



REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: ADM-BRD-442

From: Joanne Caldecott, Deputy Corporate Officer

Date: October 26, 2023

Subject: Public Notice in Local Newspapers

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Regional Board receive Report ADM-BRD-442 titled 'Public Notice in Local Newspapers', for information.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

On October 16, 2023, staff learned that due to the ongoing growth in digital media and the loss of advertising revenues, the Alaska Highways News and Dawson Creek Mirror will no longer publish weekly newspapers after the final edition date of October 19, 2023. Given that these local publications have for many years provided a reliable means for the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) to provide legislatively required public notices and other advertisements to residents throughout the Regional District, the need to find an alternative means for public notice is required as soon as possible.

Currently, the PRRD default for public notice requirements follows the *Community Charter* Section 94.1 which states that public notices must be published:

- a) In a newspaper that is distributed at least weekly:
 - (i) In the area affected by the subject matter of the notice, and
 - (ii) If the area affected is not in the municipality, also in the municipality, and
- b) Unless this or another Act provides otherwise, once each week for 2 consecutive weeks.

As of February 2022, *Community Charter* Section 94.2 also allows local governments to provide **alternative** means of public notice other than publishing in a newspaper, provided the following conditions are met:

- A local government adopts a public notice bylaw specifying at least two (2) other means of publication; and
- Before adopting such a bylaw, the local government has considered the principles prescribed in [Public Notice Regulation 52/2022](#).

Alternative means include the internet or other electronic means, and the principles for effective notice within the Regulation state that the means of publication should be reliable, suitable, and accessible with explanations provided for each. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has subsequently created Public Notice Guidance Materials (attached) for local governments to follow.

Additional considerations regarding public notice include the following:

1. The PRRD Board Procedure Bylaw requires that public notice for the Board's annual meeting schedule be posted in local print media and Public Notice Posting Places (i.e., notice boards

located in the lobby of Dawson Creek/Fort St. John PRRD offices). The 2024 meeting schedule is currently being finalized and will need to be posted soon.

2. Public notice is required for various planning and development approvals processes including, but not limited to, development variance permits, temporary use permits and Zoning and Official Community Plan Bylaws and all amendments thereto.
3. Other instances requiring public notice include Board Procedure Bylaws, Parcel Tax Roll Review, Special Board Meetings, and Elections/Assent Voting/Alternative Approvals Process.
4. Advertisements for Public Hearings, Public Consultation and other PRRD activities that engage/inform the public (e.g., scheduled maintenance, surveys, construction updates) will be impacted by the lack of local newspaper advertising opportunities.

Staff have provided this report to the Regional Board to apprise them of the current situation and advise them that options are currently being explored and outcomes will be reported as soon as possible.

It is also pertinent to note that in the past year, Regional Districts in British Columbia have chosen to create Public Notice Bylaws, and in some cases, Regional Districts are already providing a dedicated Public Notice webpage and the easy option to subscribe and receive all public notices published to the Public Notice webpage via email. A few randomly selected examples to preview as examples include:

[Regional District of Fraser-Fort George](#)

[Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen](#)

[Regional District of Nanaimo](#)

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

1. That the Regional Board provide further direction.

STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:

- Not Applicable to Strategic Plan

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):

The annual costs of statutory advertisement and public notice via local newspapers for local governments may be significantly lowered when alternative means such as electronic media are used.

To provide an initial idea of costs, the cost of advertising in two consecutive newspaper editions for temporary use permits or public hearings is \$800.00. The PRRD's total newspaper advertisement costs for 2022 (an election year) were \$125,436 and for 2023 to date are \$48,259 for 2023 at the time of writing this report.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):

Staff recognizes that not everyone has access to computers or the internet for one reason or the other, there is also no denying the changing world of communications with the advances in social media that are clearly impacting print media. Staff are seeking more time to consider the available alternative options and will present more detailed information when this has been gathered.

OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):

Best practices outlined in the Ministry's guideline materials include a public survey, discussion of different options at an open meeting before making a decision, outreach to available newspapers to understand their future plans/schedules, reaching out to member municipalities to discuss the methods used as well as the need for public education if a Public Notice Bylaw is adopted and monitoring of the bylaw to ensure that the principles continue to be met.

Attachments:

1. Ministry of Municipal Affairs Public Notice Guidance Materials
2. *Public Notice Regulation 52/2022*

External Links:

1. [Peace River Regional District Board Procedure Bylaw No. 2490, 2022 \(Consolidated Version\)](#)
2. [Alaska Highway News](#) and [Dawson Creek Mirror](#) Closure Notices