentally sensitive project, a school board decision, or the zoning of a housing development.
- Additionally, newspapers are where the public expects to find these notices (surveys bear this out). [We have Florida-centric polling on this from Mason-Dixon Polling].
- Without a paper, using only government websites, the government would shift delivering public-notice information from an active to a passive stance because newspapers reach out to their audience through intentional delivery whereas the website needs to be found and navigated.
- Government-run websites alone eliminate critical neutrality and independence of a newspaper or other third party making it possible, or even likely, for government entities to miss notification deadlines, leave out information or make changes electronically to items on their websites.
- By continuing to publish in the newspaper, notices will continue to be uploaded to the statewide website, floridapublicnotices.com, which aggregates all the newspaper notices in Florida, and allows users to freely search newspaper legal notices in Polk County and around the state.
- Finally, legal notices posted to the newspaper's website are available to the public for free—there are no paywalls or subscription requirements. Newspapers do derive revenue from the notices, but we believe it is a relatively small cost of increased transparency to the public. Taking into consideration all the costs involved like intake, formatting, affidavits, printing etc., the cost of newspaper notice is a small and a miniscule percentage of the county's overall budget.