

Remarks to the Grand Traverse County Commission

Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Good morning. My name is Harry Dorman, I'm resident of Grand Traverse County, living in East Bay Township. And, for what its worth, you'll find my name on the bronze dedication plaque on the wall of this building's lobby, as a Traverse City, City Commissioner at the time this Governmental Center was built.

That said, I am an Ordained Wiccan Priest and Minister, and I wish to speak to the subject of this morning's agenda item pertaining to Commission Meeting Invocations.

First, I strongly agree with those on the commission, and others who have spoken before me, who advocate not having an Invocation as a standing part of the Commission's agenda. I hold this position for the following reasons:

(One) Having no invocations, is in keeping with our country's constitutional intention to separate Church and State.

(1)

(Two) Removing invocations from the commission's regular agenda eliminates the need for commissioners to spend time in preparation for an invocation, or arranging for others to do so.

(Three) A lack of equal community representation. As a practical matter, it's essentially impossible to provide equal time to representatives of all our many local faiths.....not to mention also allowing those in the secular community who might wish, to invoke the powers of Positive Life Philosophies, rather than religion.

Should this commission ultimately vote to include some version of an invocation, I have two suggestions:

(One) Simply dedicate a single silent moment preceding each regular public meeting, to allow all present, to project silent energy to this elected body, in support of the “gravity” of its work.

(Two) In the event that the Commission's cannot agree to begin each meeting with a single moment of silence, my recommendation would then be that the the Commission Chair (or rotating commissioners) be given the responsibility of opening each regular meeting by reading the “standard invocation statement” (requiring less than a minute).

(2)

Lastly, should the Commission vote to go forward with a standard invocation statement, I would be happy to volunteer to help to draft such, with the statement's goal being that of asking all gathered to support the commission in its work, in such a way so as to equally recognize, honor and respect all in attendance regardless of religious beliefs, or secular positive life philosophies.

And I Thank you for your time.



Bonnie Scheele <bscheele@grandtraverse.org>

Re: Meeting time and invocation policies

1 message

Bonnie Scheele <bscheele@grandtraverse.org>
To: Chris Cramer <ccramer@grandtraverse.org>
Cc: Betsy Coffia <bcoffia@grandtraverse.org>

Tue, Jan 15, 2019 at 1:49 PM

I will print out Mr. Atallo's email and put it in the board packet. This email will be scanned and uploaded to the website as we do other attachments that are distributed during a meeting.

Bonnie Scheele, CMMC
Grand Traverse County Clerk
(231) 922-4760

Vital Records/Election Office
400 Boardman Ave., Ste 101
Traverse City, MI 49684

Circuit/Family Court Records Office
280 Washington St., Ste 206
Traverse City, MI 49684

On Tue, Jan 15, 2019 at 8:42 AM Chris Cramer <ccramer@grandtraverse.org> wrote:
Betsy - I'm forwarding this to Bonnie for her input as she's the County Clerk.
Chris C.

On Mon, Jan 14, 2019 at 7:10 PM Betsy Coffia <bcoffia@grandtraverse.org> wrote:
Chris,

Is there a process for ensuring this request for having constituent comments are entered into the public record? (See his last paragraph).

Thank you,
Betsy

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Robert Atallo** <bobatallo@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Jan 14, 2019 at 2:36 PM
Subject: Meeting time and invocation policies
To: <commissioners@grandtraverse.org>

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your recent change to the Commission's meeting time, as well as the pending proposal to include an invocation in your public meetings.

As you may be aware, setting your meeting time for 8:00 am will greatly curtail your ability to hear from the public, both in the open forum "Public Comments" portion of the agenda, and, more importantly, in public hearings. The purpose of public hearings is only partially for residents to express their opinions. It is also an opportunity for them to introduce new facts that bear on your decisions, and that you might not have been aware of. Failure to gather all the facts related to an action, or even make a good faith effort to do so, could leave the action subject to a substantive (and perhaps procedural) due process challenge. I'm not a lawyer, but I believe that if you took an action based on faulty or incomplete information, and that public participation had been restricted through the use of inconvenient meetings times, I would consult a lawyer about a challenge on due process grounds. Perhaps you can consult with

the County Attorney about this.

Second, there are numerous "land mines" in initiating public prayer in your meetings. The introduction of religious elements into the public sphere has been controversial (due to the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment). There have been a number of significant Supreme Court decisions concerning the use of prayer in public meetings, the latest of which is *Town of Greece v Galloway* (134 S.Ct 1811). In their 5-4 opinion, the Court held that such public prayer was legal and not unconstitutional, but attached a number of conditions to that finding. Though these conditions are not insurmountable, they are difficult to comply with.

The first is that the choice of clergy or lay ministers to offer the prayer must be fairly representative of the religious affiliations in the jurisdiction. The most common affiliation in Grand Traverse County is "None." (City-Data.com, 2010), at 60.6% 'That would suggest that you begin your meetings with religious prayer only 40% of the time. For the 40% with religious affiliations, you must make a good faith effort to recruit clergy in rough proportion to the religious distribution of the population. This includes Christian, non-Christian, and non-denominational faiths. Though there are no enumerated Satanists or Wiccans in Grand Traverse County, many jurisdictions have been challenged by these groups for "equal time," and these groups often win. In sum, public prayer is a tricky legal minefield, and to allow it would be opening the County up to expensive litigation, which seems pointless since almost 61% of the residents of the County are not affiliated with any religion.

Though the phrase "separation of church and state" appears nowhere in the US Constitution, and publicly sponsored prayer is not unconstitutional, the Courts have placed conditions and limits on it. You should do extensive legal research on this issue, and be ready for challenges, before you take an action on this issue that could prove very expensive for the taxpayer.

