

2025 HOUSE POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS

HB 1380

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Political Subdivisions Committee Room JW327B, State Capitol

HB1380
1/23/2025

A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 11-11-37 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the publication of proceedings of a board of county commissioners.

2:58 p.m. Chairman Longmuir opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Longmuir, Vice-Chairman Fegley, Vice-Chairman Jonas, Representatives Bolinske, Davis, Hager, Hatlestad, Heilman, Klemin, Motschenbacher, Ostlie, Toman, Warrey

Discussion Topics:

- Internet access in rural towns
- Counties' plans for proposed change
- Daily print newspapers
- Process of publishing minutes

2:58 p.m. Representative Matt Heilman, North Dakota Representative for District 7, introduced the bill.

3:03 p.m. Donnell Preskey, North Dakota Association of Counties, testified in favor and provided testimony #31103.

3:15 p.m. Jaden Schmidt, Auditor for Oliver County, testified in favor and provided testimony #30830.

3:18 p.m. Cecile Wehrman, Executive Director for the North Dakota Newspaper Association, testified in opposition and provided testimony #30522.

3:40 p.m. Art Hagebock, Pure Prairie Publishing, testified in opposition and provided testimony #30784.

3:49 p.m. Tom Shinimik, North Dakota citizen, testified in opposition.

Additional written testimony:

Jackie Thompson, Grafton, North Dakota, submitted testimony in opposition #29830

Kristi Bohl, Publisher for the Burke County Tribune, submitted testimony in opposition #29853

Allan Tinker, Owner of the McClusky Gazette, submitted testimony in opposition #29876

Jill Friesz, Owner of GS Publishing LLC, submitted testimony in opposition #29881 and #30482

Jason Nordmark, Owner of Turtle Mountain Star and Nordmark Publishing, submitted testimony in opposition #30157

Anne Ehni, Newspaper Publisher for the Harold-Press, submitted testimony in opposition #30369

Kelli Ameling, Associate Publisher for NorDak, NorDak North, Central NorDak and Mobridge Publishings, submitted testimony in opposition #30412

Kenneth Smith, Editor for the Dickey County Leader, submitted testimony in opposition #30494

Terry Schwartzenberger, Owner/Publisher of Napoleon Homestead, submitted testimony in opposition #30572

Denise Westad, Owner/Publisher of Consolidated Newspapers Inc, submitted testimony in opposition #30755

Amy Wobbema, Owner/Publisher of Transcript Publishing, submitted testimony in opposition #30770

Kelsey Majeske, Publisher for Central Republican, submitted testimony in opposition #31023

Allison Olimb, President of the North Dakota Newspaper Association, submitted testimony in opposition #31044

3:50 p.m. Chairman Longmuir closed the hearing.

Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk

Publishing county commission minutes as a legal notice in weekly newspapers is a vital practice that upholds transparency, accountability, and public trust in government operations. Here's why this is essential:

1. Promotes Government Transparency

- Citizens have a right to know how their local government operates and makes decisions. Publishing minutes ensures that actions taken by the county commission are accessible and open for public review.
- By making this information readily available, the public can see how their tax dollars are being spent and what policies are being implemented.

2. Reaches a Wide Audience

- Weekly newspapers serve as an important source of information, particularly in rural and less connected communities where access to digital resources may be limited.
- Unlike government websites that may go unnoticed, newspapers are a trusted and widely read medium, ensuring that county commission minutes reach more residents.

3. Legal Compliance and Accountability

- Publishing minutes in a newspaper ensures compliance with open government laws and mandates that information is shared in a public and verifiable manner.
- This public record serves as a historical archive of government actions, which can be referenced by citizens, researchers, or legal entities when needed.

4. Ensures Public Participation

- When residents are informed about local government actions, they are more likely to engage in civic processes, attend public meetings, and provide input on policies that affect their lives.
- Publishing in a newspaper fosters inclusivity by ensuring all citizens, not just those with internet access, are informed. One of my concerns is that Walsh County has their fair share of elderly people. I know my mother-in-law reads the county minutes on a regular basis. She also doesn't have the internet at her home so she would have no ability to keep reading them. And I know she isn't alone in this area.

5. Builds Public Trust

- Transparency in government operations builds confidence among constituents. When citizens can see decisions documented and published, they are less likely to feel excluded or skeptical about government activities.
- Weekly newspapers offer an independent platform for disseminating information, reinforcing impartiality and trust.

6. Supports Local Media

- Publishing legal notices, such as commission minutes, helps sustain local newspapers, which are critical to maintaining an informed and engaged public.
- Weekly newspapers often act as watchdogs, holding local governments accountable, and their continued existence is tied to practices like publishing legal notices. There are times when the county doesn't send in the minutes, so we do have to call for them. At one time last year we ran three meetings (which would be 1 and half months) in one issue of The Walsh County Record. Just this past week we ran three legals from their Nov. 19, Dec. 3 and Dec 17 meetings. Who would make sure that the minutes would be posted on a regular basis?

7. Accessibility for All Generations

- While digital platforms are growing, a significant portion of the population, especially older generations, still relies on print media for news and information. The Grafton residents showed their reliability to newspapers this past year by voting 668-66 to publish the Grafton city minutes.
- Publishing minutes in newspapers ensures equity, allowing all citizens, regardless of technological proficiency, to stay informed. The Walsh County Record is online every Thursday afternoon, which includes the legals at no extra cost.

By publishing county commission minutes in weekly newspapers, legislatures uphold the principles of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability. This practice not only strengthens public trust but also ensures that government actions are accessible to all members of the community, regardless of digital access or literacy. Supporting this practice demonstrates a commitment to democracy, civic engagement, and informed governance.

Thank you for your time.

Jackie Thompson

Publisher-The Walsh County Record

Grafton ND

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill #1380, which seeks to give counties the option of publishing minutes only on the county website. While I understand the desire for efficiency, it is critical that we preserve the longstanding practice of publishing county minutes in the official county newspaper.

Transparency in government is not just a principle; it is the foundation of trust between elected officials and the public. Publishing minutes in the local newspaper ensures that county business remains transparent and accessible to all residents, regardless of their digital access or literacy. Local newspapers serve as an established, trusted source of information for communities. Removing this requirement would significantly diminish the ability of many citizens to stay informed about county decisions.

In the most recent election, Burke County voters overwhelmingly expressed their support for maintaining the publication of county minutes in local newspapers. This outcome underscores the importance people place on keeping this vital information readily available and easily accessible. For many residents, especially the elderly, the local newspaper is their primary source of news and the only practical means of staying informed about county government.

It is important to note that many rural areas, including our county, have a substantial population of senior citizens who are not online. Relying exclusively on a county website to publish minutes would alienate these individuals and create a barrier to access.

Lastly, we must recognize the economic implications. Local newspapers, a cornerstone of our communities for generations, rely on public notices and legal publications to sustain their operations. In contrast, the amount of money spent on publishing these minutes is very minimal compared to the entire county budget. Diminishing their role not only reduces transparency but also threatens the viability of local journalism, which plays a critical role in holding government accountable.

In conclusion, House Bill #1380 would erode transparency and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable populations. I would like you to prioritize the public's right to know and reject this proposal. Let's respect the will of the voters and preserve the vital practice of publishing county minutes in the official county newspaper.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kristi Bohl, Publisher

Burke County Tribune

HB 1380 Testimony
Allan Tinker, Owner and Publisher
McCluskey Gazette

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

The discrimination against those who are unable to use or afford online or computer services or have the skills needed to track all what happens in their government and county meetings is double hurtful in rural or isolated county communities.

