

Commissioners vote to establish Invocation before Harbor meetings

January 9, 2025



Citing the Supreme Court 2014 case in *Town of Greece, New York v. Galloway*, the Crescent City Harbor District (CCHD) voted unanimously to establish a non-denominational Invocation Before District meetings.

Invocation Guidelines of the Resolution:

Purpose: Invocations are intended to solemnize Board meetings, promote reflection and provide guidance in their decision-making.

Scheduling: Local clergy, commissioners and members of the community may participate.

Inclusivity: Invitations shall be extended without preference of any particular denomination

Conduct: invocations must be positive, uplifting and limited to one minute. The comments may not be used to disparage others, lobby for specific policies or solicit support.

Introduction: The Chair shall introduce speaker by name and title before the Invocation.

Participation is voluntary and not mandatory.

No compensation shall be provided.

Compliance: This guidance shall be administered in accordance with applicable laws and principles of inclusivity and fairness.

The motion was introduced by Commissioner John Evans and seconded by Commissioner Dan Schmidt.

Each Commissioner signaled support. Commissioner Annie Nehmer shared her support by stating "...in the past, I sometimes came to meetings angry and frustrated. Hearing a calming message from above would give me a sense of peace and mutual respect for my colleagues. "

Opposition to the Invocation was palpable, but tepid. Questions from the public included, "Who shall I pray to?" and the threats of litigation. Other opposing comments including misuse of staff time and costs.

The messages of opposition did not resonate. Commissioner Evans was asked to deliver the first invocation, Tuesday, January 21 at 2pm T the Citizens Dock Office.

In other business, the CCHD, ironed out guidelines for a Public Code of Conduct. The stated goal of Managing Public Forums was to seek out the causes of tension and conflict, discrimination and intolerance, and eliminate those causes.

The Harbor District has been subjected to oft-times hostile testimony during Public Comments.

Comments can into vulgarity, threatening behaviors, and disruption which interfere with Commissioners doing the business of the CCHD.

Free Speech guaranteed by the 1st Amended is granted in the Constitution. Libel, slander, obscenity, copyright infringement, sefition, inciting to violence and imminent threats are not protected and may fall into Hate Speech. Hate speech based on one's race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity is not protected Speech.

The Harbor adopted a Code of Conduct which which includes no tolerance for yelling or screaming and mandatory following instructions from the Chairman.

The Chair may employ many options to maintain control including muting the microphone, calling for a recess, removal from the meeting, clearing the room and adjournment.