

ELECTION DAY: THE DEAD, DEAD TREE BALLOT PROPOSAL

And now for something super local on this Election Day.

As you may have heard, the Ann Arbor News closed down during the summer. That has left a bit of a problem under the city charter, which requires the publication of public ordinances in a “newspaper of general circulation.” The only one left is the Washtenaw Legal News—not exactly the best read rag in town. So the city has two ballot proposals which offer alternatives to publication in a dead tree newspaper.

Here’s coverage of the ballot proposal AnnArbor.Com—the much watched online outlet that has replaced the Ann Arbor News.

Ann Arbor voters will be asked Tuesday to approve two ballot proposals that will ease city charter restrictions and allow city staff to publish ordinances and notices on the city’s Web site instead of in a newspaper. With the closing of The Ann Arbor News, city officials are seeking alternative methods of providing the public with important information, said City Clerk Jacqueline Beaudry.

Currently, the city charter requires changes to city code or notices of proposed zoning amendments be published in a “newspaper of general circulation” in Ann Arbor. The Washtenaw Legal News is the only publication that fits that description right now.

Proposal A would allow city staff to publish approved ordinances within 10 days after enactment either in a newspaper of general circulation, by posting to the city’s Web site or by any

other means or method determined appropriate by the City Council. In cases of ordinances longer than 500 words, a summary may be published and copies of the full text would be available at city hall.

Proposal B will allow the city to publish notices of proposed zoning ordinances and amendments in newspapers of general circulation or any other media otherwise permitted by law.

The Michigan Press Association has spent more than \$46,000 on a campaign urging Ann Arbor residents to defeat the two proposals. It claims their passage would impact the public's right to know how local government operates.

As they note, the Michigan Press Association has been spending what—because it seems to have been spent largely in robo-calls—feels like a big chunk of change to defend dead tree opposition to the ballot proposal. Washtenaw County has a very big and very contentious millage to replace school funding stripped by our broke state on the ballot today, which is the big story (“It takes a Millage”). But from all the robo-calls the MPA has been doing—using really hysterical language about secret changes to the city's laws—you'd think it was the Dead Tree Ballot Proposal that had everyone worried.

Anyway, I shared this with you partly to raise the sensitive issues that arise when the dead tree press goes under.

But also to remind you to vote!