The people rely on their local county newspapers to keep them advised of what is "coming down the pike" and that goes unmentioned in formal minutes by people who are reluctant to step up against hidden agendas for the decisions made in these meetings.

Rural life has been successful in building this state and the fine communities within it. Don't let the sly fox manage, live in, and report on the chicken house.

Give them the basic knowledge in an easy-to-understand format, supplied by one or more of the members of their own community,

Thank you for supporting the local newspaper reporting and publication of county commission meetings.

Please DO NOT PASS.



GS Publishing, LLC

Grant County News | Carson Press

P.O. Box 100, Elgin, ND 58533 701.584.2900

Adams County Record | Hettinger County Herald

P.O. Box 749 Hettinger, ND 58639 701.567.2424

Golden Valley News | Billings County Pioneer

P.O. Box 156 Beach, ND 58621 701.872.3755

Morton County News Journal

P.O. Box 416, New Salem, ND 58563 701.843.7567

Chairman Longmuir and Committee members,

My name is Jill Friesz, owner of GS Publishing, LLC. I own and operate seven weekly newspapers in the southwest corner of the state, and I am advocating for all newspapers and readers from the state of North Dakota.

I am OPPOSED to House Bill 1380.

As you can see by the 2022 official election results, the voters in my coverage area have spoken, and they want the county commission proceedings published in the official county newspaper.

Grant County - 1,119 ballots cast - 973 votes to publish in the official county newspaper
Morton County - 11,358 ballots cast - 6,648 votes to publish in the official county newspaper
Sioux County - 584 ballots cast - 360 votes to publish in the official county newspaper
Hettinger County - 1,037 ballots cast - 917 votes to publish in the official county newspaper
Adams County - 929 ballots cast - 809 votes to publish in the official county newspaper
Golden Valley County - 778 ballots cast - 612 votes to publish in the official county newspaper
Billings County - 537 ballots cast - 464 votes to publish in the official county newspaper

The job of the newspapers in North Dakota is to be the watchdog of the communities we serve. We believe in transparency and accountability and take this position very seriously. Having access to and understanding local government proceedings helps residents stay informed about important issues such as budget allocations, infrastructure projects, and community programs. This knowledge is essential for residents to advocate for their needs and priorities effectively.

I am frequently tasked with reaching out to County Auditors to remind them to submit proceedings for publication. If they are not required to publish in official newspapers, where is the accountability? Websites can be cumbersome to maneuver, while others are not updated in a timely manner, if they exist at all. The communities in my coverage area have a large elderly population, many who do not have access to a computer or skills to navigate technology. Part of our role in the community is to be the local historian. By printing the commission proceedings, we are keeping a record of the actions taken in our county government to be preserved for future generations.

Once again, I urge you to recognize the significance of publishing county commission proceedings in local newspapers and consider a DO NOT PASS on HB 1380. By doing so, we promote transparency, enhance accountability, encourage civic engagement, support local journalism, and foster a more informed community.

Sincerely,

Jill M. Friesz

Owner/Publisher GS Publishing, LLC

P.O. Box 100 Elgin, ND 58533

w - 701-584-2900

c - 701-202-0537

January 23, 2025

House Political Subdivisions
HB 1380

CHAIRMAN LONGMUIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Jason Nordmark. I'm the owner of the Turtle Mountain Star in Rolla as well as the Towner County Record Herald in Cando, the Dickey County Leader in Ellendale, the Oakes Times in Oakes, the Mouse River Journal in Towner and the Walsh County Press in Park River.

All papers are printed in Rugby, ND, at the North Central Printing plant in which I am a majority owner along with other newspaper publishers.

Please accept this testimony OPPOSED to the amendment in House Bill 1360.

The amendment the committee will consider would give counties the okay to post minutes on their website instead of in newspapers.

In my experience, this is not what voters want.

In my 30-plus years as a newspaper publisher, I've yet to experience any public vote which declined the printing of county minutes in any of our publications. In addition, none of those ballots outcomes were even close in Rolette County.

Our state association has researched this issue in depth. In fact, last June's vote on the publication of city minutes confirms the high percentage of voters who want minutes published. An average of 85 percent of voters in 208 cities in North Dakota voted YES to publication of minutes in newspapers, with approval rates as high as 90 percent.

More importantly, poll respondents chose newspapers over city/county websites TWO to ONE as the most appropriate, reliable and transparent location for public notices.

Eight out of 10 North Dakota adults – 82 percent – said public notices belong in newspapers over government websites. Only 18 percent said governments can be trusted to be the only source of public notices.

The people trust their small-town newspapers such as the ones we produce and print every week. We serve them best we can and one of the ways is through the publication of minutes.

I would formally request that the honorable members of this committee submit a "do not pass" decision on on HB 1380.

Thank you for your time and service to our state.

Kindest regards,
Jason Nordmark
Editor/Publisher
Turtle Mountain Star

Rolla, ND

House Political Subdivisions
HB 1380

**Please Vote DO NOT PASS
On the AMENDMENT to House Bill 1380**

CHAIRMAN LONGMUIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

January 20, 2025

My name is Anne Ehni. I am the publisher of the Herald-Press, the official newspaper of Wells County, North Dakota. **Please accept this testimony OPPOSED to the amendment in House Bill 1380.**

This amendment would give counties the okay to post minutes on their website instead of in newspapers. We have the research proving **this is not what voters want.**

In a demographically weighted survey of North Dakotans in 2024:

- **85 percent said they believe public notices should be required to be placed in newspapers and 83 percent said they read public notices in newspapers either digitally or online.**
- **Respondents chose newspapers over city/county websites TWO to ONE as the most appropriate, reliable and transparent location for public notices.**
- **Eight out of 10 North Dakota adults – 82 percent – said public notices belong in newspapers over government websites. Only 18 percent said governments can be trusted to be the only source of public notices.**

Last June's vote on the publication of city minutes confirms the high percentage of voters who want minutes published. An average of **85 percent** of voters in 208 cities in North Dakota voted YES to publication of minutes in newspapers. In some towns, the vote was as high as 93 percent!

Submitted along with my written testimony, you will see a number of comments from citizens that delve into their attitudes about publication of minutes and I urge you to give those a look. **It's not that people oppose ALSO having notices posted on government websites, but they see a clear interest in having a trusted third party like newspapers involved in making sure publications occur.**

The majority of today's newspapers are both print and digital. There's also a free statewide public notice website maintained by NDNA called ndpublicnotices.com, where all public notices, including minutes, are published and accessible at no cost to the consumer or the county.

Despite any digital disruptions, newspapers have been since the First Congress of the United States the preferred vehicle for disseminating public information because they do a couple of things government websites do not: they are independent, verifiable, and archived for the historic record.

Verifying online publication is much more difficult than with newspapers. This is why courts subject digital evidence to far greater scrutiny than evidence published in newspapers. Significant numbers of people in rural areas still lack high speed internet access and our elderly have issues of cost, education and ability to access online content. Furthermore, some counties have a dismal record of providing minutes to newspapers, even though they are required by law to publish them.

Finally, please note that the amendment carries no mechanism by which to verify county compliance with website publication, while newspapers still have to provide an affidavit swearing publication has occurred. Newspapers are paid to make sure publication occurs. That's the true beauty of our current system and there's no way to replace it on a government website.

Once relegated to county websites alone, there is no mechanism to assure these postings occur and no penalty for failing to post them.

