

Third Session – Forty-First Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
Standing Committee
on
Social and Economic Development

Chairperson
Mr. Dennis Smook
Constituency of La Verendrye

Vol. LXXI No. 4 - 6 p.m., Monday, May 14, 2018

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALLUM, James	Fort Garry-Riverview	NDP
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	NDP
BINDLE, Kelly	Thompson	PC
CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.	Agassiz	PC
COX, Cathy, Hon.	River East	PC
CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.	Spruce Woods	PC
CURRY, Nic	Kildonan	PC
DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.	Charleswood	PC
EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.	Lakeside	PC
EWASKO, Wayne	Lac du Bonnet	PC
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
FONTAINE, Nahanni	St. Johns	NDP
FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.	Morden-Winkler	PC
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.	Steinbach	PC
GRAYDON, Clifford	Emerson	PC
GUILLEMARD, Sarah	Fort Richmond	PC
HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
JOHNSON, Derek	Interlake	PC
JOHNSTON, Scott	St. James	PC
KINEW, Wab	Fort Rouge	NDP
KLASSEN, Judy	Kewatinook	Lib.
LAGASSÉ, Bob	Dawson Trail	PC
LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
LAMOUREUX, Cindy	Burrows	Lib.
LATHLIN, Amanda	The Pas	NDP
LINDSEY, Tom	Flin Flon	NDP
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	NDP
MARCELINO, Flor	Logan	NDP
MARCELINO, Ted	Tyndall Park	NDP
MARTIN, Shannon	Morris	PC
MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
MICHALESKI, Brad	Dauphin	PC
MICKLEFIELD, Andrew	Rossmere	PC
MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice	Seine River	PC
NESBITT, Greg	Riding Mountain	PC
PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.	Fort Whyte	PC
PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.	Midland	PC
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REYES, Jon	St. Norbert	PC
SARAN, Mohinder	The Maples	Ind.
SCHULER, Ron, Hon.	St. Paul	PC
SMITH, Andrew	Southdale	PC
SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
SMOOK, Dennis	La Verendrye	PC
SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
TEITSMA, James	Radisson	PC
WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.	Gimli	PC
WIEBE, Matt	Concordia	NDP
WISHART, Ian, Hon.	Portage la Prairie	PC
WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA
THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Monday, May 14, 2018

TIME – 6 p.m.

LOCATION – Winnipeg, Manitoba

**CHAIRPERSON – Mr. Dennis Smook
(La Verendrye)**

**VICE-CHAIRPERSON – Mr. James Teitsma
(Radisson)**

ATTENDANCE – 11 QUORUM – 6

Members of the Committee present:

Hon. Messrs. Eichler, Wharton, Wishart

*Mr. Allum, Mses. Fontaine, Klassen,
Messrs. Lagimodiere, Lindsey, Pivniuk, Smook,
Teitsma*

PUBLIC PRESENTERS:

*Mr. Bob Cox, Winnipeg Free Press
Mr. Will Reimer, private citizen
Mr. Laurie Finley, Steinbach Carillon*

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS:

*Gail H. Fisher, private citizen
Ben E. Fox, Manitoba Beef Producers
J. Brodt, private citizen
Danielle Da Silva, private citizen
Vicki Wallace, Southern Manitoba Review
Simon Fuller, private citizen*

MATTERS UNDER CONSIDERATION:

*Bill 19–The Planning Amendment Act
(Improving Efficiency in Planning)*

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Good evening. Will the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development please come to order.

Our first item of business is to elect a Vice-Chairperson.

Are there any nominations?

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): I nominate James Teitsma.

Mr. Chairperson: James Teitsma has been nominated.

Are there any other nominations?

Hearing no other nominations, James Teitsma is elected Vice-Chairperson.

This meeting has been called to continue consideration of Bill 19, The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning). I would like to remind the committee that the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development will meet again tomorrow, May 15th, at 6 p.m., to continue consideration of Bill 19.

As per an agreement between the House leaders, a set number of presenters scheduled to present at tonight's committee meeting. So we will hear from 18 of the presenters registered to speak on Bill 19. And you have a list of those presenters before you. Presenters will be called in the order they registered and appear on the list.

I would like to inform all in attendance of the provisions of—in our rules regarding the hour of adjournment. A standing committee meeting to consider a bill must not sit past midnight to hear public presentations or to consider clause by clause of a bill, except by unanimous consent of the committee. As per agreement between the House leaders, the committee will agree to sit past midnight if that is necessary to hear all scheduled presenters.

I would like to inform the committee that, as part of the ongoing efforts to update the Legislative Assembly's educational video series, the proceedings of tonight's meeting will be filmed. Thank you.

Written submissions. Written submissions on Bill 19 have been received from the following persons, and copies have been distributed to committee members: Gail H. Fisher; Ben Fox, Manitoba Beef Producers; J. Brodt; Danielle Da Silva; Vicki Wallace, Southern Manitoba Review; and Simon Fuller.

Does the committee agree to have these documents appear in the Hansard transcript of this meeting? *[Agreed]*

Public presentation guidelines: Before we proceed with presentations, we do have a number of other items and points of information to consider.

For all the information—for the information of all presenters, while written versions of presentations are not required, if you are going to accompany your presentation with written materials we ask that you provide 20 copies. If you need help with photocopying, please speak with our staff.

As well, in accordance with our rules, a time limit of 10 minutes has been allotted for presentations, with another five minutes allowed for questions from the committee members.

If a presenter is not in attendance when their name is called, they will be dropped to the bottom of the list. If the presenter is not in attendance when their name is called a second time, they will be removed from the presenters' list.

I would also like to remind the members of the public who are observing the committee meeting to please not disturb the committee proceedings by applauding or commenting from the audience. Taking of photographs are not permitted from the public gallery as well as any audio-video recordings, and please ensure that your phones are in silent mode.

Speaking in committee: Prior to proceeding with public presentations, I would like to advise members of the public regarding the process for speaking in committee. The proceedings of our meetings are recorded in order to provide a verbatim transcript. Each time someone wishes to speak, whether it be an MLA or a presenter, I first have to say that person's name. This is the signal for the Hansard recorder to turn the mics on and off.

Thank you for your patience. We will now proceed with public presentations.

