

A Register and a Newspaper Page Are Different Jobs

Public paper · Notice Nearby · 2026-09-25

People mix three jobs into one phrase: “publish the notice.”

1. **The statute** says where the legal duty must be met — often a newspaper of general circulation, sometimes a government site, sometimes both.
2. **The newspaper page** (print or the paper’s own site) is one channel that can put the words in front of people who already open that paper.
3. **A searchable register** is a different channel: it helps a stranger find the same words by county, by search, or by a stable public URL.

Those jobs are related. They are not the same. Access research — especially on what happens when notices leave newspapers — helps keep the labels straight.

What the Florida study measured

Florida’s HB 7049, effective January 1, 2023, was the first modern statewide law to let local governments stop using newspapers and post required notices on county-operated websites instead (or in addition). Researchers Kimberlyn Munevar, Anya Nakhmurina, and Delphine Samuels studied what followed. Their January 2026 paper, and their March 2026 ProMarket summary, report the first systematic empirical look at this shift.

They gathered more than **150,000** Florida newspaper notices from 2020–2024 across more than **2,100** local governments. Not every county had a notice website ready on day one. That variation let them compare governments that could switch with governments that could not.

In counties that already had a public-notice website, newspaper notices fell about **37%** after the reform relative to counties without that option. Cities cut newspaper notices about **48%**. The drops were largest in categories that usually invite public pushback: public hearings about **44%**, planning and zoning about **27%**, ordinance proposals about **30%**.

Did citizens simply follow the notices to the county site? The study found **no clear rise** in traffic to those county notice websites. Public meetings in cities with website access showed about **14%** fewer speakers (counted from meeting video transcripts) than cities that kept newspaper publication. Those same cities issued about **28%** more commercial zoning permits.

The authors’ reading is careful: their design does not claim a final causal decree for every state. It does show a pattern. Newspaper dissemination can work as **incidental** information — you see the ad while reading something else. A government website usually requires **intentional** search — you must know it exists and go open it. When officials get discretion to choose the lower-visibility path, the study found they often did, especially for notices that might draw opposition.

That is a finding about **channels and engagement**. It is not a finding that Notice Nearby is a newspaper. It is not a finding that a register replaces Legal Publication.

What news-desert research adds

Separately, Medill’s State of Local News work shows why findability matters even when the statute still names a paper. In 2025: **212** counties with no local news source; **1,525** with one source left; about **50 million** people with limited or no local news. UNC’s earlier desert reports showed the same long arc — hundreds of counties with

zero or one paper, and many “ghost” titles with little left of the old audience.

Pew’s 2024 survey shows most adults no longer prefer print for local news (9% preferred a print paper). Digital and social paths dominate. Medill’s desert survey found residents in empty counties often lean on social groups and personal networks, and many still say news is “easy” to get — even when professional in-county journalism is gone.

Put together: the newspaper page is weaker as a mass incidental door than it was twenty years ago, and a bare government URL is not automatically a better door. The access problem is not “paper good, internet bad.” It is “does anyone who was not already looking still encounter the words — and can someone who *is* looking find them without knowing a secret URL?”

Two jobs, one honesty rule

Job	What it is for	What it is not
Newspaper / statutory outlet	Meet the legal duty where the code still names it	A guarantee that every neighbor read the ad
Searchable register	Help a stranger find the filed text by place and search	A substitute for Legal Publication or a newspaper of record
County / clerk site	Official posting where law allows or requires it	A national register or a private product

Notice Nearby is the middle row. Record of Sale, LLC (Oregon) operates a public-notice register. Public Register Placement is complementary discoverability: public URL, publication number, SHA-256 of the filed text, Placement Certificate. It does not claim to be government. It does not claim to erase a newspaper requirement. It does not give legal advice.

Access After the Newspaper already split statute, register, and hash. This paper adds the research point: **how** people meet the text changes whether they show up. A register optimized for search answers the looking problem. A newspaper page, where it still has readers, can answer the stumbling-upon problem. Policy fights that pretend those are one job will keep talking past the evidence.

Findings synopsis

- **Florida notice study (2026):** After governments could move notices to county websites, newspaper notice volume fell sharply where websites existed; county-site traffic did not clearly rise; meeting participation fell and commercial permits rose in the authors’ comparisons. Incidental discovery on a newspaper path was hard to replace with a site people must seek out.
- **Medill 2025:** News deserts and single-source counties now cover tens of millions of people; the old shared bulletin board is gone in many counties.
- **Pew 2024 / Medill desert survey:** Attention and preferred paths have moved online and into social spaces; desert residents often do not hunt for a replacement journalistic door.

Prefer accurate, fewer claims. We do not invent statistics the studies did not report.

Closing

A searchable register and a newspaper page do different jobs. The statute may still need the second. A stranger trying to find a hearing date may need the first. Notice Nearby sells the first as a complement — never as a costume for the second.

Sources

1. Kimberlyn Munevar, Anya Nakhmurina & Delphine Samuels, ProMarket essay on Florida public-notice reform (Mar. 6, 2026).
<https://www.promarket.org/2026/03/06/when-governments-stop-publishing-notices-in-newspapers-does-anyone-notice/>
2. Study PDF: “Newspaper Notice as a Government Transparency Mechanism: Evidence from Florida” (Jan. 2026).
https://flpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Public_Notices__MNS_.pdf
3. Zach Metzger, *The State of Local News: 2025 Report*, Medill (2025).
<https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/projects/state-of-local-news/2025/report/>
4. Elisa Shearer et al., *Americans’ Changing Relationship With Local News*, Pew (2024).
<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2024/05/07/americans-changing-relationship-with-local-news/>
5. Michael Lev & Eric Rynston-Lobel, Medill desert consumption survey (2026).
<https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/posts/2026/02/10/news-deserts-social-media-local-news-medill-survey/>
6. Penelope Muse Abernathy, *The Expanding News Desert*, UNC Hussman (2018).
<https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/reports/expanding-news-desert/loss-of-local-news/>

Not legal advice. Not a newspaper. Not Legal Publication. Record of Sale, LLC (Oregon).