



# MAYOR REPORT TO COUNCIL

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**DATE:** August 8, 2023

**TO:** COUNCIL

**NAME AND TITLE:** Simon Yu, Mayor

**SUBJECT:** Amending Public Notice Bylaw No. 9329, 2022

**ATTACHMENT(S):** None

## RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council DIRECTS Administration to return for Council's consideration an amendment to the "City of Prince George Public Notice Bylaw No. 9329, 2022" that includes "local newspaper" as a required means of publication for City of Prince George public notices in addition to the existing means of "Public Notice Page" and "Facebook Page."

## PURPOSE:

It is the will of Council to conduct business with the core principles of integrity, accountability, inclusivity, and transparency, as stated in the City of Prince George 2023 - 2026 Strategic Plan.

## BACKGROUND:

On June 13, 2022, Administration presented a Report to Council providing options for alternative means of statutory public notice other than the default requirement of publishing in a local newspaper. City administration indicated that its current practice of publishing public notices in the newspaper was limited in "flexibility and effectiveness."

At the August 15, 2022, meeting, Administration presented Council with a Report recommending that it adopt the "City of Prince George Public Notice Bylaw No. 9329, 2022," which specified the City's website and Facebook page as the official public notice channels rather than the local newspaper. The public notice bylaw also authorized Council and specified positions within Administration to supplement the approved public notices with the local newspaper if there were matters that affected the "community at large or when significant public interest is anticipated".

The Report to Council indicated that the proposed City of Prince George Public Notice Bylaw considered the principles for effective public notice prescribed in the Public Notice Regulation 52/2022. The principles that must be considered before a public notice bylaw is adopted are:

- Reliable – the publication methods are dependable and trustworthy;
- Suitable – the publication methods work for the purpose for which the public notice is intended; and,
- Accessible – the publication methods are easy to access and have broad reach.

The Bylaw was adopted at the August 29, 2022, Council meeting, and on November 1, 2022, the City discontinued its publication of public notices in the local newspaper and began publishing all notices on the City's website and Facebook page.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

Upon careful consideration, conversations with Council colleagues, and overwhelming community feedback, I believe that the existing "City of Prince George Public Notice Bylaw No. 9329, 2022" does not align with the principles outlined in the Community Charter for facilitating effective public notice, as stipulated in the Public Notice Regulation 52/2022. Furthermore, it does not align with Council's core priorities of accountability, inclusivity, integrity, and transparency.

To my understanding, Prince George is one of the only municipalities in British Columbia that opts to disseminate its notices exclusively through its City website and Facebook page, rather than relying on the local newspaper. The purpose of public notices is to foster transparency and accountability by providing the public with information about opportunities to express their views and engage in local government decision-making processes. While digital platforms like Facebook and a city's website can complement traditional communication methods, utilizing the local newspaper for public notices ensures a wider reach that encompasses accessibility, inclusivity, credibility, and adherence to legal mandates.

This approach not only cultivates a more engaged and well-informed community but also guarantees that essential information reaches all residents, regardless of their technological inclinations or constraints. Given Facebook's response to the recently passed Bill C-18, the City of Prince George has an opportunity to show support for local journalism and bolster its alignment with the local newspaper, rather than directing attention to a U.S. social media conglomerate. By selecting the local newspaper as the avenue for its public notices, the City of Prince George demonstrates an investment in transparency and conducts its legal affairs with greater openness toward its local constituents.

Numerous compelling factors underscore the rationale for publishing public notices in local media outlets rather than confining them solely to social media platforms such as Facebook or the city's website. By placing notices in the local newspaper, the City ensures that all residents have equal access to the information. Public notices are crucial for promoting transparency and citizen participation in the decision-making process, and by utilizing local media, the City of Prince George can avoid excluding certain segments of the population. People have diverse communication preferences, with some favoring newspaper notices and others digital platforms. A combination of local media and digital channels caters to a broader range of preferences. It's important to recognize that not everyone in the community uses or has access to digital platforms, and some residents may not be active on social media. Publishing notices in local media guarantees that the information reaches a more diverse audience, including older adults, low-income individuals, and those without internet access.

Social media and city websites can often become crowded with various posts and content, making it easy for important notices to get lost in the noise. Public notices in a local newspaper are more likely to stand out, ensuring the information receives the attention it deserves. Local newspaper outlets are reliable, established, and reputable sources of information. Notices published in newspapers carry a level of credibility that social media posts may lack. Furthermore, physical copies of newspapers can be preserved and easily referenced, allowing people to revisit the information when necessary.

Publishing public notices in the local newspaper demonstrates a commitment to engaging with the community transparently. It indicates that the City of Prince George values open communication and actively seeks to involve residents in decision-making processes.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

It is recommended that Council amends the “City of Prince George Public Notice Bylaw No. 9329, 2022” by adding “local newspaper” as a required means of publishing City of Prince George public notices to the existing “Public Notice Page” and the “Facebook Page” to support Council’s commitment to conducting business with the core principles of integrity, accountability, inclusivity, and transparency.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:**

Simon Yu, Mayor

Meeting Date: 2023/08/16