**Bill 19—The Planning Amendment Act
(Improving Efficiency in Planning)**

Mr. Chairperson: I will now call on Jenifer Bilsky, Interlake Publishing Group. Jenifer Bilsky? Jenifer Bilsky is not here. Her name will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Shannon 'Stampert,' Evidence Network. Shannon 'Stampert'? Shannon 'Stampert' is not here, be moved to the bottom of the list.

Brenda Kowerko? Brenda Kowerko? Brenda Kowerko is not here. She will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Danielle Broome? Danielle Broome, private citizen? Not here. Danielle will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Darci Semeschuk, the Souris Plaindealer. Darci Semeschuk is not here, will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Bob Cox, Winnipeg Free Press. Do you have any written materials for distribution to the committee?

Mr. Bob Cox (Winnipeg Free Press): I do, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairperson: Once the material has been distributed to the committee, we will then allow you to proceed with your presentation.

You may proceed with your presentation, Mr. Cox.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, honourable ministers, other committee members. Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you this evening.

I—my name is Bob Cox. I'm the publisher of the Winnipeg Free Press. I have given you a written submission there; however, I'm conscious of a few facts tonight, one of which is that I stand between you and the Winnipeg Jets, and I don't like my chances in that contest. So I'm going to give you a very brief summary of what I have to say and not burden you with the whole text, which you can read at your leisure—and pleasure, for that matter.

The first is that I want to make it clear that I endorse the position taken by the Manitoba Community Newspapers Association. It was eloquently presented at your last session by Kim MacAulay, and I certainly couldn't do better than she did at making the points that are important to the newspaper industry in the province of Manitoba.

* (18:10)

I do want to make four brief points, however. One is on the whole question of what mandatory public notices really are. What they do is they give power to people. They are meant to tie the hands of

politicians. They give power to people to know what government is doing and power to act on that knowledge. They deliberately take power away from politicians. That's the whole point of them.

Local councils and planning districts have authority to choose how to communicate with residents on many matters, but there are some judged important enough that the hands of politicians must be tied so that power stays with the people.

Second point I would like to make is that notices—public notices, excuse me—must be put in a place independent of government. They cannot be put simply on a government website. Once government controls the platform, power is once again in the hands of politicians and not in the hands of people.

And, as I said, there are many matters in which government has discretion about how it communicates but there are certain judged so important that that discretion should be taken away. It should be in the hands of the people who are affected by the actions of government.

I'm not saying any particular government would abuse this power, but people should not have to rely on a politician saying, just trust me.

Third thing I'd like to note: one of the things—I sat through the hearings last week, and the question came up about whether section 25 of Bill 19 should be passed and simply not proclaimed. Well, I have a little story for you.

About 20 years ago, my wife insisted that we buy a stainless steel kitchen counter and sink. I didn't have much say in the matter, so we still have that kitchen counter and sink in its original box in the basement of our house.

We have lived in four cities and five houses since purchasing that kitchen sink, but we have never lived anywhere where we could actually install that sink or of—that it was of any value or use to us whatsoever—and by the way, if you want a stainless steel kitchen sink, I've got a great deal on one.

However, I beg of you not to throw the kitchen sink into this legislation. I beg of you to simply not pass section 25, to fix section 25 rather than passing it and then not proclaiming it, because you don't want the kitchen sink hanging around in the basement for the next 20 years.

And, finally, I'd just like to say that we do live in the digital age, and I recognize absolutely that it is

way past time that public notice provisions were modernized. Frankly, this government should deal with that matter, but they should deal with it in a comprehensive way, which takes a look at how public notices are best presented to the public, respecting all the principles of public notices, in an age when there are so many, many ways of communicating.

If there's a proper study done—I don't see that there was a proper study done in this case. I think there was simply a default, in this case. Oh, we'll just put it on a government website. If you do that, again, you start violating the fundamental principles of public notices. You should maintain those notices because they are very important to our democracy, and we should take our time to come up with a proper way of doing it.

Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Cox.

We will take questions from members of the committee.

Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations): Well, thank you so much, Mr. Cox, for coming out this evening, and don't worry about the Jets game. I'm sure we can catch up later, but it's great you took the time to come out tonight.

Just quickly, on your comment about the kitchen sink: apparently, you didn't have fair say when your wife went out to purchase that kitchen sink, so—but—

Floor Comment: Well, there were no public notice provisions in our household, unfortunately.

Mr. Wharton: Yes, exactly.

Floor Comment: And, frankly, I've been advocating for them for a long time, but yes. Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I apologize.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Wharton still has the—are you finished, Mr. Wharton?

Mr. Wharton: No. Not yet. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Floor Comment: I thought he was done.

Mr. Wharton: Well, apparently I was, yes.

Again, just wanted to thank you, Mr. Cox, for coming out and, again, taking part in the democratic process, and certainly we heard some very interesting comments and concerns last Thursday. And we're looking forward to this evening and

tomorrow night as well, to continue to gather information during the process. So thanks again for coming out.

Mr. Cox: Thank you. I don't think there was a question there, was there?

An Honourable Member: Comment. Just a comment.

Mr. Cox: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Mr. Lindsey? Question?

Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon): Thank you, and I thank you for coming out and taking time out of your Jets schedule to come and present tonight. It—democracy, unfortunately, sometimes gets in the way of leisure activities, but so be it. It's that important.

So were you or anybody from your group consulted prior to this piece of legislation being implemented?

Mr. Cox: No, I certainly wasn't consulted. I don't believe anyone else, certainly from the Winnipeg Free Press was consulted, and I have to say I'd be absolutely thrilled to be consulted on this matter. It's a matter that is very near and dear to my heart, as someone who has been in journalism for 35 years. The matter of communicating with the public, of communicating the importance of the work the government does to the public has been part of my entire adult life. I would love to have a say in what—how my children and my grandchildren should receive notice of what government is doing.

Hon. Ralph Eichler (Minister of Agriculture): Really not a question, but more of a comment, Mr. Chair.

I wondered if there's leave of the committee to have Mr. Cox's presentation—written presentation—recorded in Hansard.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave of the committee to have Mr. Cox's presentation into committee—into Hansard? [Agreed]

Good evening. My name is Bob Cox. I am the publisher of the Winnipeg Free Press. The newspaper reaches 428,000 Winnipeg readers in some form every week, according to a recent survey of readership by Vividata, which measures the readership of publications in Canada.

That represents two out of every three people in the City of Winnipeg. My company also produces and distributes the Canstar community papers,

which arrive on the doorsteps of more than 200,000 households every week.

I emphasize these numbers because I am here to address Bill 19, The Planning Amendment Act, specifically Sec. 25 of this Act.

