



# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## **What is a public notice?**

A public notice is a formal announcement or warning that is legally required to be published as an advertisement in a paid-circulation newspaper. It helps citizens learn about plans and actions that will impact them and their community. Public notices may be published for a variety of reasons, including business and licensing matters, public meetings, zoning, requests for proposals, local government matters and elections.

## **Why is the government trying to save money by cutting public notice advertising in newspapers?**

This could actually cost government *more* money to create secure, archivable websites. The real problem lies in giving the government control of the public notice process. This will limit citizens' access to public information, so that they won't know what's being planned in their communities. It could result in the government defending itself in lawsuits caused by lack of information getting to citizens.

## **How much do localities spend on public notices?**

Only about one-half of one percent of operating expenditures is spent on public notices, regardless of a locality's size. The costs of developing a secure website and posting notices would be far greater than the amounts most localities currently spend on public notices. Some localities in Virginia do not even have official websites, and many existing government websites do not offer extensive information or public access to documents.

## **Would online publication of public notices allow more citizen access?**

In addition to newspapers, online publication of public notices could be useful. Keep in mind, however, that websites and computer systems can crash; what happens if a website with public notices fails just when you need that information? What happens if a website with public notices gets hacked? Technology is always changing, new systems can be expensive and maintenance of websites requires considerable attention.

## **Do most people get their news online or in print?**

There are significant population segments that do not use the Internet for reasons ranging from lack of access to lack of connections. These citizens would be disenfranchised if public notices were only posted on the Internet. As for the general public, a recent survey by the National Newspaper Association revealed that 81% of survey respondents read a local newspaper on a weekly basis; each reader shared the paper with 2.36 additional readers; approximately 75% read public notices published in their local newspapers; and 66% had never visited a local government website.

## **If public notices aren't advertised in my local newspaper, where would I find them?**

You will have to locate your local government website and search for them there. Each government website has a different structure. In many cases, local newspaper websites are easier to find and navigate than local government websites. Remember, some Virginia localities do not even have official websites.

## **If I need to look up a public notice from the past, can I still do that online?**

Public notices in newspapers are archived as a matter of public record. At this point in time, there are no consistent content requirements for government websites. If public notices are available on government websites, each locality may store them in a different format and in a different section of its website.

## **Why is the newspaper industry so passionate about public notices?**

Public notice advertising revenue for newspapers is minimal, compared to other sources of revenue, such as display and classified advertising and circulation. Newspaper staffers care about public notices because they care about the public's right to know. Newspapers are independent, impartial sources of information that citizens can easily access. Newspapers are not under government control. Newspapers don't crash or get hacked like websites. Newspapers provide proof that an action was publicized by a public notice, and they publicize actions that affect citizens like you.