

DEEP NEWSROOM CUTS HURT COMMUNITIES: REPORT

PUBLIC HEALTH AND NEWSPAPERS GO HAND-IN-HAND, WRITES APRIL LINDGREN

NEWSPAPERS MATTER NOW MORE THAN EVER



APRIL LINDGREN Column

It's about trust. Our relationship with our readers is built on transparency, honesty and integrity. As such, we have launched a trust initiative to tell you who we are and how and why we do what we do. This article is part of that project.

Discussions about local journalism used to be about scoops, breaking news and deadlines. These days the debate is littered with terms like local news poverty, news deserts and ghost newspapers - a term recently coined by U.S. researchers to describe publications so diminished by layoffs they cannot adequately cover their communities.

The numbers are sobering: The Local News Map, a crowd-sourced tool that

tracks changes to local news outlets, documents the loss of 260 local newspapers, online news sites and radio and television outlets in 190 communities between 2008 and Oct. 1 of this year. Community newspapers that publish fewer than five times per week have been hardest hit - 189 have ceased to exist over the past decade. Another 74 news outlets implemented service cuts ranging from shorter television newscasts to reduced newspaper publication schedules.

Overall, local news outlets closed at almost three times the rate that new ones opened.

While the statistics are startling, they don't convey what really happens when a local newsroom is cut to the bone or shut down. The loss of timely, verified, independently produced news has real-life conse-

quences.

A Scientific American report earlier this year, for instance, offered a concrete illustration of why local health news matters. In the article, U.S. epidemiologists worried aloud that the disappearance of so many local newspapers means researchers are losing an important early warning system for the outbreak and spread of infectious diseases.

Closer to home, stories that showcase how news organizations hold power accountable are a staple of journalism awards ceremonies. Recent National Newspaper Award winners in the local reporting category range from an account of the shocking living standards of marginalized people in Kingston to a series of stories in the St. Catharines Standard about the impact of child abuse

by a Roman Catholic priest in the Niagara area.

In addition to monitoring power, local news equips citizens with a shared set of facts and information so they can act collectively and participate in decision making - a city council decision to build a four-lane expressway at the end of your street should never come as a surprise. Yet municipal officials say it is increasingly difficult to get news about city affairs out to residents and warn that rumour, speculation and deliberately misleading information circulated online by vested interests will fill the space formerly occupied by local news.

Local news organizations also keep people safe during emergencies: A Conference Board of Canada review of how Calgary responded to the massive 2013 flood highlighted the essential role of local media in reassuring the public and keeping people informed. One official told the report's authors that media were as important to the city's emergency response "as police, fire and EMS."

Whether they realize it or not, local news helps people understand and navigate the local economy. Stories about house prices and vacancy rates inform buy-versus-rent decisions. Headlines about the local unemployment rate matter if you are thinking of searching for a new job.

Transit reporters' stories on the location of new subway, bus or rapid transit lines can affect house prices, commuting decisions and the location of new businesses. Education coverage keeps parents informed about the latest issues in local schools.

Local news also matters because it can do harm: Reporting gone wrong can stereotype, misrepresent or underrepresent minority groups and the most vulnerable people in a community. It can result in uncritical boosterism for local business and other elites.

And it can act as a bully pulpit for the loudest voices while other perspectives languish.

At its best though, local news builds community by making it possible for peo-

ple to collectively share moments both good and bad. After last year's deadly shooting at a Quebec City mosque, for instance, stories across the country documented vigils held to support local Muslim communities and denounce Islamophobia. If you didn't attend the vigil in your area you could still share in the moment of solidarity by reading about it in the local paper or watching a local television newscast.

In the United States, the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy summed up the importance of local news when it concluded that information is "as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools, and public health." The authors could have added that clean air, safe streets, good schools and public health owe much to local journalism.

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We welcome your questions and value your comments. Email our trust committee at trust@metroland.com.

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Notice of Public Meeting

haltonhills.ca

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Council Seeking Input on Building Permit Rates and Fees

This is to advise that the Town's Council will be considering the proposed **2019 Rates and Fees** at the Council meeting to be held **Monday December 17, 2018, in Council Chambers, 1 Halton Hills Drive, Georgetown**. The purpose of the public meeting is to obtain public comments on a proposed increase to the Town of Halton Hills existing **building permit fees** and is being held pursuant to Section 7 of the Building Code Act, 1992. Following the public meeting, the

Town will pass the bylaw to implement the 2019 building permit fees. A report of the proposed fees may be obtained on the Town's website at haltonhills.ca. In addition, any and all information pertaining to proposed changes to the building permit fees is available to the public upon request by contacting the Building Division directly at 905-873-2601 ext. 2322.

If you wish to register to speak to Council at the December 17 meeting, please contact the Clerk's Division at 905-873-2601 Ext. 2333 by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, December 14, 2018.

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