

Proposed resolution for the City of St. John's
Purpose: To support a healthy ecosystem for local journalism

Whereas a healthy, professional news media is essential for the proper functioning of civil society and democracy at the local, regional, federal and international levels;

Whereas the Public Policy Forum declares — on its website for the 2017 report *The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age* (commissioned by the federal government) — that “real news is in crisis” in this country;

Whereas the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) cited eight “critical information needs” the media help to provide including emergencies; other public risks to health; education; the environment; economic opportunities; civic and political knowledge of policy initiatives; and the conduct of public officials, and candidates for office (*The Shattered Mirror* p.4);

Whereas Canadians have lost the essential services provided by roughly 2,000 media workers in 100 communities across Canada due to layoffs in only six weeks from the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns taking effect in March 2020 — a time it became clearer how important it is for Canadians to receive accurate information — and advertising revenues have plunged, prompting an emergency \$30-million advertising-buy by the federal government;

Whereas residents of 190 Canadian communities lost 250 established news outlets due to closings or mergers between 2008 and 2018;

Whereas two thirds of Canadians agree or somewhat agree that because of the Coronavirus/Covid-19 outbreak the federal government should treat widespread media bankruptcies and lay-offs as an emergency, according to a Nanos Research poll of April 2020;

Whereas the federal government allocated nearly \$600 million in aid for Canadian media over five years in its 2019 budget, including a 25-per-cent tax credit for newsroom salaries; a 15-per-cent tax credit for digital media subscribers; and charitable tax status for non-profit news outlets;

Whereas Canada's federal government acknowledged in its 2019 budget (p. 173) that "A strong and independent news media is crucial to a well-functioning democracy.";

Whereas at least 17 municipal councils in Ontario and B.C. have already passed resolutions similar to the one proposed below;

Whereas the news media in St. John's have been instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring local citizens have accurate local information;

Whereas robust local news media can better serve St. John's residents by helping the city pursue the four Strategic Directions and goals outlined in its

2019-2029 Strategic Plan;

Therefore Be It Resolved that the City of St. John's Council recognizes that a healthy, professional news media is essential to the proper functioning of democracy in our city; urges nearby municipal councils and across Canada to recognize that a robust news media is essential to the proper functioning of democracy in their jurisdictions; endorses legislation and regulations to support and rejuvenate news outlets across Canada; and urges the federal government to move quickly to pass legislation to ensure an ecosystem for a healthy news media to serve all Canadians.

And that the resolution be forwarded to the area municipalities; local M.P.s and M.H.A.s; Municipalities Newfoundland & Labrador; and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.