



MEMORANDUM

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES A. BERGMAN, CITY MANAGER

BY: KELLY WETMORE, DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE & INFORMATION SERVICES/CITY CLERK

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION AMENDING THE EXISTING PLEDGE TO FOLLOW BEST PRACTICES OF CIVILITY AND CIVIL DISCOURSE IN ORDER TO INCLUDE A REGIONAL CODE OF CIVILITY

DATE: JUNE 26, 2018

SUMMARY OF ACTION:

Adoption of a Resolution to amend the existing pledge to follow best practices of civility and civil discourse in all meetings by including the San Luis Obispo Regional Code of Civility to strengthen a culture of civility and collaboration in the region.

IMPACT ON FINANCIAL AND PERSONNEL RESOURCES:

There are no impacts to financial and/or personnel resources.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Council adopt a Resolution amending the existing pledge to follow best practices of civility and civil discourse in all of its meetings.

BACKGROUND:

In August of 2017, 32 San Luis Obispo County residents from various backgrounds including government staff, elected officials, leaders from Cal Poly, Cuesta and K12, as well as a diverse mix of individuals from the SLO County nonprofit and business communities, participated in a group trip to Denver, Colorado. The purpose of the trip was to hear about lessons learned in Denver in order to proactively envision and plan for the future of San Luis Obispo County.

Of the many topics explored in Colorado, the most impactful to the group was the concept of Regionalism; the idea that regions which learn to work together will do better for their citizens. Regional collaboration is rooted in trusted relationships and from that, the idea of a region-wide Code of Civility began. The idea was that each jurisdiction would adopt the same Code of Civility, setting a common expectation of how all public business would be conducted in the region, at both the City Council level and at a regional level.

**CITY COUNCIL
CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION AMENDING THE EXISTING PLEDGE TO
FOLLOW BEST PRACTICES OF CIVILITY AND CIVIL DISCOURSE
JUNE 26, 2018
PAGE 2**

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES:

The City of Arroyo Grande has embraced the core concepts in the proposed Regional Code of Civility. In 2015, the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County (LWV of SLO County) made a presentation entitled "Empowering Our Communities Through Civil Civic Engagement". Following a presentation to the Council regarding civility and civil discourse during public meetings, the City Council adopted its own policy resolution pledging to follow best practices of civility and civil discourse in all its meetings.

A group of elected officials who attended the Denver trip approached the Countywide Mayors and City Managers groups asking for each City Council to adopt or endorse the proposed Regional Code of Civility as a promise to each other and the public to conduct themselves in a way that cultivates a culture of civility and collaboration in our region. Mayor Hill attended the Mayors meeting where the Code of Civility was discussed and agreed that Arroyo Grande should consider joining other cities in adopting the Code of Civility. The proposed Code of Civility would not replace the Council's existing policy, but is proposed to be added as Exhibit A to the attached Resolution to complement the existing policy.

To date, the Code of Civility has been adopted or endorsed by the cities of Atascadero, Grover Beach, Paso Robles, San Luis Obispo, Morro Bay and the County of San Luis Obispo. The City of Pismo Beach will continue to use a city-specific civility code consistent with this regional version.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Adopt the Resolution;
2. Do not take any action at this time; or
3. Provide other direction to staff.

ADVANTAGES:

Adoption of the Resolution including the regional Code of Civility shows a commitment to strengthening a civil political community in which each person is respected and spirited public and political debate is aimed at the betterment of the City of Arroyo Grande and its citizens.

DISADVANTAGES:

No disadvantages noted at this time.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

No environmental review is required for this item.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND COMMENTS:

The agenda was posted at City Hall and on the City's website in accordance with Government Code Section 54954.2.

RESOLUTION NO.

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ARROYO GRANDE AMENDING THE EXISTING PLEDGE TO FOLLOW BEST PRACTICES OF CIVILITY AND CIVIL DISCOURSE IN ALL MEETINGS

WHEREAS, the City Council commits itself to building a civil political community in which each person is respected and spirited public and political debate is aimed at the betterment of the City of Arroyo Grande and its citizens and not the disparagement of those with whom we disagree; and

WHEREAS, the City Council pledges to promote the use of and adherence to the principles of civility and civil discourse in conducting business with appointed and elected officials, staff, and citizens; and

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to reaffirm the importance of civility and civil discourse in the democratic process by incorporating a regional Code of Civility.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Arroyo Grande, in order to ensure civility and civil discourse in all of our meetings, we pledge our commitment to the following best practices of civility and civil discourse:

- a. To respect the right of all people to hold different opinions in all our meetings.
- b. To avoid rhetoric intended to humiliate, malign, or question the motivation of those whose opinions are different from ours in all our meetings.
- c. To strive to understand differing perspectives in all our meetings.
- d. To choose words carefully in all our meetings.
- e. To speak truthfully without accusations, and avoid distortion in all our meetings.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the City Council desires to reaffirm the importance of civility and civil discourse by including a regional “Code of Civility”, attached hereto as Exhibit A and incorporated herein by reference.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution amends and supercedes Resolution No. 4685 adopted September 8, 2015.

On motion by Council Member _____, seconded by Council Member _____, and on the following roll call vote, to wit:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

The foregoing Resolution was passed and adopted this 26th day of June, 2018.

JIM HILL, MAYOR

ATTEST:

KELLY WETMORE, CITY CLERK

APPROVED AS TO CONTENT:

JAMES A. BERGMAN, CITY MANAGER

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

HEATHER WHITHAM, CITY ATTORNEY

CODE OF CIVILITY

A healthy democracy respects the people's right to debate issues with passion. A healthy democracy not only tolerates disagreement but welcomes it in order to refine ideas and create policies that benefit the greater good.

The deterioration of civility across the country and within our community poses a threat to our democracy and our civic well-being. This deterioration:

- Compromises the integrity of a healthy, representative democracy
- Closes the door on depth of thought, reducing complex problems to harmful oversimplification
- Deters potential leaders from running for office or serving in government
- Poisons the civic well and discourages citizens from engaging on pressing community issues
- Casts the spotlight on poor behavior rather than shining a light on possible solutions
- Sets a poor example for our children

We have crafted this Code of Civility as a promise to each other, and to the people and institutions we serve, that we will always strive to conduct our debates - whether in person, online, or in written communication - in ways that allow for the widest range of opinions on ideas and policies, yet also respect the dignity, integrity and rights of those with whom we might disagree. With our individual and collective commitment to this code, we welcome our elected colleagues, the press and the public to hold us accountable.

In our deliberations we pledge to:

Listen First

We will make an honest effort to understand views and reasoning of others by listening to understand, not listening to find fault, allowing thoughtful discussion to lead to the best possible outcomes.

Respect Different Opinions

We will invite and consider different perspectives, allowing space for ideas to be expressed, opposed and clarified in a constructive manner.

Be Courteous

We will treat all colleagues, staff and members of the public in a professional and courteous manner whether in person, online, or in written communication, especially when we disagree.

Disagree Constructively

We strive to advance solutions to community issues; when faced with disagreement, we do more than simply share our concerns with differing positions, we work to propose a course of action of mutual benefit.

Debate the Policy Not the Person

We will focus on the issues, and not personalize debate or use other tactics that divert attention from the issue.

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