



Evan Butow / The Dickinson Press
Dickinson Mayor Scott Decker surprisingly introduced a motion to end the city's use of Youtube to live-stream commission meetings.

Dickinson Commission ends YouTube livestreams without notice

The 3-1 vote ended a COVID-era accessibility effort, prompting concern over public access and government transparency

BY EVAN BUTOW
The Dickinson Press

DICKINSON
In a quiet but consequential move, the Dickinson City Commission voted Tuesday to end its longstanding practice of livestreaming meetings on YouTube — a decision made without prior public notice or agenda listing. The motion, introduced by Mayor Scott Decker during the “commissioner comments” portion at the end of the meeting, was not previously announced and was passed following minimal discussion. The measure carried with a 3-1 vote. Decker and Commissioners



Dickinson Press file photo
The City of Dickinson is provided Public Access Channel 19 free of charge through a Broadcast franchise agreement with Consolidated Telcom.

Jason Fridrich and Dr. Robert Baer supported the change, while Commissioner Joe Ridl voted against it. With Commissioner John Odermann’s resignation earlier this year, his seat remains vacant, leaving only four commissioners currently serving. The city began livestreaming its biweekly commission meetings in 2020 as a response to COVID-19 restrictions on in-person attendance. Since then, it has become a routine part of city communications. The city’s YouTube channel contains archived meetings dating back more than a decade. Decker said the city is not legally obligated to

provide YouTube livestreams and cited its agreement with Consolidated Telecom, which broadcasts meetings live on local public access Channel 19 at no cost. According to City IT Director Aaron Meyer, the YouTube broadcasts also incurred no cost or additional burden on city staff. In an interview with The Dickinson Press, Decker said the decision was motivated in part by the city’s new public comment policy, which requires in-person registration and limits comments to five minutes. “I felt with our new policy, the five minutes, that you need to be there,” Decker said. “If people

are signing up remotely, because they could call in and then watch it on YouTube live, then we have no way to verify who they are. I would rather have them in front of the city commission and being held accountable to not only us, but the public — the citizens of Dickinson.” Decker emphasized the decision was not meant to stifle dissent. “I did not have any individual in mind,” he said. “I do think some people are using our YouTube feed in whatever way they find necessary to get their message out on how they feel about the city, but I did not have that in mind.”

VOTE on A4

Dickinson ends livestream, dims beacon of transparency

In a quiet move without vote or public input, Dickinson’s leaders cut live access to meetings, distancing local government from its citizens and raising serious concerns over accountability.

BY JAMES B. MILLER, JR.
For The Dickinson Press Editorial Board

Something fundamental broke in Dickinson on Tuesday — not with a bang, not with a vote, but quietly, almost as an afterthought. Without warning, the City of Dickinson ended its practice of live-streaming commission meetings. There was no notice, no public discussion and no explanation. Just a passing “commissioner comment” that quietly flipped the switch and darkened a small but powerful window into how our local government operates. In that moment, our city moved further away from its people. This decision — made by Mayor Scott Decker and Commissioners Jason Fridrich and Robert Baer — represents a step backward. It distances us from transparency, accountability and the citizens our leaders were elected to serve. Let’s call it what it is: a retreat from public visibility. More importantly, it didn’t have to happen. There was no

opportunity for public input, no formal vote and no deliberation. Just the quiet cancellation of a tool that since the COVID-19 pandemic had allowed residents to monitor local government from their homes, workplaces or wherever life took them. The justification offered? Thin at best. Mayor Decker suggested that residents should “show up” to meetings in person. That defense overlooks reality. These meetings occur during regular work hours — a time when many are working, commuting or managing family responsibilities. For working families, attending in person is often not feasible. Even more puzzling, the livestream posed no financial or logistical burden. It was operated with no additional cost or staff strain on the city. Yes, meetings are still recorded and uploaded online. But they are often posted well after the fact. Delayed access is not equivalent to real-time transparency. Watching a meeting two days later — after decisions have already been made — is not the same as engaging live, and not everyone has Consolidated cable. So why shut it down? Some speculate that the motive lies in discomfort with being publicly criticized. Livestreams do more than inform; they bring every viewer into the room, a room some may not otherwise have access to for a plethora of reasons. They ensure public officials are seen and heard in real time. Ending the stream doesn’t resolve discomfort — it simply avoids it. That avoidance is troubling. It’s true the commission wasn’t legally obligated to maintain the livestream. It was never

LIVESTREAM on A4



Dickinson Press file photo
Dickinson City Commission quietly ends livestreams of public meetings, raising concerns over transparency and public access.

Former ND senator transferred to federal medical prison

BY APRIL BAUMGARTEN
The Forum

ROCHESTER, Minn. — A former North Dakota senator who planned to sexually abuse children overseas has been transferred to a federal prison. Jail records show Ray Holmberg, a Republican from Grand



Forks, was taken from the Sherburne County Jail in Elk River, Minnesota, to the Federal Medical Center in Rochester on Wednesday, June 4. Rochester is one of six cities in the U.S. that have a federal medical prison. Holmberg was sentenced in March to 10 years in prison after he pleaded guilty to traveling to Prague multiple times between 2011 and 2016 with plans to

sexually abuse children as part of commercial sex. Holmberg has several health conditions that qualify him for a medical prison, said his attorney, Mark Friese. Holmberg said he suffers from “serious” spinal and pulmonary issues. Friese argued that Holmberg be sentenced to home confinement, noting that treatment in a prison would be more costly. Prosecutors asked

for about three years in prison, which fell within federal sentencing guidelines. Prosecutors said the 81-year-old also targeted and groomed young men, including a University of North Dakota student and a Grand Forks Central High School student. The high school student said he met Holmberg in the mid-1990s when Holmberg was a counselor at Central. Investigators said they

believe the student was an adult when Holmberg paid the student for sexually explicit videos of himself and sex. The student also claimed Holmberg sexually assaulted him in 2012 in a Bismarck hotel. Holmberg did not face criminal charges for allegations connected to the students. Holmberg was a state senator from 1977 to 2022, when he resigned after The Forum

reported he was texting a Grand Forks man who was jailed and later convicted on federal child sex abuse material charges. The report was published more than a year before Holmberg was federally charged. He also worked for Grand Forks Public Schools from 1969 to 2002, first as a middle school teacher and later as a counselor.