

STATE OF WISCONSIN
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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ATTORNEY GENERAL

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Daniel P. Bach
Deputy Attorney General

April 17, 2006

Mr. Greg Peck
Editorial Page Editor
The Janesville Gazette
Post Office Box 5001
Janesville, WI 53547-5001

Dear Mr. Peck:

I am glad that you were able to attend the public records/open meetings seminar at Blackhawk Technical College on March 8. The Department of Justice is pleased to be able to present these seminars around the state in recognition of the fact that a representative government is dependent upon an informed electorate.

You state that the question arose at the seminar whether meeting notices must be posted on a governmental body's web site if the governmental body operates a web site. Section 19.84 of the Wisconsin Statutes sets forth the public notice requirements of the open meetings law. The law provides that the chief presiding officer of a governmental body, or the officer's designee, must give notice of each meeting of the body to:

- (1) the public;
- (2) any members of the news media who have submitted a written request for notice; and
- (3) the official newspaper or, if none exists, to a news medium likely to give notice in the area.

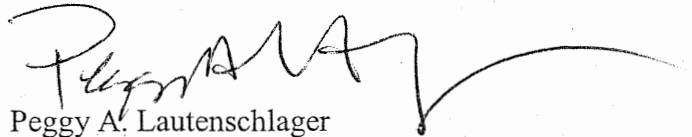
Sec. 19.84(1), Wis. Stats. This office has said that the chief presiding officer may give notice of a meeting to the public by posting the notice in one or more places likely to be seen by the general public. 66 Op. Att'y Gen. 93, 95 (1977). As a general rule, this office has advised posting notices at three different locations within the jurisdiction that the governmental body serves. *Id.* Alternatively, the chief presiding officer may give notice to the public by paid publication in a news medium likely to give notice in the jurisdiction the body serves. 63 Op. Att'y Gen. 509 (1974). The short answer to your question, therefore, is that the law does not require that a governmental body post meeting notices on its web site. That is true because the law itself only requires notice to the public. The law does not require that the notice be posted in any particular place. Posting meeting notices on a governmental body's web site

Mr. Greg Peck
Page 2

would certainly be a service to the public and, to the extent it supplemented other notices, promote the law's goal of informing the public of the public's business.

The law does not require a governmental body to post its notices on its web site, and posting the notices on the web site should not be a substitute for other notices to the public. To the extent such web site postings supplement other public notices, they should be encouraged.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peggy A. Lautenschlager", with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peggy A. Lautenschlager
Attorney General

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