

HB 1380 Testimony

Terry Schwartzberger - Owner and Publisher Napoleon Homestead

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

Thanks for allowing me to provide input on HB 1380. As being in the newspaper industry for 40+ years and a second-generation owner, I've seen all types of attempts to eliminate the need to publish legal notices and in particular the need to publish minutes of counties, cities and schools, so am urging a no vote on HB 1380.

In the four decades of being able to publish the official minutes of these political subdivisions I've heard from readers who would ask questions, such as: Are they (commissioners) actually spending that much for this or that? My general response has always been that is what the minutes show or say and then I encourage folks with questions to attend a meeting or contact a commissioner directly. If it would not be for the publication of minutes, many of these expenditures or actions would go unnoticed.

It is my privilege and honor to be able to provide a service to rural North Dakota citizens who are the individuals footing the tax bill for their county. Taxpayers want to know and have a right to know what their local government agencies are doing.

In Logan County the cost to publish the minutes averaged \$413 per month in 2024. Just a fraction of the \$1,838,525 which was budgeted in the general fund for 2024. This is a small price to pay for the ease of access and transparency which newspapers provide.

The median age of a resident in Logan County is 49.2 (according to 2022 data). Many of the Logan County folks are older and who are without internet access or don't have any knowledge about using the internet and will not be able to access the minutes on-line.

Just one plus for continuing to publish minutes in a newspaper is that citizens are used to getting and reading public notices in newspapers and in particular the official county minutes in either the print edition or in our on-line edition of the newspaper.

By requiring county governments to publish minutes in a newspaper is just another system of checks and balances. This newspaper will make sure that all minutes are published in a timely manner. By allowing government officials to publish to their websites, may create an opportunity for neglecting to publish or the website may be cumbersome and folks will have to actually seek and find if they want to read the official minutes.

I believe HB 1380 is a bill that should receive a DO NOT pass vote as it takes away the citizens right in Logan County and all of North Dakota to ease of access to county information. The ability to be able to pick up an official county paper and read about the actions of county government is something every citizen should have the right to experience.

Thank for your time and consideration.

Terry Schwartzberger

Publisher/Owner – Napoleon Homestead

701-321-2338