Thank you for considering this testimony. **I urge a DO NOT PASS on HB 1380.**

Anne Ehni, Publisher

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Opinion

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By Sen. Jeff Magrum
Committees look at Missouri River, audits of political subdivisions
I want to wish everyone a blessed celebration of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead to create a path for our Salvation.
Your North Dakota Legislative Interim water topics committee met recently. We discussed the issues and concerns going on with water in the state. The big issue is the southwestern states wanting our Missouri River water. Their goal is to get the current national government to let them pipe our water to the Colorado River to supplement

their water. This has been a re-occurring issue and one not likely to stop.
Your Legislative Audit and Fiscal Review Committee met last week to go through audits of many different political subdivisions. Everything was better this time with the audits that we reviewed. Our state Auditor's office has been getting tough on corruption, so, hopefully, we will be getting more clean audit reports from our government agencies going forward. The North Dakota State Auditor's Office is our government watchdog for the people.
Pore space, what is it? This is the subsurface of your land. It

runs to the center of the earth. Pore space cannot be severed from surface ownership unlike mineral rights. There is a lot of concern about the pore space right now as out-of-state corporations using federal tax credits are attempting to steal pore space from landowners. I will write a future report about this topic including an unconstitutional law called Amalgamation.
Good Lords Blessings to you and your family.
Sincerely,
Sen. Jeff Magrum
District 8

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

Spring brings...

By Laura Gardner
Awe Spring! Birds, green grass, flowers, Easter, track, baseball, softball seasons and of course...prom season. Prom, to mothers it brings excitement, fathers collectively cringe, and wallets shudder! And this is where my husband and I have found ourselves. Lucky for us, this is a one-two punch. Two of our three daughters would be participating in the age-old high school formal. A neat twist as our oldest daughter was taking her middle sister as her date. Middle sister also gets to attend with a friend of hers at his school's prom later next month.
Now we aren't new to prom as our son had attended several proms when he was in school and of course we had attended proms just a few years ago. We are, however, new to shopping for prom dresses. Holy guacamole, were we in for a wild ride. Shopping for a modest and reasonably priced prom dress is not for the faint of heart. It's unbelievable what passes for a prom dress these days. I swear there's Vegas Showgirls wearing more than what some designers were offering up as a prom dress. Crazier yet, was the price tag on this tiny fabric posing as a dress. I'm terrified to think someone, well probably a lot of someones, have purchased these scantily clad sparkly 'dresses' as why else would that style be offered?
Lucky for us, we were able to find two dresses that wouldn't make their Dad suffer a small stroke or be uncomfortable if we ran into any religious lead-



ers while the girls were donning their fancy dresses. With some small modifications, a morning of primping and prepping, our girls were ready for their big formal dance. Of course first they had to endure the obligatory pictures, a fancy early supper, a gaming date at Tilt and no prom adventure is complete without a trip to Walmart. Fortunately, snowmageddon stayed somewhat mild to allow the festivities to be modified, but still continued.
When we made it to the school, the gym had been transformed into the New York City Skyline. As we watched all the jazzed up and bejeweled smiling students, they not only looked sharp, but it was so nice to see a multitude of colorful fabric... and modest amounts of it! It was so nice to see that the crazy trends on the online dress shops and even some of the more revealing dress options in state didn't find their way to our prom. Loving once again that North Dakota is keeping with its own trends. I'm happy now that we have one prom down and no more dress shopping until next year!

THE FILM PURSUIT

Racing the Chariots of Fire

By Hunter Kamrath
"Ben-Hur" was a historical fiction film released in 1959 that starred Charlton Heston, Jack Hawkins, Stephen Boyd, Haya Harareet, and Hugh Griffith. The film was directed by William Wyler.
Who knew that one loose tile on a roof could cause so much trouble? While a Roman governor and his procession are entering Judea, a loose tile from the roof crashes into the ground right where the governor and his horse are riding. Sure enough, in the middle of all the commotion, the horse gets spooked and throws the governor off. This whole situation was nothing short of an accident. A man named Messala, a Roman commander, investigates the scene and learns quickly it was a tragic accident. Instead, he blames his childhood friend, Judah Ben-Hur, a wealthy Jewish Prince. Judah is arrested without a fair trial and is sent to the galleys. The Romans also imprisoned his mother and sister. Ben-Hur is set on escaping prison life and getting revenge on Messala.
Every Easter, I have a tradition of watching this incredible film. Most of the film's setting takes place during the end of Jesus' time on earth. One of

the reasons this film is one of my very favorites is how Jesus Christ is used in the film. Ironically, He has a very small part in the nearly four-hour movie. His face is never shown, and He doesn't even have a single line of dialogue throughout, but His role is so very important. The film has a lot of tragic themes like imprisonment, leprosy, and revenge. Jesus Christ represents hope and optimism in the story. When Ben-Hur is a galley slave, Jesus arrives and gives him water before the poor man dies of dehydration. Later in the film, Judah seems to be driven by hate and bitterness, and it's up to the Prince of Peace to resolve this in him.
It wouldn't be right to discuss Ben-Hur without discussing one of the greatest scenes in movie history. Not long after the film's intermission, an epic chariot race occurs. This epic race is a giant visual spectacle. Set designers were tasked with building this enormous film set to bring the chariot arena/racetrack to life. At that time, it was the largest film set ever. Not only that, but another track identical in size had to be made right next to it where the horses could be trained, and the filmmakers could figure out how they wanted to film the

scene. To make the scene even more realistic, two of the film's big stars, Charlton Heston and Stephen Boyd, had to learn how to drive a chariot. The other charioteers were played by men who were experts in working with horses. The scene took a long five weeks to film and cost the filmmakers 1 million dollars to bring to life.
Not only is the chariot race gorgeous to look at, but the film looks so authentic thanks to the incredible work by the set designers as well as the costume designers. The movie looks so realistic thanks to those elements.
Composer Miklós Rózsa does an incredible job with the picture's soundtrack. The loud and boisterous feel really adds to many scenes making the entire movie feel like a giant event. Some film buffs believe this soundtrack still has an impact in movies today. My personal favorite composer, John Williams, has been said to have been greatly inspired by this film when composing music for films.
"Ben-Hur" is one of my favorite films of all time thanks to the brilliant themes throughout with Jesus, the epic chariot race, the gorgeous film sets, and the brilliant soundtrack.

Accountability vs. future advancement

The importance of printing meeting minutes

By Kelli Ameling
Associate Publisher
The publication of meeting minutes is a hot topic in North Dakota as a handful of government entities will have ballot measures this election cycle asking taxpayers if they want meeting minutes published in the newspaper.
Every four years, under North Dakota Century Code, government entities place the measure on the ballot for voters to decide if they want meeting minutes to be published in the legal newspaper. This code is specifically in regards to publishing meeting minutes, as by law, government entities still have to publish all other public notices such as election information, budget information, bid notices etc.
Recently, at a Washburn Commission meeting, two commissioners stated they were part of a county-wide push to re-word

the ballot measure to address the cost of publishing meeting minutes. At this meeting, the commissioners inaccurately stated they spent \$6,500 a year to publish meeting minutes and wanted the wording on the ballot to reflect that information. However, the commission president stated he wasn't comfortable with how the committee was going about things on a short-time frame, and the commission decided to leave the ballot this year, as is for the city.
It turns out, misinformation was given to the committee and commissioners, and the city of Washburn actually had spent just over \$2,000 in 2023 publishing meeting minutes – about a third of the cost stated at a public meeting (you can read the full story in this week's Leader News).
Yes, there is a price to publishing

Please See MINUTES on page 13

8 OUT OF 10 ADULTS
IN NORTH DAKOTA READ A LOCAL PAPER
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MINUTES

Continued from page 4

meeting minutes, legal rates are set by the state of North Dakota every two years – not the local newspapers. And, as much as newspapers do need and rely on that revenue, the cost is merely associated with the time and cost to actually process and print the minutes. The real reason for publishing the meeting minutes is to have an official record of accountability.

