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Roswell City Council rejects prayer proposal

By Joan Durbin
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Updated Friday, March 12: 9:08 a.m.:

The Neighbor is awaiting clarification from Councilwoman Betty Price regarding her quote in the last paragraph.

A proposal to begin Roswell City council meetings with prayer died in a council committee meeting Monday.

Councilman Rich Dippolito was the first of five council members to express reservations. In his comments, he said prayer at gatherings where people choose to be there voluntarily is different than praying at meetings that are the only legal venue for certain public transactions.

"I support prayer, but what concerns me is having belief-based prayer at a council meeting where people have to come to do business," Dippolito said. Councilwomen Nancy Diamond and Becky Wynn both said they had gotten largely negative reactions to the proposal from many residents.

"I've been approached in the grocery store. Everyone wants to talk about this. I'm surprised because I thought I'd get more people wanting to do prayer," Diamond said. "But I now feel like some people are going to be uncomfortable every time we [pray], and I don't know how to get around that. I just haven't found the support for it."

Since it was reported last month that Councilwoman Betty Price had proposed an opening prayer at council meetings, the number of comments on this newspaper's Web site exploded, with the overwhelming majority opposed.

Wynn referenced those comments in voicing her concerns and added she had had the same experiences Diamond had mentioned.

"I've found the same thing when I go out. Probably 80 percent of the people are saying to me no, don't do it," she said of instituting council prayer. "I would have a difficult time supporting this because I'm not seeing the support from our community to do it."

Councilman Jerry Orlans reported similar feedback. "I was a little surprised that certain people who were talking to me about it didn't want it." Three residents who regularly attend council meetings have made it known they would feel uncomfortable with prayer, Councilmen Kent Igleheart noted.

Mayor Jere Wood said based on what council members had just related, "I have decided not to move ahead [with the proposal]. I see both sides of the issue, but I certainly don't want something that we would try to make a positive experience turn negative."

When the next agenda item was immediately called, Price interjected, asking for and then getting confirmation that the mayor was refusing to place the prayer issue on a formal council agenda for a vote. She said the Georgia Municipal Association's guidelines for city meetings include opening

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prayer.

“We might be a little more diverse in city size and scope than most GMA members,” Diamond said.

Price also denounced blog comments as being unreliable because they are by nature anonymous and many of the authors may not even live in Roswell.

“We have no right not to be offended,” Price said. “Being challenged would be a wonderful thing. Getting back to the roots of our country would be an even more wonderful thing.”



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