The Act would eliminate mandatory newspaper notice requirements under the Planning Act and replace them with requirements that municipalities put up notices on their websites.

I do not have the statistics for the websites of all municipalities in Manitoba, but I can guarantee you that not one of them is viewed by two-thirds of a municipality's residents each week.

In fact, I can guarantee you that not a single one of them is ever viewed by two-thirds of a municipality's residents over any time period—a week, a month or a year.

Newspapers have been used for public notices for centuries because newspapers reach people. They bring things to the attention of people that people did not know about.

And newspapers still do this effectively.

It's popular to say in this digital-crazed age that newspapers are old-fashioned and obsolete.

Like many things that are popular to say, this is just plain wrong.

It is a paradox of our age that digital technology has given newspapers more readers than ever, even as it has disrupted the business models upon which the industry has been based.

Requiring public notices in newspapers is as relevant today as it was 100 years ago.

Placing information passively on a website is simply not the same as actively placing it in newspapers where it will come to the attention of a variety of people.

I am reminded of one of my favourite books, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, where the people of Earth are surprised to learn their planet is about to be destroyed to make way for a new space highway.

They are told simply: "All the planning charts and demolition orders have been on display in your local planning department in Alpha Centauri for fifty of your Earth years, so you've had plenty of time to

lodge any formal complaint and it's far too late to start making a fuss about it now."

For many people, municipal websites can be as remote as the planning department in Alpha Centauri.

Bill 19 as currently written would put people in the position of having to go searching for information that can affect their lives, but which they don't know exists.

I think it's important to reiterate the principle behind public notices.

Some partisans in this debate have used it as an opportunity to attack newspapers saying that we are somehow simply trying to preserve a revenue stream by defending public notices. That revenue stream is tiny—less than one-fifth of one per cent of Winnipeg Free Press revenues.

Moreover, such attitudes ignore that what is at stake is a fundamental principal of democracy.

Many generations of politicians, from all political stripes, have passed into law public notice provisions for the same reason—to require governments to display information in places where the public is likely to come into notice so that people can make well-informed decisions.

Public notices provide transparency and accessibility to citizens who want to know more about government actions. Providing public notice provides the opportunity for the public to influence governing bodies and allows the public to be an active participant in a democratic society.

This principle goes back many centuries. Before public notices, only elites—the Kings and Czars, the nobility, the churches—had access to information and controlled it in order to stay in power and control most of the population.

Uprisings and revolutions followed once the printing press allowed people to discover what was happening. We have our democracies today as a result.

Generations of politicians have understood that in order to preserve our democracies, we must tie the hands of government when it comes to telling the public what is going on.

Public notices are not discretionary government advertising—a budget line to be cut when a government decides not to spend money communicating with the public.

They are put in place when matters are deemed important enough that a government should not be allowed to pick and choose when it will publish a public notice on a matter and when it will not. Planning changes definitely are important enough to require public notices.

Public notices take power away from government and give it to the people.

To do this, they must be independent of government. A government website is, by definition, not independent and therefore cannot fulfill the functions of public notice. In fact, a government website gives power back to government and takes it away from the people.

Newspapers are independent of government, and their content can be guaranteed and tracked to ensure that anything published as a public notice is not altered in the future.

Of course, we do live in a digital age, and the number of possible ways of communicating with people has exploded. It is certainly valid to re-examine what constitutes proper public notice.

However, this legislation is not based on such a re-examination—on a study of what is the most effective way of displaying information in places where the public is likely to come into notice.

Frankly, I think it would open a dangerous door if public notice provisions are not maintained. The public has a right to due process that goes beyond any particular piece of legislation. In the future, legislation that does not provide for proper public notice could be challenged in court.

As it is written now, this bill does not provide proper public notice.

The numbers I have given you about newspaper readership show that newspapers remain a very valid method of providing proper public notice.

Given that we know this, I am recommending that Bill 19 be amended to ensure newspaper-notice requirements are preserved.

Section 25 of the bill should be changed to maintain the current requirement to place public notices in newspapers and to add a requirement to also post them on a municipality's or planning department's website.

Having taken this step, I recommend that the Province of Manitoba undertake a study on how to maintain public notice principles in a world where

the number of forms of public communication has exploded and the audiences for any single form of communication have shattered.

Now I have sat through this committee's hearings on Bill 19 to date, and I have heard the questions asked by members and I would like to conclude by addressing some of them.

No. 1: Should Bill 19 simply be scrapped and then start over? No, it should not. The Bill has merit and some flaws. The good work of this Committee can fix those flaws and if that happens all of you good Members can take satisfaction in a job well done.

No. 2: What is the matter with simply passing Sec. 25 as is and not proclaiming it, so newspaper notices are preserved for the time being? Let me tell you a story. In my basement I have a stainless steel kitchen sink in its original box. My wife insisted on buying it 20 years ago because it was on sale. We have never lived in a house where we could install it. We wasted money buying it, and we have lugged it around from city to city, from house to house, just so it can take up space. We would have been better off not to buy it, and the people of Manitoba would be better off if Sec. 25 is not passed as is.

No. 3: Won't municipal councils and planning districts want to tell the public about changes? There is nothing in Bill 19 that stops them from advertising in newspapers. Don't you trust them to inform the public? To answer this, I return to my earlier point about what public notices do. They put power in the hands of the people. They take it away from politicians. There is no discretion, no possibility of improper action. They are designed so that people don't have to be satisfied by a politician saying: "Just trust me." What does discretion look like? Well, it is a council advertising one development and deciding another only needs to be posted on its website. It is a door that opens to potential abuse. In the interests of democracy we should keep that door shut.

That concludes my remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Lindsey: One of the things that we heard when some other people were here presenting was that, well, the newspapers have a vested interest in the notices contingent to be published because it's a lot of money going into their coffers from the government coffers.

Would you care to comment on that?

Mr. Cox: The amount of money related to public notices is extremely small compared with overall revenues, certainly of the Winnipeg Free Press. I did a calculation the other day that it's about one-fifth of 1 per cent of the revenues of the Winnipeg Free Press, so it's very small.

I might note that this government, because it is very cost-cutting conscious, has made a decision to reduce its communications budget and I have to say that the reduction in communications budget overall has had a much larger impact than this legislation would have.

Mr. Lindsey: I thank you for that perspective.