A push Washburn and other entities have made to move away from the publishing minutes is that posting minutes online are free. That is also not accurate.

Government entities have to keep in mind not just the cost of a website, but a host of one with enough space to hold years of records, the cost of time it takes to upload the documents and prepare the state-required paperwork like affidavits of publication stating they are available, equipment and the cost to stay up-to-date on that equipment for video recordings, making sure an IT employee is hired or bump the salary of an employee who will manage the recordings to make sure those are posted within the required time (and stay on top of the technology if a server/host were to go down) – all of this alone would cost an entity more than the roughly \$2,000 they are spending to publish meeting minutes.

Printing meeting minutes is a huge responsibility that is governed by the state.

Newspapers print the minutes as an unbiased third party. Once those meeting minutes are in print, there is no question if someone doctored and changed the minutes kept on file. This is a safety net for accountability of what took place at government meetings.

During the March 11 discussion at the city of Washburn, Commissioner Keith Hapip Jr., stressed the fact that even if meeting minutes were not to be published, the video and official meeting minutes would still be posted online and social media.

What third-party would be accountable to make sure video footage isn't lost or edited? What unbiased party is going to make sure meeting minutes aren't changed or doctored? Not to mention, we all know how technology can be – what if the internet or server goes down? Someone hacks the system? Or, something else happens where those videos and electronic information is just gone.

I would like to say we never have to worry about that in our county – but this scenario does

hit close to home as our sister paper experienced such an issue just last year with the city of Beulah.

Our Editor at that time wrote a story about a situation that didn't go by the books when it came to selecting a city attorney to head a project. Following the story a letter to the editor came, signed by the mayor, announcing the paper's inaccuracy. Beulah ran the letter, alongside a note from the Publisher sighting the exact time in the video that this indiscretion happened. The very next day the video of the meeting was taken down and the meeting minutes were altered to leave out the incident completely.

After the newspaper stood by the occurrence of what took place in the meeting, along with the original submission of meeting minutes to the newspaper, the video went back up online and the city was held accountable for their wrong doing.

This is an example, that took place in our backyard, on the importance of the publication of timely meeting minutes.

Yes, technology is advancing, and I will be the first to say I use it and rely on it, especially in regard to meeting coverage in the area when its available. It helps our newspaper be in multiple places at once to help provide as much information as possible to our readers.

I am strong believer in there will always be news, but how readers receive it will always be advancing. So, is this is a topic that needs to be addressed in regards to how meeting minutes are published for accountability and historical reasons – yes.

But we aren't there yet.

We cannot build a house without a foundation. We cannot advance in technology without making sure our standards for doing things the we have been doing them are addressed and those same standards can still be met as we transition into a new world of how people receive their information though technology.

Newspapers have to be a part of that foundation. Newspapers have to be a part of the discussion moving forward. Community journalism is still the backbone of communities they serve. Our goal is to provide you with accurate information to hold your county, city and school officials accountable, everyone always does their best when they are in the most light and we need to make sure that our officials stay in the light.

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for all those who
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and donated.
Special thanks to the
Wilton Lions Club and
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Insurance
and Ken Thompson
with Four Winds
Acution.

Thank you,
Todd Newton

Cardinal Corner

Thursday, Mar. 28
CNDC Indoor
Track Meet @
Minot State

Friday, Mar. 29
Good Friday:
NO SCHOOL

Monday, April 1
Easter Break:
NO SCHOOL

Tuesday, April 2
5/6 BBB vs Wilton
4:00 p.m.

5/6 VB TLM Triangular
@ TL 4:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 3
Kindergarten
Screenings

Thursday, April 4
5/6 VB vs Wilton
4:00 p.m.

Baseball vs C. Mclean
4:30 p.m.

Friday, April 5
Region 7 Speech
@ HMB

CHURCH DIRECTORY

BUTTE

- ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

MERCER

- OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN, 447-2694. Worship 11 a.m. Sunday School 10 a.m.
- MERCER BAPTIST CHURCH. Pastor Paul Stout, Sunday School, 10 a.m. Worship, 11 a.m.

REGAN

- ASSEMBLY OF GOD CHURCH, Rev. Steve Denn. Sunday School 10 a.m.; Morning Worship, 11 a.m.

RIVERDALE

- RIVERDALE COMMUNITY CHURCH, Pastor Alan Hathway; 463-2665, pastor's office. Sunday worship service, 9:00 a.m.
- ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, Pastor Van Vechten Crane. Sunday worship service, 11 a.m.

TURTLE LAKE

- ST. CATHERINE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, Father Patrick Cunningham. Sunday Mass, 8:30 p.m.
- TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Pastor Russ Lambert, 448-2551. Sunday Worship, 9:30 a.m. Sunday School, 10:30 a.m.
- TL BAPTIST CHURCH, Steve Vetter, 448-2222. Prayer time, 9 a.m. Worship Service, 8:30 a.m.
- SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST, Pastor Casper du Plessis, 701-485-2698. SABBATH SCHOOL, 10 a.m. Church Service, 11:10 a.m.
- ST. OLAF LUTHERAN CHURCH, 448-2698. Worship, 9 a.m. Sunday School, 10 a.m.
- METHODIST CHURCH, Pastor Kayla Buckley 448-2277. Sunday Worship Service, 9 a.m.

UNDERWOOD

- FAITH EVANGELICAL CHURCH, Pastor Steve Gage; Family Worship 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School 11 a.m. We also offer a Facebook Live worship service through the church's Facebook group. Website: faithevangelicalunderwood.org.
- AUGUSTANA LUTHERAN CHURCH, Worship Service, 10 a.m.
- FIRST ASSEMBLY OF GOD, Borchardt Ave. Morning Worship, 10 a.m.; WEDNESDAY: Kids Aflame Power Club and Youth Group, 6 p.m. Services on Underwood First Assembly of God Facebook.
- ST. BONAVENTURE CHURCH, Father Patrick Cunningham. Sunday Mass, 10:30 a.m.
- ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, Rev. Nathan Schieber. Worship Service, 9 a.m.
- TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, rural Pick City. Worship service, 11 a.m.

WASHBURN

- BIRKA LUTHERAN CHURCH, WORSHIP SERVICE, 8:30 a.m.
- FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH, Interim Pastor Paul Krueger. 709 Fifth Ave., 462-3775. Worship Service, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:45 a.m.; Holy Communion first and third Sunday of each month. Easter Sunrise Service at 7:00 a.m. followed by a breakfast.
- ST. EDWIN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, Father Patrick Cunningham. Saturday mass 5:00 p.m. Rosary prayed 1/2 hour before services.
- UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, Pastor Annie Carlson 462-3220. Sunday School for preschool to sixth grade, 9:30 a.m., (Sept. thru May); Worship Service, 10:30 a.m.
- WASHBURN BAPTIST CHURCH, Pastor Rick Torkelson Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Worship Service, 10:30 a.m.

WILTON

- FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Rev. Dr. Chuck Pedersen, Sunday: Morning Worship, 11 a.m.; Sunday School 10 a.m. for both children & adults. Thursday: Women's Bible Study, 1 p.m.
- MISSION EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH, 701-734-6959. Adult Sunday School 9:45 a.m.; Worship Service 10:45 a.m.; Awana, 6-7:30 p.m. Wednesdays during the school year.
- SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH. Sunday Mass/Eucharist, 8:30 a.m. Holy Days: As announced.
- SS PETER & PAUL UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, Rev. Fr. George Pruys. Saturday Confession, 4:00p.m.; Divine Liturgy, 4:30 p.m. Holy Days: As Announced. Good Friday Service at 6 p.m. Easter Saturday service at 4:30 p.m.
- SUNNE LUTHERAN CHURCH, Sunday School, 9 a.m.; Worship Service, 10 a.m.; Website: sunnelutheran.org.

