

## SUMA passes 'anti-democratic' resolution

At its annual convention held in Saskatoon last week, delegates to the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) passed a resolution that authorizes SUMA to “lobby the provincial government to review the public notice requirements and expand the methods of communicating with our taxpayers to include consideration for the use of email, municipal websites, social media and other electronic notifications available to a municipality”.

“If the provincial government agrees with SUMA’s resolution (submitted by the Town of Pilot Butte) ratepayers may no longer see ‘legal notices’, zoning notices, tax notices, etc. published in newspapers,” Sask Weekly Newspaper Association executive director Steve Nixon stated. “Such notices would be relegated to electronic distribution methods such as social media and municipal websites. SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) passed a similar resolution at its last convention.”

“This means it will be up to you, the ratepayer, to regularly go and check to see if there is anything new you need to know before it is forever removed from public display,” Nixon noted. “Publishing public notices in newspapers is vital to the democratic process of a community. In most cases, the newspaper is also the only printed record of history for a community. Once printed, it can’t be altered, erased or hidden. Public access does not mean public notice. Making information accessible online does not mean the public has been informed. It is critical to keep public notices in the public record through newspapers. If not, then we open the door for the potential for government corruption, misuse of office and less accountability.”

The following are the types of municipal government notices that may no longer be available in print: Street Closures, Land Use/Zoning Bylaw Changes, Preparation of Assessment Rolls, Buying and Selling of Public Lands, Notice to Expropriate Land for Public Use, Public Hearings, Elections/ By Elections/Abandonment of Poll, Bids/Tenders/Request for Proposals, Employment Opportunities, Proclamations, Annexation Intentions, Changes to Fees and Charges, Approval of the Municipal Budget, and Council Remuneration.

“The SWNA will now be looking at contacting Warren Kaeding, Minister of Government Affairs, whose department oversees The Municipalities Act, and will be lobbying to have the Act remain as it is when regarding the public notice requirements of being advertised in a newspaper. As the Washing Post aptly put it at the Superbowl, “Democracy Dies in Darkness”,” Nixon added.

It should be noted that the Provincial Government itself stopped placing public notices in newspapers several years ago.

-editor