In your opinion, is it better to just have the offending sections remove the legislation amended so that that notice provision is no longer there, as opposed to the government just not proclaiming it?

Mr. Cox: Yes, that is correct. I take the position that the Manitoba Community Newspapers Association espoused last week, which is that the section certainly can allow for government websites to post matters for 27 days. That's great. The more ways you post something or make things known, the better, but I would say that it would be better to save the newspaper provisions and not simply have something pass but not proclaimed.

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Mr. Wharton, you have about—

Mr. Wharton: Okay. Mr. Cox, do you feel that municipal governments would, if they had the choice or fair say, that they would make the right decision on how they feel best to communicate with their constituents?

Mr. Cox: I think in almost every case they would make a very good decision because I certainly trust local councils. My brother was a local reeve for a long time. However, I don't want to have to trust them. I don't want to have to—I don't want to put that power—I want—that power should be taken from their hands and stay with the people, where it belongs.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank you for your presentation, Mr. Cox. Time for questions has expired.

We will now call on Michelle Nyquist. Michelle Nyquist? Michelle Nyquist will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Will Reimer, private citizen. Do you have any written material for the committee, Mr. Reimer?

Mr. Will Reimer (Private Citizen): I do not, just an oral presentation.

Mr. Chairperson: Then you may proceed with your presentation when you are ready, Mr. Reimer.

Mr. Reimer: Thank you.

Okay. Well, greetings, ladies and gentlemen, honourable ministers. Thanks for letting me have your time and being able to speak to you this evening. I really do appreciate it.

So I'm here to speak up and add my voice to those protesting certain provisions within Bill 19, The Planning Amendment Act, specifically section 25 concerning the publishing of information within community newspapers.

First, though, I'm just going to introduce myself and explain a little bit about why I'm here, because I'm sure probably none of you know me.

My name's Will Reimer, and in less than a year I'll be graduating from Red River College as part of the journalism program I've been majoring in for the last two years.

As you can probably guess, I didn't choose this line of work because of the money. There were three other reasons that I got into this career path and, coincidentally, they're the same reasons that I'm here today. First of all, I wanted my life's work to benefit other people as with everybody else here. Basically, I want my actions to be of use to as many people as possible.

* (18:20)

Next, I love this country and I love the province of Manitoba. I truly believe this is one of the best places in the world to live. And central to our success and the quality of life we enjoy is an open and democratic government.

I firmly believe, as I'm sure that everybody else does here, that transparency and access to information and freedom of the press and speech are central to the cornerstones of our democracy, and, thus, any attempts to limit or restrict these fundamental principles must be vehemently opposed.

And, lastly, on a slightly more personal note, I just enjoy this sort of thing. I like to write and I like to do research. I like to be involved in the process. And I'm a bit of a news junkie.

So those three things have led me to be in front of you today.

Now, with all that said, I must admit that as much as I like to be involved, it is a bit demoralizing to have to come here at the onset of my professional career to oppose what I and many other people view as a limit on basic government transparency. However, I'm also not naive enough to not understand the disconnect between the governors and the governed, and occasionally the few must be reminded of the needs of the many.

As it relates to section 25, I play pretty close attention to the news, and I don't know of a single person who is asking for this change to be made, much less anyone who's going to benefit in a reduction in the way vital information is distributed. The fact is, whether intentionally or not, the way the stipulation was added to the amendment—obscure, without proper amount of public discourse considering the impact it will have—it comes off as just a little bit sneaky, concerning and warranting of a certain amount of public outrage.

I would also like to be clear that if the reason for this amendment stems from a financial perspective, that as a taxpayer, I have no problem with my money going to this very fundamental service. However, my assumption is that's not why this change is being proposed.

I would also like to point out that I am one of the people in this province who still do not have access to home Internet. I—just coming out of being a student, I could never justify paying for that at the same time as doing everything else at the same time. I do, of course, have a cellphone that has access to the Internet. So if I wanted to, I could access this sort of information. But there are still many people in this province who do not have Internet access. So I wonder how our government expects them to be aware of, much less respond to, developments going on around them.

Furthermore, even if one hundred per cent of the populace had access to the Internet and knew where to find the information—because I hope at least that would be put forward to the constituents, if this were to be enacted—that wouldn't change the fact that making this information available to the public is not the same as notifying the public. Making information available is really the very baseline of government responsibility. If this were something new, we would see it as progressive. But as it happens, we're here today because section 25 is actually a step backwards, away from the ideal principles of a

transparent government that I and everybody in this room benefit from.

The last point I would like to make today is that changes like this, once passed, are very difficult to repeal, as I understand it. As someone who has studied history, I understand that the privileges of living in a free and democratic society are rarely taken away all at once. Rather, they are chipped away by pieces of legislation such as section 25.

So I'm here today to urge the committee to completely strike section 25 from The Planning Amendment Act, and, as I said a moment ago, it may be easy to pass a bill such as this, but it will be very difficult to get back this service that, really, the government should be provided once it's enacted. If people are to be affected, then they should at least be told and given a reasonable time to respond. And to reiterate my earlier point, making information available is passive, while notifying the public is active. A functioning democracy is not passive. It requires much effort on the part of everyday people such as myself to come out and make our voices heard just as much or more as the people such as yourselves who are here to hear me. So I urge the MPs here to act in accordance with the principles on which they were elected.

I'm here only speaking for myself, but I can honestly say that not one single person that I've talked to about this bill even knew about it. However, every one of them was upset by the implications of section 25. In my humble opinion, this amendment is not only unneeded, it is also unwanted.

Our government campaigned on making itself more open and strengthening access to information laws, so how, then, can an amendment such as this be justified? However, I'm not here really concerned about the government's reputation or legacy or that of the PC Party. I'm here out of concern for the future of the province.

So, in summary, I am imploring that section 25 be stricken entirely from Bill 19. It is regressive, secretive and contrary to the functioning of a democratic government. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Reimer.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you very much for your presentation. Clearly, you've put some thought into it, and I appreciate that.

How many times have you, in your career, or your educational career, I guess, gone to various government websites to look for things that may be happening that you should be aware of?

Mr. Reimer: I mean, the media is the first step for this sort of thing, so when I see things through the news media, that usually urges me to go on and look for it.

I do frequent government websites every now and again just because I like to be informed and I like to know about things such as this is happening. If you're asking about a specific time frame, I'm not really sure. Every—it's occasional, really.

Mr. Lindsey: I'll defer to Mr. Allum.