WING

- BETHLEHEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, PASTOR TRISHA DE-BOER. Worship Service, 11 a.m. Communion celebrated on the first Sunday of each month and major festivals. Sunday School, 10 a.m.

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Morton County News Journal

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Chairman Longmuir and Committee members,

My name is Jill Friesz, owner of GS Publishing, LLC. I own and operate seven weekly newspapers in the southwest corner of the state, and I am advocating for all newspapers and readers from the state of North Dakota.

I am OPPOSED to House Bill 1380.

According to the 2024 official election results, the voters in my coverage area have spoken, and they want the council proceedings published in the newspaper.

**In the 17 cities I serve throughout the Southwest portion of the state,
88% voted YES to have proceedings published in the newspaper.**

The job of the newspapers in North Dakota is to be the watchdog of the communities we serve. We believe in transparency and accountability and take this position very seriously. Having access to and understanding local government proceedings helps residents stay informed about important issues such as budget allocations, infrastructure projects, and community programs. This knowledge is essential for residents to advocate for their needs and priorities effectively.

I am frequently tasked with reaching out to County and City Auditors and School Business Managers to remind them to submit proceedings for publication. If they are not required to publish in newspapers, where is the accountability? Websites can be cumbersome to maneuver, while others are not updated in a timely manner, if they exist at all. The communities in my coverage area have a large elderly population, many who do not have access to a computer or skills to navigate technology. Part of our role in the community is to be the local historian. By printing the commission proceedings, we are keeping a record of the actions taken in our local government to be preserved for future generations.

Once again, I urge you to recognize the significance of publishing proceedings in local newspapers and consider a DO NOT PASS on HB 1380. By doing so, we promote transparency, enhance accountability, encourage civic engagement, support local journalism, and foster a more informed community.

Sincerely,

Jill M. Friesz

Owner/Publisher GS Publishing, LLC

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DICKEY COUNTY LEADER

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January 21, 2025

Ken Smith
Editor, *Dickey County Leader*
Ellendale, North Dakota

Re.: House Bill # 1380,

Dear Representatives Longmuir, Fegley, Jonas, Bolinske, Davis, Hager, Hatlestad, Heilman, Klemin, Motschenbacher, Ostlie, Toman and Warrey:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill # 1380, which would make the newspaper publication of county commissioners' minutes optional.

While as engaged citizens we value the online publication of our commissioner's minutes (which our auditor's office posts regularly), we believe that maintaining the requirement to publish in the newspaper is a good policy.

First, as a newspaper, we take seriously the need to cover the actions of our commissioners in articles and notices as well as published minutes. The inclusion of the minutes in our newspaper for a nominal fee is a strong motivation for us to stay connected to the auditor's office and to the commission.

Second, our readers have come to expect to be able to find the minutes in our newspaper, and to them it is a valuable service.

Third, the newspaper is a reliable and permanent record that will remain long after county websites have become defunct. The North Dakota State Historical Society subscribes to every single paper in the state, and every week they microfilm every page of every issue and store them securely.

As a trained historian (M.A., UND, 1999 and D.A., UND, 2001) I greatly appreciate this. I have also overseen the digitization of our newspaper and our newspaper and historical society have made it available free online going back to 1882, when we were founded. Incidentally, we take pride in being the oldest business in Dickey County. Our archives area at <http://ellendalehistoricalsociety.advantage-preservation.com>

Fourth, we believe the cost to the county is minimal. In our case, the commission minutes are run in two newspapers, the *Dickey County Leader* (the county's official paper) and the *Oakes Times*, our sister paper. The dual publication comes at no extra cost to the county, and helps us serve our county residents though they may not subscribe to our paper. We love the Tornadoes fans as well as the Cardinals fans.

Fifth, we believe that the small financial boost that county papers receive by publication of the minutes is a practical and moral encouragement to local editors, writers and staff to keep up the task of producing papers.

It is my experience and those of others who do similar work, that we do it out of love and commitment to our local communities, both town and country dwellers, and we think of it as a public service as much or more than we think of it as simply a job. I could never count the number of conversations I've had, over the last six years since I've been editor, of our readers telling me in person, by email, by phone or by written letter, how much they appreciate our paper.

We are not politically partisan. We champion the cause of our schools and all sorts of local businesses, be they large or small. We constantly talk up the value of our government agencies (city as well as county), our fire and rescue departments, and voluntary organizations, whether they be churches, Masonic lodges, 4-H, history organizations, preservation and improvement committees, bridge clubs, saddle clubs and much more. We record present history and write about our past history. We believe we are an important part of the "glue" that helps hold the community together.

These are some of the reasons we favor keeping the requirement that counties publish their commission minutes in our papers. We would regard voting "no" on House Bill # 1380 as a vote of confidence in our work.

Thanks so much for considering our perspectives.

Sincerely,

Ken Smith
Editor, *Dickey County Leader*



Cecile Wehrman, director@ndna.com 701-648-8697

House Political Subdivisions
HB 1380

CHAIRMAN LONGMUIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Cecile Wehrman. I represent the North Dakota Newspaper Association and the state's 73 newspapers. Please accept this testimony **OPPOSED** to House Bill 1380.

This bill would give counties the okay to post minutes on their website instead of in newspapers. But we know that's not what people want.

In a demographically weighted survey of North Dakotans in 2024:

--**85 percent** said they believe public notices should be required to be placed in newspapers and **83 percent** said they read public notices in newspapers either digitally or online.

--Respondents chose newspapers over city/county websites **TWO to ONE** as the most appropriate, reliable and transparent location for public notices.

--Eight out of 10 North Dakota adults – **82 percent** – said public notices belong in newspapers over government websites. Only 18 percent said governments can be trusted to be the only source of public notices.

Minutes of a county body are among the most important communications local governments release to the public. They are the only mechanism by which the average citizen gains exposure to what the county is spending money on, who is coming before the county with problems and how county business is being managed. The cost of this transparency is typically less than 1 percent of the budget -- in some cases, well below 1 percent.

While counties don't vote on the issue of minutes publication, last June's vote on the publication of **CITY** minutes confirms the high percentage of voters who want minutes published. An average of **85 percent** of voters in 208 cities in North Dakota voted YES to publication of minutes in newspapers. In some towns, the vote was as high as 93 percent!

Submitted along with my testimony and the survey results previously mentioned, you will see a number of comments from citizens that delve into their attitudes about publication of minutes and I urge you to give those a look. It's not that people oppose **ALSO** having notices posted on government websites, but they see a clear interest in having a trusted third party like newspapers involved in making sure publications occur.

The majority of today's newspapers are both print and digital. There's also a free statewide public notice website maintained by NDNA called ndpublicnotices.com, where all public notices, including minutes, are published and accessible at no cost to the consumer or the county.

Despite any digital disruptions, newspapers have been since the First Congress of the United States the preferred vehicle for disseminating public information because they do several things government websites do not: they are independent, verifiable, cannot be altered electronically and they are archived for the historic record. Websites can go down or be hacked, but newspapers are required to provide copies of every issue to the State Historical Society. Once they're printed, they become the permanent archive of each county.