I respectfully request that this document be entered into the public record of the Commission's proceedings.

Robert Atallo
Garfield Charter Township
231-421-8262

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Christine J. Cramer, Administrative Assistant
Grand Traverse County Administration and
Board of Commissioner's Office
400 Boardman Avenue
Traverse City, MI 49684
231-922-4797

*True to minute -
Taker*

Answer Monroe St

I am Bonnie Spanier. I am a tax-payer in Traverse City. [Jan.16, 2019 GTCC]

[SMILE] Why such a fuss over an appointment to a library board that gets no pay?

Susan Odgers went through the full vetting process, competing against 6 other candidates. The County's ad hoc committee chose her as the best candidate after due deliberation and presented that conclusion to the December Commission.

At the December meeting, the County Commission's legal counsel said there was **no rule against Mr. Mair voting for his wife, and he did--legally.**

His vote for Susan Odgers simply agreed with the ad hoc library committee's choice.

Mair was also told that, if he voted, that ended the matter.

The notes for today's meeting also show legal counsel affirming that there is no rule barring Mair from casting his vote. Therefore, there is no basis for legal challenges to Odgers' appointment.

Yet you, the new Commission rescinded the December vote, took a new vote, and came out against Susan Odgers' apptmt. **However this is not binding** because you disregarded certain agenda rules.

That brings the matter back to the legal procedure from the December meeting, the vote that approved Susan Odgers' appointment to the library Board.

Your vote was not binding so it did not reverse the December one.
Odgers was legally voted in for the TADL Board.

Kindly do your job, stop blocking her appointment, and allow her to get on with the TADL Board's work—for which she gets no financial benefit.

But wait, WHY this controversy now?

Several facts suggest either personal animosity or political extremism at play. I surely hope not, for the sake of your Commission's reputation for integrity in your work.

For one, Susan Odgers is highly qualified and is well known for her longtime service to the community, including decades of teaching at NMC, Grand Valley and Ferris State and also her Record-Eagle columns. People across the

TIME CHANGE

I'm retired - and it was difficult for me to get here this morning.

But I have come as a representative for several of my friends and neighbours who are unable to attend because they have to work.

Regarding ~~the~~ the recent change of ^{the} meeting time for the commission, it may not have been your intention to keep 75% of the workers in the Grand Traverse area from taking part in your activities. But that in fact has been the end result.

Having last minute additions to your agenda, ones that are decided on without time for community discussion, is like having a secret commission. No government agency should practice that way.

Again I will say, it may not have been your intention to keep a large percentage of the citizens you represent from taking part in your activities, but you need to be made aware that that, in fact, has been the end result.

Kelli MacIntosh

INVOCATION

If you feel the need of spiritual guidance before taking part in these meetings - note that what you get from your routine religious practice - I would like to suggest you plan for a few minutes of personal reflection before attending these meetings.

There is no need to insist that everyone in attendance take part in a invocation that may not be of their choosing.

We have the freedom of religion and must respect each individual's choice as to how they want to approach their spiritual growth and practice.

— Keli MacIntosh

Initiative has been lost. I feel we have to
increase participation in local government
Takes local brain - a pattern of local
municipal entities have emerged to support
development of local economy - this
is returning us to a city with no
public sector involvement in itself. Long term
a pattern of local

local government has to be local
local brain. Local entities are responsible
for local government. Local government is in
private control

responsible for managing local development
local government has to be local from now
on. Local government is in private control
through initiative with local entities
controlling local

local government

January 15, 2019

Grand Traverse Board of Commissioners
400 Boardman Avenue
Traverse City, MI 49684

Public Input - General Comments *RE: DEMOCRACY*

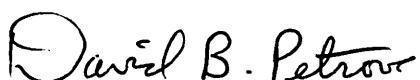
Democracy is a messy system to govern by. That is why “representative” democracies came to exist, which still brings problems because “We the People” continue to demand a voice in our government so the system gets even messier. Such is the burden created by a “government by the people”, who cherish a progressive, democratic, and tolerant society.

By comparison, right-wing groups are well versed in making government run like a corporation making operations more efficient by limiting the exercise of democratic methods and restricting civil liberties with arbitrary regulations and laws. As the political structure becomes dominated by a rigid one-party ideology, opposing viewpoints are suppressed and private economic enterprise flourishes at the expense of human rights, environmental health and personal freedoms.

Our nation, our state, our counties and our townships have been traveling down the path of conservative right-wing politics away from liberal and progressive for too long. The often repeated calls for “lower taxes, more jobs, less government and increasing police power” has been recited like a mantra which has helped the wealthy elite to increase an economic and political dominance of our society. “We the People” do the work, create the wealth and die in the wars that only a select few benefit from while doing little to nothing to earn such riches.

Democracy is messy, time consuming and frustrating in many ways, but when it becomes acceptable to allow increasingly difficult hurdles to voting, or to allow legislators to override citizen initiatives and utilize regulations to effectively veto popular proposals, and to institute local rules that exclude citizen participation, we are heading down the same old path that leads to an authoritarian, militaristic and evil country. We may want to believe the world’s evil is far away, across oceans or buried in the distant past, but the same threats to democracy are alive and growing in our own back yard, unless we speak up and show we will not tolerate it.

If democracy is not growing; if it is not becoming more progressive and more liberal, then democracy is dying and it will be replaced by a right-wing nationalist ideology or movement with a totalitarian and hierarchical structure that is fundamentally opposed to democracy and liberalism. The common name for this is “fascism”, and we must stand against it, beginning here with the local levels of government.



David B. Petrov,
9988 Riley Road, Interlochen, MI 49643