Mr. Chairperson: Oh, so you'll defer to Mr. Allum.

Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview): Well, I also want to (a) congratulate you on your academic career and your career in journalism and also to thank you so much for coming out tonight.

If I was an enterprising journalistic student, I wouldn't just be focusing on section 25. There are other elements of this bill that we have trouble with. One is that is the right to appeal in section 118.2 that allows, you know, a local council to make a decision about a livestock or quarry operation but the only ones who can appeal that particular decision of council is the applicant, either the quarry operator or the livestock operation.

What would your observations be on a system that doesn't allow the public to appeal as the same way as the applicant or the developer in this case?

Mr. Reimer: Well, I think it's up to each and every one of us to take sort of a piece. I mean, it's not really just—I mean, if it just has to do with a single organization or a single group, that's one thing, but I think everybody should be consulted if we're being affected, right.

I'll be honest—I didn't read that exact section that you're describing, so I can only give you my perceptions as it stands now.

Mr. Allum: I thank for that. I guess I'm encouraging you, as an enterprising journalistic student, to look at other features of the bill because it's a part of the approach of this government is to throw a bunch of things in there, maybe one or two will be okay and the other three or four, and we were told, wouldn't be so good. And we were told the other night, well, the enemy of—how did that go—the enemy of the—

something—some crazy saying about—*[interjection]*—oh, perfection is the enemy of the good.

But we, as an opposition, are constantly faced with legislation that throws two or three what we would call poison pills into an otherwise okay bill. And this one—I just mention another one besides section 25, so I would encourage you, as an enterprising journalist that—to look at other features of the bill, and if you have the opportunity to analyze it and write about it.

Mr. Reimer: Yes. Thank you for that. I think that's great advice. However, I'm only one person. I only have so much time and, I mean, there's only so much time given to these sorts of things as well, but thank you, thank you for that very much.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank you for your presentation, Mr. Reimer.

We will now call on the next presenter, Gary Struth. Is Gary Struth here? Seeing as Mr. Struth is not here, he will be moved to the bottom of the list.

The next presenter, Connie Kay from the South Mountain Press. Is Connie Kay present? Connie Kay is not present. She will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Would Laurie Finley from the Steinbach Carillon be present?

Mr. Finley, do you have written presentation for the committee?

Mr. Laurie Finley (Steinbach Carillon): I do.

Mr. Chairperson: We will have staff circulate it, and once it has been circulated to the committee, you will be able to make your presentation.

* (18:30)

You may proceed with your presentation, Mr. Finley.

Mr. Finley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Minister Wharton, MLAs. As mentioned, I'm Laurie Finley, publisher of the Steinbach Carillon newspaper. Our newspaper supports the readers of not only Steinbach but a large part of southeastern Manitoba, covering an area from the Trans-Canada Highway south to the US border.

Our newspaper serves a population in Steinbach and the surrounding area of approximately 60,000 people. With editorial community correspondence from over 30 southeastern

communities, we are the only source of local news and information in the region to that level. Our newspaper is distributed through the rural municipalities of Hanover, De Salaberry, La Broquerie, Ste. Anne, Stuartburn, Taché, Piney, Reynolds as well as in the city of Steinbach itself. Today I'm here to talk about Bill 19 and the potential impact this may have on the readers and constituents our newspaper reaches.

The publication of print—the publication in print of public notices is an important and needed form of communication that needs to be continued. We are concerned that the changes in this bill and not making it mandatory to publish these notices challenge democracy and the right for the public to have prior notice of changes potentially affecting them.

The posting of this information on the municipality's websites is something we agree with and is important to do in an ever-expanding digital age, but that alone does not constitute public notice, in our opinion. Access to Internet service and cell mobility service is not just an issue in the North, as has been mentioned before, but also through a wide range of the southeastern market we serve.

On the first day of these hearings, Chris Goertzen, the president of AMM and the mayor of Steinbach, said he supports the continued publication of public notices, which I applaud. But the concern is that Chris Goertzen and similar-thinking people might not always be in place, and, if it is left optional, we are concerned that it may not always be the case that these notices are published in print. As a matter of coincidence to that node, Chris Goertzen announced this morning that he is not seeking re-election.

I don't believe that people are in the habit, or will be, of going to a website every day and searching to see if there is something that may affect them. That is just not something that most people will, or do, at this point. As well, newspapers provide a permanent archive record of the publication of these notices, eliminating potential challenges to the question of whether there was a notice given, as websites do not provide the same public record as a newspaper does.

We believe this bill needs to be amended to reflect the requirement for mandatory publication of public notices in newspapers has been the practice for decades. If and when, at an appropriate time comes around, that this method of communication no longer has the mass reach that it continues to have

now, then the appropriate changes could be tabled at that juncture. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation.

Oh, sorry, I didn't have my microphone. Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Finley.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you very much for your presentation. At any point in time before the government introduced this bill, did they consult with you, ask you what your thoughts on it might be, or are you aware of any of those conversations that took place?

Mr. Finley: There was no communication with myself directly, and, as a board member, as well, of the Manitoba Community Newspapers Association, I know there was no prior communication with that organization as well.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you for that. So, since you became aware of any of these provisions in this particular bill or the other bill, have you spoken with your MLA and got your thoughts across to that individual?

Mr. Finley: Yes, I have given my thoughts to our MLA, and, subsequently, I have been in a position to meet with a number of MLAs and Minister Wharton, as well, in regards to our feelings on this issue.

Mr. Lindsey: Have you had any success in convincing any of those MLAs that you've spoken to that this portion of this bill in particular should be just withdrawn as opposed to just not proclaimed?

Mr. Finley: We've been very politely listened to.

Mr. Lindsey: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Finley.

We will now move on to our next presenter, Rick Thomson. Is Rick Thomson in the room? Rick Thomson is not in the room. He will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Rick Reimer? Is Rick Reimer present? Rick Reimer is not present. He will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Is Tanis Hutchinson—Tanis Hutchinson is not present. She will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Shawn Bailey—is Shawn Bailey present? Shawn Bailey is not present—be moved to the bottom of the list.

Is Lana Meier present? Lana Meier is not present. She will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Is Jo-Anne Procter present? Jo-Anne Procter is not present. She will be moved to the bottom of the list.

Is Stephanie Duncan present? Stephanie Duncan is not present. She will be moved to the bottom of the list.