Verifying online publication – and making sure it isn't altered -- is much more difficult than with newspapers. This is why courts subject digital evidence to far greater scrutiny than evidence published in newspapers.

Significant numbers of people in rural areas still lack high speed internet access and our elderly have issues of cost, education and ability to access on-line content.

Furthermore, some counties have a dismal record of providing minutes to newspapers, even though they are required by law to publish them. A number of our members have submitted written testimony about late publications of minutes and having to remind auditors to send them. Who will make sure the minutes are published online?

Please note that the bill carries no mechanism by which to verify county compliance with website publication, while newspapers still have to provide an affidavit swearing publication has occurred. **Newspapers are paid to make sure publication occurs.** That's the true beauty of our current system and there's no way to replace it on a government website.

Once relegated to county websites alone, there is no mechanism to assure these postings occur and no penalty for failing to post them. People will be less informed about county business, less engaged in their communities, less inclined to get involved and have no remedy if a county fails to post them online.

We urge a **DO NOT PASS** on HB 1380

(Please see survey documents attached)



The North Dakota State Study

**Consumer Insights from the
North Dakota Newspaper Association**



Survey Methodology

- The North Dakota Newspaper Association commissioned Coda Ventures, an independent research and consulting firm, to conduct a survey among North Dakota adults, age 18+.
- The survey was designed to measure the demographics, media behavior and purchase intentions of respondents for specific product categories.
- The survey was fielded online, and respondents were screened by zip code to ensure an accurate representation of urban, suburban and rural communities. Additional quotas were set for age, gender, education and race to match the demographic composition of the population.
- The data was weighted and projected to the most recent ESRI census estimates.
- The survey was fielded from February 12 - March 19, 2024.
- At the close of the survey, a total of 405 adults participated. (Margin of Error: +/- 4.9%)



Public Notices

83%

Of North Dakota adults
read **public notices** in
print or digital **newspapers**

Usually	22%
Sometimes	35%
Seldom	26%
Never	17%



85%

Believe that publishing
public notices in newspapers
should be **required**

Yes	85%
No	15%

How often do you or other members of your household read public notices in a newspaper, on a newspaper's website or on the free statewide newspaper public notices website, regarding such issues as: tax/rate changes, zoning changes, abandoned properties, changes to the state constitution, bids on government contracts, etc.?

When state and local government agencies publish public notices, they pay for that publication, which amounts to less than 1% of their budget. Knowing this, do you believe that state and local government agencies should be required to publish such public and legal notices in newspapers and on their websites as a service to the community?

Citizens Speak Out about Public Notices

"I think the government should realize obviously that it's very important for public notices to be in newspapers and that's why it's been going on for over 200 years. To try and change it now would be ridiculous."

"I believe public notices in newspapers are important and should continue."

"I feel information that should be public should be easily accessible to all and reported on by multiple different agencies especially outside of the government itself."

"Public notices should appear on both state websites and in newspapers as not everyone gets online and not everyone wants to use online to read this important information. Citizens should know everything that's going on especially if they pay for it with our tax money."

"State sites are ok if you are looking for notices, but local papers will let you know about them without having to search. Most of the time you do not look for these things, so the local papers print them, and you will see them."

"I trust the local newspaper more than I do the government and state."

"They have always been in newspapers, and I feel they should continue to be in newspapers. They should be available as many places as possible."

Citizens Speak Out about Public Notices

"Sometimes it is very difficult to find public notices online. Do you look on the city site, county site, state site...so many sites."

"I think a large majority of people will follow their local newspaper for info instead of a county or state website."

"If info is available in the newspaper we don't have to search and dig on city and county websites for news and information."

"A third party, like a newspaper, is best for presenting the information and retaining historical information."

I feel that a local third party like a newspaper has no conflict of interests as opposed to government owned entities."

"The fact is there are still citizens who don't regularly use the internet. Citizens have the right to use whatever source they choose, and the government has an obligation to provide it."

"There should be access to information for all people to see, and therefore the information should be shared in several forms."

Opinions About Sources of Public Notices

Local newspapers/newspaper websites are a more reliable, appropriate and transparent medium for public notices than state, city or county websites

Local newspapers are also more concerned with the community

	Local Newspapers/ Websites	State Websites	City/County Websites
Concerned about the local community	<u>68%</u>	8%	24%
Appropriate location for public notices	55%	18%	26%
Reliable	53%	30%	17%
Transparent	53%	29%	19%

When thinking of the following sources for public notices, which do you feel is the most...

Government Websites vs. Newspapers

Eight out of 10 North Dakota adults (82%) believe that an independent third-party should deliver public notices versus having them only available on government websites

	North Dakota Adults
I think newspapers as an independent third-party source should deliver this important information to the public	82%
I think government can be trusted to be the only source of public notices	18%

Do you think state or local governments should stop publishing public notices in local newspapers/newspaper websites and only publish them on their websites?

HB 1380 Testimony

Terry Schwartzenberger - 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 Schwartzenberger

Publisher/Owner – Napoleon Homestead

701-321-2338

January 22, 2025

House Political Subdivisions
HB 1380

Chairman Longmuir and Committee Members:

My name is Denise Westad. I represent Consolidated Newspapers Inc., which consists of two official county newspapers in North Dakota. Please accept this testimony OPPOSED to the amendment in House Bill 1380.

This amendment would give counties the okay to post minutes on their websites instead of in newspapers. I have the voter numbers proving this is not what voters want.

In the last election, voters in Benson county voted 92.86% to 96.49% in favor of publishing minutes in newspapers. Nelson county voted 80.95% to 97.96% in favor of publishing minutes in the local newspaper, an average of 91.78%.

In addition to publishing minutes in print newspapers, we also upload them to a free statewide public notice website maintained by NDNA, ndpublicnotices.com, which is accessible and at no cost to the consumer or the county.

In 2024 Benson County spent \$4,842.75 on publishing minutes in the Benson County Farmers Press, out of a budget of \$7,258,391.83. That is 0.0007%. Nelson County spent \$4,899.46 on publishing minutes in the Lakota American, out of a budget of \$5,339,861.49. That is 0.0010%.

Despite any digital disruptions, newspapers have been since the First Congress of the United States the preferred vehicle for disseminating public information because they do a couple of things government websites do not: they are independent, verifiable, and archived for the historic record.

Verifying online publication is much more difficult than with newspapers. This is why courts subject digital evidence to far greater scrutiny than evidence published in newspapers. Significant numbers of people in rural areas still lack high speed internet access and our elderly have issues of cost, education and ability to access online content. Furthermore, some counties have a dismal record of providing minutes to newspapers, even though they are required by law to publish them.

Finally, please note that the amendment carries no mechanism by which to verify county compliance with website publication, while newspapers still have to provide an affidavit swearing publication has occurred. Newspapers are paid to make sure publication occurs. That's the true beauty of our current system and there's no way to replace it on a government website.

Once relegated to county websites alone, there is no mechanism to assure these postings occur and no penalty for failing to post them.

I urge a DO NOT PASS on HB 1380

January 22, 2025

**N.D. House Political Subdivisions Committee
House Bill 1380**

Chairman Longmuir and Members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee:

My name is Amy Wobbema, and I am the publisher of two newspapers in central North Dakota – the New Rockford Transcript and Foster County Independent. I'm writing today in opposition to House Bill 1380.

This amendment would give N.D. counties the authority to post minutes on their website instead of in newspapers. We think that's a bad idea. And based on both 2024 election results and a study conducted on behalf of North Dakota newspapers, citizens agree.

During the 2024 primary election, 94.88% of voters in the City of New Rockford said they wanted the city's minutes published in the local newspaper – 371 people voted yes, while only 20 said no.

