

Government to slash membership numbers on provincially appointed boards

By: Nick Martin

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Infrastructure Minister Blaine Pedersen and Premier Brian Pallister.

Premier Brian Pallister plans to chop membership from, consolidate, and even eliminate 25 provincially appointed boards, councils, committees and commissions.

Bill 10 is a streamlining act, Growth, Enterprise and Trade Minister Blaine Pedersen told the legislature Monday.

The intention is to have more effective delivery services and provide value for money, he said.

More than 170 positions will disappear at a savings of at least \$150,000 a year in per diems and staff time. No one is being fired, said the minister — numbers will drop as terms expire and members are not renewed or replaced.

There are 183 provincial agencies, boards and commissions, the vast majority which need no similar action immediately, he said.

The bodies include the accessibility advisory council, Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the provincial healthy child advisory committee, and the Manitoba arts council, who will all lose members when the bill becomes law.

Gone will be the agri-food and rural development council, caregiver advisory committee, Manitoba council on aging, and heritage tree review committee.

"Our government is committed to repairing the services we provide for Manitobans and this includes establishing more efficient agencies, boards and commissions to oversee provincial programs and services," said Pedersen.

"We believe smaller boards and councils work better together, and are more engaged in both the process and outcomes," said Pedersen. "The ideal board is seven to nine persons. In creating smaller boards, we are following the best practices of the not-for-profit and private sectors."

The various agencies were notified Monday afternoon after he tabled the bill, Pedersen said, noting it will probably be passed in June.

Under Bill 10 cabinet ministers could only appoint new advisory committees for no longer than two years for specific reasons and with a clear mandate.

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*Read more by **Nick Martin**.*

Extra, extra: Manitoba Gazette going digital

The *Manitoba Gazette* is going online after 146 years as a print-only official list of provincial notices made available free of charge each week.

Meanwhile, Sport, Culture and Heritage Minister Cathy Cox tabled Bill 8 Monday that would amend 24 separate statutes so she can eliminate the requirement to publish official notices in local newspapers.

Once the Government Notices Modernization Act passes, it will be mandatory to publish government notices in the online edition of the *Manitoba Gazette*, but ministers will be free to decide if they wish to buy space in newspapers for their notices.

"We want to remove barriers to the way we share information," Cox told the house Monday. "Manitobans are moving more and more toward online sources to receive their news and information. As the preferred method to share information continues to evolve, we wish to modernize our approach with the *Manitoba Gazette* to give Manitobans free access to up-to-date information."

Winnipeg Free Press publisher Bob Cox doubted that many people would see notices if they're required to track down the *Manitoba Gazette* each week, free or otherwise.

"I think it's good that the province is making it easier to get access to government notices; however, access is not enough on its own. I certainly hope that the province recognizes that important notices should be widely distributed and continues to use advertising to do this," he said.

"You are not notifying the public about things if you have to subscribe to the *Manitoba Gazette*, free or not, because not many people are going to do that. You still have to use traditional media, which reaches larger audiences than ever across the province, to advise them of changes that could have an impact on their lives."

It was not clear Monday how much money the provincial government hopes to save. KPMG's value-for-money audit told the Conservatives they can save significantly by cutting the \$28.5 million it spends on communications, including \$5 million to advertise in newspapers.

The *Manitoba Gazette* has been the official government publication since July 1871 and is used to publish government and public notices required by provincial statute or regulation, such as legal and estate notices, public hearings and name changes. Legislation also requires the government to announce certain actions in newspapers, Cox said Monday.

The *Manitoba Gazette* was originally distributed in print format to paid subscribers. In 2014, the province discontinued paper copies and currently emails a weekly edition to subscribers for an annual fee of \$100. The province earns about \$6,000 annually on subscriptions.

HISTORY

Updated on Monday, December 4, 2017 at 8:49 PM CST: updates number of positions cut.