This ends the list of presenters we have before me. I'm just wondering, what is the will of the committee? Do they wish to take a brief recess in case somebody should show up shortly, or should—like, it's up to the committee what they would like to do.

An Honourable Member: We're good.

An Honourable Member: Why don't you call them?

Some Honourable Members: Call them again.

An Honourable Member: Yes.

An Honourable Member: Just call them again.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, Jennifer Bilsky. Is Jennifer Bilsky present? Jennifer Bilsky is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Is Shannon 'Stamper' present? Shannon 'Stamper' is not present. She will be moved from—or he—not sure if Shannon is—

An Honourable Member: She's a woman

Mr. Chairperson: —will be removed from the list.

Brenda 'Kerwako'. Brenda's not present. She will be removed from the list.

Danielle Broome. Danielle Broome is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Darci Semeschuk. Darci Semeschuk is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Michelle Nyquist. Michelle Nyquist is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Gary Struth. Gary Struth is not present. He will be removed from the list.

Is Connie Kay present? Connie Kay is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Is Rick Thomson present? Rick Thomson is not present. He will be removed from the list.

Is Rick Reimer present? Rick Reimer is not present. He will be removed from the list.

Is Tanis Hutchinson present? Tanis Hutchinson is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Is Shawn Bailey present? Shawn Bailey is not present—be removed from the list.

Is Lana Meier present? Lana Meier is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Is Jo-Anne Procter present? Jo-Anne Procter is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Is Stephanie Duncan present? Stephanie Duncan is not present. She will be removed from the list.

Mr. Allum: Just before we wrap up for the evening, I think all of us around the table understand why maybe the vast majority of folks haven't come tonight, and I'm wondering if the minister, along with his House leader, would be interested in trying to extend this—these hearings so that people do have an opportunity to come and have their say on this bill. So I'm really—it's no more than just an observation on my part and on our part, I think, but that I think we all understand why folks aren't here and, you know, we don't want to undermine the public hearing process, which is very important to Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: As the Chair, I can recommend that the House leaders take a look at this. I know that tomorrow night whoever isn't present can come and register so we may be here 'til midnight or so tomorrow night, so I guess basically the House leaders can discuss it and see what would be the best solution, but I guess at this point in time—Mr. Eichler?

Mr. Eichler: Fair enough suggestion. I mean this is a beautiful night out there as well and this could be even more nicer tomorrow and we got summer coming.

* (18:40)

I just want to put on the record that it's very clear that we have the most transparent system in all of Canada, and those presenters that could not make it tonight, they have an opportunity to re-register tomorrow night. They will be after the regular presenters but, in order to ensure that all voices are heard, we have that open, transparent model that we follow here and encourage all those who want to present to show up tomorrow night. And I'm sure we'll hear them, what they have to say, loud and clear.

Mr. Lindsey: Want to clarify that if people have registered ahead of time to speak, were they made aware that if—for unforeseen circumstances they weren't able to be here on the night that they registered—were they made aware that they could show up again to speak?

Mr. Chairperson: The people who have registered to speak were given options of either presenting a written submission or that they could come back in the next night, as well, when we had the—last week, when we had the presentations, there was only 11 that presented out of the 25 that were notified. They all have been notified that those are the terms and conditions.

So it is available to them to come in here tomorrow night and present as long as everybody else who is on the list is able to present first.

And we've also received 21 written submissions from people that were supposed to be presented but decided to send a written submission.

So, basically, I think we have been more than fair with everybody who is a presenter, and it's—I think they still have the option to present here tomorrow night.

So now that—

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Chair, in all due respect—and this is why we have a committee to hear what people have to say. And I just want to put on the record—I want to thank the Clerk's office for the good work that they've done trying to reach out to make sure that all members have been contacted. And they do a lot of work on our behalf, and I just want all committee members to realize the amount of work that goes in to ensure the general public is here.

So, on behalf of the committee, I want to thank all of them for the hard work they do.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, the Honourable Mr. Eichler.

Are there any other questions or comments?

Seeing no other questions or comments, that concludes public presentations for this evening.

Before we rise, I would appreciate if members would leave behind the copies of the bill so they may be collected and reused at tomorrow night's meeting.

The hour being 6:42, committee rise.

COMMITTEE ROSE AT: 6:42 p.m.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

Re: Bill 19

Ref. to announcement from MB Community Assoc. in The Selkirk Record Newspaper of May 3, 2018.

I strongly oppose the Manitoba Government's announcement to end the practise of informing the public through community newspapers to "post such information anywhere on a municipal or planning district website."

I do not have enough income to pay for internet service, or the skill to navigate on the computer, or a cell phone, as well.

The majority of the population in the Selkirk area are seniors, many in the same low income bracket.

I have a land phone and Canada Post to communicate and read newspapers, magazines and books—not online.

I do not like being forced to communicate by computers or cell phones and have the right to know the intentions of government policies and notices. The above announcement is "a message from the Manitoba Community Newspaper Association MCHA.

From

Gail H. Fisher

Re: Bill 19

To whom it may concern:

Manitoba Beef Producers (MBP) is pleased to provide comments to the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development re: Bill 19--The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning).

MBP is an agriculture association, the primary voice of the Manitoba's beef industry. It represents approximately 6,500 producers involved in various aspects of the beef cattle industry, including the cow calf, backgrounding and finishing sectors. Our mission is to represent all beef producers through communication, advocacy, research, and education—within the industry and to governments, consumers and others, to improve prosperity and ensure a sustainable future.

Cattle production is a major economic driver in our province, creating thousands of direct and indirect

jobs and driving millions of dollars in purchases of goods and services. MBP appreciates this government's commitment to growing the beef herd and the confidence it has in our sector. MBP believes the long-term economics of livestock production are sound. But taking advantage of those economic opportunities depends on having a stable, consistent, and predictable policy and regulatory environment. Nothing puts the brakes on investment faster than inconsistency and uncertainty.

MBP welcomes efforts by this government to reduce administrative burden and to create a modern regulatory environment that encourages rather than discourages investment.

Elements of the existing Planning Act have a significant impact on cattle production in Manitoba. This includes the provisions that require municipalities to have a livestock operation policy setting out where livestock operations can or cannot be developed, as well as specifying the maximum number of animal units that are allowed. The Act also sets out provisions for municipalities around conditional use and what types of conditions may be applied to livestock operations. Finally, the Act contains provisions related to the Technical Review Committee and when applications for certain sized livestock operations must be reviewed.