The incumbent mayor of New Rockford ran unopposed in that same primary election, and the publication of city minutes got more votes than he did.

The results were similar across the state. An average of **85 percent** of voters in 208 cities voted YES to publication of minutes in newspapers. In some towns, the vote was as high as 93 percent.

There are very few legislative proposals and ballot measures that get that kind of support, other than maybe the request to name an overpass in Carrington after WWII veteran Staff Sergeant (SSgt) Miles Shelley, as we reported in the Foster County Independent last week.

While we don't currently put the question of whether or not to publish county minutes in the official newspaper on the ballot because it's already codified in state law, the North Dakota Newspaper Association did its own research to gauge public opinion about publication of minutes and other public notices.

In a demographically weighted survey conducted in 2024, eight out of 10 North Dakota adults – **82 percent** – said public notices belong in newspapers over government websites. Only 18 percent said governments can be trusted to be the only source of public notices.

On a regular basis, newspaper staff get asked if minutes from a certain meeting have been published in the newspaper. Our readers look for this information and use it to keep them informed. Additionally, if there is confusion about the intent of action taken by the commission,

both the newspaper staff and public officials alike will refer the citizen to the official minutes as published in the newspaper.

By giving the counties the option to only post the minutes in a digital format on their websites, it makes vital public notices less accessible, easier to alter and prone to online hacks.

Newspapers are the aggregators of information. We compile relevant and timely content and put it in front of readers, and a copy of every newspaper published in North Dakota is archived by the North Dakota Historical Society. Once our newspapers are archived, they cannot be altered. That gives newspapers the important distinction as historical records for every North Dakota county that are safe from alteration or deletion by dishonest politicians and online hackers alike.

Further, all county minutes published in newspapers are also readily available online, right along with other public notices. The NDNA-powered website, ndpublicnotices.com, is a one stop shop for all public notices published in North Dakota newspapers, making them free and easily accessible by anyone online.

With the facts not in their favor, some will make this all about money. The truth is, however, that the cost of publishing public notices is negligible in relation to county budgets.

Eddy County spent about \$2,900 in the past year to publish their minutes in the New Rockford Transcript. Further, they spent a total of \$9,400 to publish ALL required public notices in 2024. Last year was a presidential election year, during which they must publish several notices specific to the election such as sample ballots and abstract of votes for both the primary and general elections. During a non-election year, such as 2025, their total will be quite a bit less.

In Foster County, the bill totaled about \$6,500 to publish minutes and \$14,600 for publication of all required public notices in 2024. The commission in Foster County meets twice per month, compared to Eddy County's one meeting per month.

To put that in perspective, Eddy County will collect \$1.87 million in property tax revenue in 2025 and less than \$10,000 of that will go to the local newspaper to publish vital public notices. Based on their final, approved 2025 budget, Foster County will collect \$3.276 million in property taxes in 2025. In either case, that equates to no more than one-half of one percent, or a penny out of every \$2 collected in property tax by each county, being used to keep citizens informed.

Also regarding money, newspaper publishers don't get paid if county minutes don't run. We are also required by law to provide affidavits to prove that we have published official county minutes. The amendment in HB 1380 doesn't include any equivalent publication requirement for county officials. Who will make sure minutes get posted online in a timely manner, and what will happen if they don't?

To be clear, I am not opposed to having county auditors post meeting minutes on their county's website. Rather, if this bill is really about making county minutes more accessible to the public, then I'd propose that the law require publication BOTH in the local newspaper and on the county's website. That action isn't really necessary, however, because public notices are already available online on the newspapers' websites and at ndpublicnotices.com. This is yet another service newspapers provide to the counties and their citizens, made possible by the small fee we charge to publish public notices.

County governments pay a fee for every other service provided to them. They contract with private companies for all sorts of things on a regular basis. Publishing public notices and disseminating them to citizens is a service newspapers provide, and we do it well.

I urge a DO NOT PASS on HB 1380.

If you have any questions, please email me at amyw@transcriptpublishing.com.

Amy Wobbema
Publisher
Transcript Publishing
New Rockford, N.D.

CHAIRMAN LONGMUIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Art Hagebock. I am the owner and publisher of four weekly newspapers in southeast North Dakota. They are the LaMoure Chronicle, Kulm Messenger, Litchville Bulletin, and the Enderlin Independent.

Please accept this testimony "AGAINST" HB 1380

I have been in the newspaper industry since 1980. I have owned my four newspapers since 2012. I also am very involved with my communities that I have papers in. I sit on the LaMoure Community Development Corporation board, St. Rose Care Center nursing home board, American Legion, LaMoure County Housing Authority board, LaMoure Chamber Retailers, James River Sportsman Club, and recently retired as the fire chief after fifteen years in that position. I attend every School Board, City Council, and County Commission meeting and report the stories in our papers. I do not tell you these things to be boisterous, I tell you this because I know how vital the local newspapers are to getting information out to the public. The public also expects my newspapers to give them all the public information they need and want. The web and social media are great tools for information but anytime anybody really wants to make sure that their information is seen, they put that information in their local newspaper.

I do not know if everyone understands the process of publishing minutes. At the county level, it is mandated that the minutes must be published and the voters pick which newspaper to publish them in. At the city and school level, the voters choose whether the minutes are published or not. The city council or school board then chooses which newspaper they will be published in.

In the last election, the voters voted 170 to 10 in favor of publishing the school's minutes in the newspaper. The city of LaMoure had 7 no votes to 105 yes votes. Over 2,000 voters picked a newspaper to publish the county minutes in that last election in LaMoure County.

It is obviously clear that the voters want their government information readily available to them. They do not want to have to go hunt for it. I had to go through four different steps to get to where I could read this bill on the state's website. How many people would give up after the first couple of tries.

I go to these meetings, I see how much trouble these entities have in keeping their websites current. Who is going to monitor them? This bill is absolutely the wrong approach. If you want to give the option to the voters on what form of media they would like to get their information from, then let them decide. Do not dictate their wishes through this type of legislation.

Written Testimony for the
House Political Subdivisions

January 24, 2025

Jaden Schmidt, Oliver County Auditor

RE: SUPPORT for HB 1380

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee.

My name is Jaden Schmidt and I am the Auditor for Oliver County. I would like to express my support of House Bill 1380.

In 2023, Oliver County spent a total of \$5,263.50 with our official newspaper, the Center Republican. In 2024, that number increased to \$10,552.74. This increase is largely due to the election printing and publishing but also includes commission meeting minutes, legal notices for Planning & Zoning, notices for bid opportunities, job listings, newspaper subscriptions as well as other printing needs.

Last year, Oliver County spent \$3,827.51 for the publication of our meeting minutes, an increase from \$1467.80 that was spent specifically for minute publication in 2023. Our minutes are also published to our website, approximately one week prior to their publication in the newspaper.

To some, the amount is not staggering, but for a small county like mine, that is an amount that could be allocated towards other services for our county residents. Where the public accesses information has shifted from printed paper to digital and continues to do so. Having our minutes published to the website becomes directly available to the public, often in a manner quicker than waiting for the newspaper to publish them.

Thank you for your time today and I urge a DO PASS recommendation on HB 1380.

Written Testimony for the House Political Subdivisions

January 24, 2025

Kelsey Majeske, Publisher

RE: Opposition for HB 1380

Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee,

My name is Kelsey Majeske, and I serve as the Publisher for the *Center Republican* and several other small community newspapers across North Dakota. In Oliver County, the Center Republican holds the designation as the legal newspaper for the County, City, and School District.

In 2024, Oliver County was billed a total of \$9,245.20 for all advertising placed with the Center Republican, of which \$3,135 was allocated for the publication of regular and special meeting minutes. While this represents an increase from the \$5,655.98 paid in 2023, the increase is primarily due to additional public bid notices and election-related costs. This cost represents less than half of a percentage point of the overall budget for Oliver County.

I firmly believe that publishing meeting minutes in the newspaper each month serves as an essential service to our community. In Oliver County, where nearly 40% of the population is over the age of 60, many residents continue to rely on print media rather than digital platforms. We frequently receive inquiries from readers seeking meeting minutes, particularly when they are delayed in being sent to us for publication. For many in our community, these minutes are a vital tool for staying informed about their local government activities.

While we live in an era where digital platforms are often seen as more convenient, providing meeting minutes in print remains a critical service. It ensures transparency and accountability, offering residents a reliable and tangible record of government actions. This approach minimizes the potential for discrepancies and fosters greater public trust.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to vote against HB1380.

January 23, 2025

House Political Subdivisions
HB 1380

CHAIRMAN LONGMUIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

My name is Allison Olimb. I serve as the president of the North Dakota Newspaper Association, which connects the state's 73 newspapers. Please accept this testimony OPPOSED to the amendment in House Bill 1380.

SECTION 1. AMENDMENT. Section 11-11-37 of the North Dakota Century Code is amended and reenacted as follows: 11-11-37. Proceedings of board of county commissioners to be published in official newspaper or to official website - When published.

The amendment in question utilizes a very crucial conjunction that bothers me—"or."

When it comes to publishing online, where is the accountability? Who is the watchdog to ensure that publishing takes place? Who is responsible for following up? Who is going to make sure those websites are not edited, hacked, or deleted? What is the archival plan?

You are going to hear from many of my colleagues who are the designated "official county newspaper" and will have a financial buy-in. I do not. I am the editor of one of the two newspapers in Walsh County. Neighboring Grafton is the county seat and the newspaper there serves as the official county newspaper.

I am coming to you as a citizen, a landowner, a passionate advocate of rural North Dakota who lives in one county, works in another, and is impacted by decisions in both.

The one thing I can count on with our area newspapers is that there is a level of accountability. There often are news reports that give highlights of what took place in county meetings, but that is not the same as running an official record. The minutes are printed as presented, unedited and preserved in the state historical archives as designated by law because that is what newspapers do.

In the state of North Dakota there are 73 newspapers and 53 counties. While the conversation of “news deserts” is prevalent in modern media, what North Dakota lacks in concentrated media areas, we make up for in range. In full transparency, there are three counties that do not have representation in their borders. What they still have is representation in close neighboring communities that keeps that coverage intact. Every county is represented and it is their voters who select that publication.

When voters come to the ballots, time and time again, they choose transparency. They choose publication. They choose newspapers. An average of 85 percent of the voters in 208 cities voted yes to the publication of their city minutes.

A NDNA survey conducted by an independent third party found that respondents chose newspapers over city/county websites **TWO to ONE** as the most appropriate, reliable and transparent location for public notices. More than 80 percent of North Dakota adults said public notices belong in newspapers over government websites. Only 18 percent said governments can be trusted to be the only source of public notices.

The people of North Dakota trust us because we are good at our jobs, and you will be hard pressed to find someone more willing to fight for the public right to know than a North Dakota journalist. We have just as much at stake as our readers because we aren't just reporting on our communities, we are a part of them.

What my newspaper is responsible for is city and school minutes. When it comes to those school and city minutes we are responsible for, there are times when we are the ones making sure that they are getting in front of the people. We are making sure they are accessible. We are making sure they are documented and archived.

I believe that we live in a North Dakota that utilizes both print media and online sources to access information. I, personally, have both online **AND** print subscriptions to several area publications. What this amendment is missing is that our newspapers already provide that online step in making these records available. Should I need to access records online for anywhere from Pembina County to Slope County, I can find searchable documentation at <http://www.ndpublicnotices.com>, a North Dakota Newspaper Association website.

I am not opposed to online publication. I am opposed to “or”.

As a concerned citizen of the state of North Dakota I would urge a DO NOT PASS on HB 1380. Thank you for your consideration.

Testimony prepared for:
House Political Subdivisions
Donnell Preskey, NDACo
January 23, 2025



Re: HB 1380 – Publication Requirement

Chairman Longmuir and committee members, I'm Donnell Preskey with the North Dakota Association of Counties. We are here in support of HB 1380 to amend the publication requirement for the printing of commission meeting minutes to allow for the county to instead publish on their website. This will save taxpayer dollars.

NDACo has attempted to amend publication requirements numerous times in recent sessions, and in that time, costs continue to rise. Now, counties are under even greater scrutiny for how taxpayer dollars are spent. In 2019, counties budgeted \$450,000 for publication requirements. A recent survey found that line item has grown to \$750,000 in 2024. And the harsh reality is that fewer people are subscribing to and reading the local newspaper in that timeframe. Costs have risen while the reach has decreased. This fact should cause pause. Is this the best use of taxpayer dollars?

While counties have numerous publication requirements that are included in the \$750,000 budget number – meeting minutes is typically the largest share of that cost. Estimates from counties show the expense of publishing the meeting minutes is about half to one-third of their publication budget.

The Office of Management and Budget negotiates and sets the rate for legal notices. County Auditors were notified in late 2024 that OMB is proposing increases of 3.25% in FY2026 and 3.25% in FY2027. That's an increase statewide of almost \$50,000 in two years. It is our position that if the cost of operating newspapers has increased, those costs should be passed on to the subscribers or advertisers not government entities.

OMB conducted a recent survey, which included County Auditors, regarding the proposed rate increase. A majority of auditors who responded shared negative comments about the rate increase. Citing the increased cost will put greater pressure on the limited property tax revenue available or lead to a property tax increase. In a survey, NDACo conducted to gather the publication budget information for 2024, there were several comments including: papers failing to publish the information when it is required, papers reducing how often printing, and the decrease in subscribers.

With an increased focus on limiting government spending at the local level – it is beyond time to look at these publication requirements. We ask you give HB 1380 a Do Pass Recommendation.

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Political Subdivisions Committee Room JW327B, State Capitol

HB 1380
1/24/2025

A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact section 11-11-37 of the North Dakota Century Code, relating to the publication of proceedings of a board of county commissioners.

9:51 a.m. Chairman Longmuir opened the hearing.

Members Present: Chairman Longmuir, Vice-Chairman Fegley, Vice-Chairman Jonas, Representatives Bolinske, Davis, Hager, Hatlestad, Heilman, Klemin, Motschenbacher, Ostlie, Warrey

Members Absent: Representative Toman

Discussion Topics:

- Online vs hard copy newspaper
- Committee action

9:52 a.m. Representative Warry moved a Do Not Pass.

9:52 a.m. Representative Hager seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Clayton Fegley	Y
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Macy Bolinske	N
Representative Jayme Davis	Y
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	N
Representative Lawrence R. Klemin	Y
Representative Mike Motschenbacher	Y
Representative Mitch Ostlie	Y
Representative Nathan Toman	A
Representative Jonathan Warrey	Y

9:54 a.m. Motion passed 10-2-1

9:54 a.m. Representative Klemin will carry the bill.

9:55 a.m. Chairman Longmuir closed the hearing.

Wyatt Armstrong, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1380 ([25.1057.01000](#))

Political Subdivisions Committee (Rep. Longmuir, Chairman) recommends **DO NOT PASS** (10 YEAS, 2 NAYS, 1 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING). HB 1380 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.