Earlier this year MBP was able to provide feedback to the provincial government on its proposed efforts to streamline and modernize the existing Planning Act.

This included a revisiting of the province's Livestock Review Process that has been taking on average more than 300 days. The aim was to see the total length of the Livestock Review Process reduced by 100 plus days. MBP is pleased to see that improvements are being made in this area. Delays in getting conditional use permits have been a concern for the beef industry. If you're trying to develop a business plan and looking at where to situate a new operation such as a feedlot, or how to expand a current feedlot, cow-calf or backgrounding operation you need a timely review process. Delays in approvals processes can be problematic for beef producers.

MBP encourages continued efforts to streamline the Livestock Review Process. The beef sector often grows through the sale and acquisition of existing operations by new or expanding operators. A 200 plus day review process is still not conducive to allowing the timely sale/transfer of real estate

conditional upon the property's intended use being approved. Further, construction seasons are short and if projects can be approved within a shorter timeframe there will be both production and economic benefits derived by the producer.

Speaking specifically to Bill 19, one proposed change would see an increase in the minimum variance of a zoning by-law that can be approved by a designated municipal employee. It would change from 10 per cent to 15 per cent and MBP believes this could be beneficial for agriculture, particularly operations seeking to update their barns. Affected operations would be exempt from requiring a new local approval or new Technical Review report provided the operation had previously been technically reviewed by the province. MBP supports this approach.

Another key change being proposed in Bill 19 will allow municipalities to set their own animal unit threshold for a local conditional use approval and hearing. Municipalities will be required to review their conditional use thresholds within one year of the legislation being enacted. While MBP sees merit in this approach, it also cautions that this has the potential to create confusion on the landscape, this at a time when one of the government's stated objectives is to create a more predictable investment environment.

Having the 300 animal unit threshold as currently set out in The Planning Act could be deemed overly prescriptive. However, it has made it very clear when the conditional use process is triggered in all Manitoba municipalities. The new approach will likely result in a wide variation in thresholds. A potential new entrant to the industry looking to establish a beef operation may have to invest considerable time investigating where a given municipality sits with respect to the conditional use threshold. As well, given the four-year municipal election cycle and potential changeovers in the composition of councils, thresholds could change on a regular basis, potentially adding to producer uncertainty.

Bill 19 includes a new appeal provision around municipal council decisions about conditional use applications. Under this Bill, an applicant for a large-scale livestock operation may now appeal to the Municipal Board if their application is rejected, or if conditions are placed on the approval. MBP supports the use of an appeal mechanism to ensure that producers seeking to expand their operations and

who meet all the provincial environmental requirements are allowed to do so. MBP cautions however that the appeal process must be timely and not become unduly burdensome.

MBP supports replacing the use of "qualified land use planner" with "registered professional planner" as per the Registered Professional Planners Act. Having continuity of terminology between different pieces of legislation is important.

MBP encourages the continued publication of the notice of hearing in newspapers and other public places. MBP cautions that there remains a cohort of people in rural communities who are not necessarily using the Internet to search for such notices (or who have poor Internet access) and who therefore would not readily see notices posted only to a website. MBP recognizes that cost savings could be achieved by going to a website only approach but at this time MBP still supports the continued use of notifications in newspapers, as well as electronic options.

MBP recommends that once a revised Planning Act receives Royal Assent that updates be made to the documents entitled "Planning Resource Guide: Planning for Agriculture" and "Land Use Planning for Livestock Development". It is important for producers to have access to an easy-to-use guidance document that clearly lays out the steps needed to see a proposal for a new or expanding livestock operation through to completion. This could include a flow chart outlining the steps involved for producers, municipalities and/or planning districts, as well as a checklist of information producers will be required to provide if a conditional use is triggered. MBP believes this type of document would be useful to people thinking about establishing livestock operations in Manitoba.

Further, MBP suggests there could be value in the creation of a "one-stop" online resource where municipalities and/or planning districts could be encouraged to provide short details about their livestock operations policies. This could include the animal unit thresholds, setback distances and other types of information beneficial to producers as they think about establishing or expanding livestock operations. It could be housed on the appropriate provincial department websites.

MBP also encourages the province to work with local governments to ensure they have access to technical expertise and resources to help inform them about new agricultural technology and practices.

This could be beneficial as they assess proposals related to livestock operations.

In closing, MBP notes that the opportunity for farm and ranch expansion plays a critical role in getting the next generation of cattle producers into the business. For many young people, starting up a new farm operation is not an immediately viable option, so having the ability to expand an existing family operation is very important.

MBP believes that having cattle producers on the landscape provides many benefits to our province and our communities: economic, environmental and social. MBP strongly encourages Manitoba's local governments to consider the merits of having livestock production in their municipalities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on Bill 19.

Respectfully submitted,

Ben E. Fox
President
Manitoba Beef Producers

Re: Bill 19

Dear Manitoba Government:

Public notices absolutely need to be published in community newspapers!

There is a fundamental difference between a passive portal of information and an active announcement. Notices and an active attempt to spread information about upcoming government dealings is not achieved through simply making information available on a website such as the Gazette—it does no outreach, alerts no one, is not spread or published anywhere. Notification requires notices, outreach—not a passive website that awaits human investigation.

I am greatly concerned about the provincial government's proposed legislation to remove the requirement of municipalities and provincial government bodies to publish mandatory public notices in Manitoba's community newspapers.

Bills 8 (The Government Notices Modernization Act) and 19 (The Planning Amendment Act) should be revised to remove the sections that would relieve public bodies of their responsibility to place public notices in community newspapers.

These notices are currently required to be published in community newspapers to spread information about government dealings that affect the average Manitoban. These notices are an effective way to inform the public about important things going on in our own backyards—public hearings, or the use of chemicals, locally, for instance.

If Bills 8 and 19 are passed, then, the onus to become aware of government activity and information falls back on the average Manitoban, who, if they want to know what's going on, will have to actively search out this information, rather than finding it in the community newspapers that come across their coffee tables reliably each and every week.

Posting government notices in the Gazette is not outreach, is not providing notice, and is passive. The Bills should not allow the provincial government and public bodies to have fulfilled its responsibility to inform the public by simply posting government notices in the Gazette.

Even if information is spread through social media, complicated algorithms mean that only some audiences will see that information—others won't.

And then there's the issue of Manitoba residents with poor or non-existent internet service—they won't have the opportunity to see this information at all.

Making information accessible does not mean that it will be accessed, and passing these bills will create a barrier to government transparency and accountability, something that is simply unacceptable.

I urge the government to change the wording of the bills so that public notices are still required to be published in the province's community newspapers. I would even strengthen the legislation to suggest that notices be required in multiple community newspapers, online and in print.

While I understand that the current government has officially stated the sections of Bills 8 and 19 dealing with mandatory public notices in newspapers will not be proclaimed at this time, this remains a very concerning issue for me, as it should be for all Manitobans. The sections left unproclaimed can be enacted by government at anytime with the swipe of a pen and without notice or further public consultation.

I urge the committee to revise Bills 8 and 19 and not simply leave bad legislation—or bits of it—unproclaimed. This is a terrible idea, and it is terrible legislation.

Thank you,

J Brodt

Re: Bill 19

To the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development,

My name is Danielle Da Silva and I'm a journalist with Canstar Community News and The Sou'wester community paper, serving southwest Winnipeg.

I am registering my opposition to Bill 19, The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning), and am calling on the government to amend the proposed changes to Section 25 to maintain the current requirement to publish mandatory public notice in newspapers and also add the requirement to post the information on a municipality's or planning district's public website, should one exist.

In a community as diverse as Manitoba, governments should be providing information to residents through varied mediums—online, social media, radio, television, community postings, and print media.

People can not reasonably be expected to seek out information that they do not know exists, about important changes in their communities, on obscure websites. The requirement to post notice in community newspapers ensures those without internet access, family commitments, and simply not enough time to browse government websites at their leisure will be brought up to speed on what's going on in their neighbourhood. Thousands of Manitobans already pick up community papers regularly to find out what is happening in their area, see their neighbours in print, and read reports from city hall and elsewhere.

The saying "the medium is the message" holds true in this case. Maintaining public notice in community newspapers demonstrates to citizens that governments respect their time, value ease of access, and are being proactive in disclosing information. Lowering the standard for public notice by requiring it only on a municipality's or planning district's public website reinforces the disconnect between citizens and government.

Public notice in community newspapers, in conjunction with digital media, however, is democratic. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,

Danielle Da Silva

Re: Bill 19

I run the weekly newspaper in my little town. The weekly is solidly entrenched in the lives of families in my small corner of the world, just as it has been since 1899.

The internet is changing many facets of our lives in Manitoba and around the world. The ease and economy of using this tool is hard to dispute in many cases.

For the most part, rural Manitobans are not flocking to the internet for their news. Even if they wanted to, economical internet access is spotty, with many farms outside the area served by MTS. Other forms of access are too expensive in some cases. The cellphone service is almost non-existent in the village of Cartwright, and spotty through a great chunk of our readership area, so that option is not reliable for data services either.

Most people who have heard about the changes to Bill 19, the plan to "enhance communication" do not realize that this encompasses some of the most basic issues that arise in our rural areas. The municipal and planning newspaper notices are so important to let people know that any change is being considered. When it arrives in the paper that they are reading, it is seen, even when they had no notion of looking for the information.

Allowing this type of information to be solely posted online will not mean better communication - for most, it will mean no clue about what is going on. Those who are internet-savvy are not going to be most concerned with a basic government website where they have to search for information that they don't even know is there. In farm communities, they are busy looking up marketing information, or weather, or, let's face it, watching cat videos.

It certainly could and does happen that, learning of an issue by seeing a municipal or provincial notice, residents will then look for more information online. But if there is no knowledge that there is something to look for, a complete break-down of the necessary element of informing the public will occur.

The publication of ads in papers is a proven, and provable method of providing notice. A paper-trail of proof that knowledge of the issue in question was made available in a public way. With all the information on the internet, it is likely that, even if the information is available, there is no proof that it appeared when and where it should have, and no proof that anyone saw it.

It is extremely disappointing to have the provincial government cut down on newspaper ads as well. After decades of serving the public in so many ways, and already having the federal government "disappear" great swaths of ad income, it feels like a betrayal to have the province move toward taking away this portion of income for newspapers. While the complaints about spending too much money on advertising are easy fodder, when people think about where the money goes, and how the local papers support their local economies and projects, they think again. The public notices are providing a public service which fits well with newspapers.

While we like to think that our municipal councils would do the right thing and continue newspaper notices; not all councils are created equal. At times the desire to slip something controversial by, might win over the rights of the public to be made aware of issues. My newspaper, and most others, print council meeting notes free of charge—just another community service, like so many others. A lack of advertising to support the newspaper could jeopardize the ability to report, and even the ability of the newspaper to continue in business.

In our rural towns, people are excited to get the paper—they for sure pick up their mail the day the paper comes out. People read it, and talk about it, so if someone has missed anything important or controversial, the chances of their neighbour mentioning it are great. That kind of communication does not need enhancement, and is worth much more than the amount paid for an advertisement.

For our sake, and your sake, and for all those who count on local newspapers to keep tabs on their neighbourhood, please amend Clause 25 of Bill 19 to maintain the current requirement for mandatory public notices to be published in newspapers.

Thank you,

Vicki Wallace
Editor, Southern Manitoba Review

Re: Bill 19

To the Standing Committee on Social and Economic Development:

My name is Simon Fuller, and I'm the reporter for The Lance, which covers the geographic area of southeast Winnipeg. The paper is one Canstar Community News' publications.

I would like to formally register my opposition Bill 19—The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning). I had been scheduled to speak at a committee meeting on May 14, but I am now unfortunately unable to attend the meeting.

I do not believe the proposed changes are beneficial to Manitobans. Public access to information is not sufficient public notice. I believe this legislation sends a message that our government no longer values community newspapers as a means of serving public notice, yet newspapers are often their first options when they want to reach Manitobans with their regular columns, or when they have an important message to share.

As a reporter, I hear regularly from readers about how they didn't know about an event, or a decision by community committee, or whatever, was taking place until they saw it in the pages of The Lance, or another one of the Canstar newspapers, despite much of this information being available somewhere online. Our residents look to their newspapers for information about their communities; as they have been doing so for more than 80 years in The Lance's case.

Taking public notices out of the newspaper won't save the government a significant amount of money, but I believe it will deprive hardworking but otherwise engaged citizens of vital information about their communities.

I would suggest the government amends Clause 25 of Bill 19 to maintain the current requirement to publish mandatory public notices in newspapers and add requirements to post the information on a municipality's or planning district's public website, should one exist.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Simon Fuller

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/hansard.html>