**CITY OF PALM COAST**

**MEETING INVOCATION POLICY**

The City of Palm Coast adopts the following Meeting Invocation Policy (“Policy”) for the purpose of providing a process to allow invocation speakers to give a short invocation at the beginning of City Council meetings. The City Council has determined that invocations which comply with the guidelines in this Policy are consistent with applicable law and jurisprudence.

Absent a pattern of invocations that over time denigrate, proselytize, or betray an impermissible government purpose, a policy establishing invocations to begin the meetings of a governing body is permissible. *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 134 S.Ct. 1811 (2014); *see Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983) (the practice of opening a legislative session with prayer is deeply rooted in history and does not violate the Establishment Clause); *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, 142 S. Ct. 2407 (2022) (activities which accord with history and tradition are permissible under the Establishment Clause); *Atheists of Florida, Inc. v. City of Lakeland*, 713 F.3d 577 (11th Cir. 2013) (the selection process for an invocation speaker does not violate the Establishment Clause if it does not advance or disparage any particular faith). Further, the selection process for an invocation speaker does not violate the First Amendment if it does not advance or disparage any particular faith. *Atheists of Florida, Inc. v. City of Lakeland, Fla*., 713 F.3d 577 (11th Cir. 2013); *Williamson v. Brevard County*, 928 F.3d 1296 (11th Cir. 2019) (commissioners may not categorically exclude from consideration speakers from a religion simply because they do not like the nature of its beliefs).

**POLICIES**

1. To solemnize proceedings of the Palm Coast City Council, it is the Council’s policy to allow for a brief invocation to be offered at its regular business meetings for the benefit of the City Council and the residents of Palm Coast. Invocations given must comply with the following:
	1. The invocation, which may include prayer; a reflective moment of silence; or a short solemnizing message, is to be offered before its regularly scheduled business and workshop meetings for the benefit of the City Council, to accommodate the spiritual needs of the public officials. Special meetings, emergency meetings, and workshops will not include an opening invocation. The invocation shall not exceed one (1) minute in length.
	2. The invocation shall occur after the “Pledge of Allegiance” item on the meeting’s Agenda.
	3. Only one (1) invocation shall be given per meeting.
	4. The invocation may be secular or nonsecular in nature. Invocations may not be used to advance or disparage any particular religion, faith, or belief. Invocations should be considerate of all Palm Coast residents and must display a respectful attitude towards all peoples regardless of religion, race, national origin, sex, gender, or ability.
2. No member of the City Council nor any other person in attendance at the meeting shall be required to participate in any invocation that is offered. No person in attendance will be directed to stand, bow, or in any way participate in the prayers; make public note of a person’s presence or absence, attention or inattention during the invocation; or indicate that decisions of the City Council will in any way be influenced by a person’s acquiescence in the prayer opportunity. The Mayor will provide time for persons who wish to leave the room during an invocation to do so, and equal time for them to return to the room before other business is addressed.
3. The invocation shall be voluntarily delivered by a local clergy-member, religious leader, or community religious leader. To ensure such person (“Invocation Speaker”) is selected from among a wide pool possible speakers, on a rotating basis, the Invocation Speaker shall be selected according to the following procedure:
	1. The City shall post on its website an invitation to deliver the invocation which shall substantially read as follows:

*The City of Palm Coast makes it a policy to invite members of the local community to offer an invocation before the beginning of its regular business and workshop meetings. The City Council extends its invitation for a representative from your assembly to deliver the invocation at one of our regular business meetings, which are typically held on Tuesdays in the City Council Chambers, located at 160 Lake Ave., Palm Coast, FL 32164.*

*It is the City’s policy that an invocation speaker is free to offer an invocation according to the dictates of their own conscience, but, in order to comply with applicable law, the public invocation opportunity may not be exploited to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other faith or belief. Each speaker who requests to deliver an invocation at an upcoming meeting of the City Council shall be scheduled to deliver the invocation on a first-come, first-serve basis.*

*If you are willing to assist the City in this regard, please send a written reply via email to the City Clerk at* *vsmith@palmcoastgov.com* *or via mail to City of Palm Coast, c/o City Clerk, 160 Lake Ave., Palm Coast, FL 32164. Replies should include the name of the invocation speaker, the speaker’s phone number, email address, the name of the associated congregation/assembly and its physical address.*

*The City Council’s regular business and workshop meeting dates are posted on the City’s website at https://www.palmcoastgov.com.*

*On behalf of the City, thank you for considering this invitation.*

*NOTE: all information provided is subject to disclosure pursuant to Florida’s Public Record laws.*

* 1. The City shall maintain a database of the religious congregations, of all denominations, located within the City of Palm Coast that have expressed an interest in delivering an invocation. All religious congregations and assemblies with an established presence in the City of Palm Coast are eligible to be included in the congregations list and any such congregation can confirm its inclusion by written request to the City Clerk. Persons who reside within the City of Palm Coast and who are members of a religious congregation which is located within Flagler County, but outside of the jurisdictional boundaries of the City of Palm Coast may, in a writing or email addressed to the City Clerk, request the inclusion of their congregation on the congregation list. In maintaining the congregation list and in enacting a procedure to include congregations which are frequented by the City’s residents but which are outside of the City’s boundaries, the City intends to ensure that all of the community’s religious denominations have an equal opportunity to provide Invocation Speakers.
	2. The City Clerk shall make a reasonable effort to update the congregations list annually, or as changes are received.
1. Consistent with the above, Invocation Speakers shall be selected on a first-come, first-serve basis. Should this method of selecting a speaker be impracticable at any point, speakers shall be chosen randomly.
2. If the selected Invocation Speaker does not appear at the scheduled meeting, the City Council will supplement with a moment of silence.
3. The Invocation Speaker may not act as an extension of their denomination or faith group. The invocation is not an opportunity to preach, proselytize, or otherwise advance any particular religion or belief.
4. The invocation may not advance any particular political or social movement in a manner that would suggest the City’s involvement in such a movement.
5. No Invocation Speaker shall receive compensation of any kind for their service. The role of Invocation Speaker shall be voluntary.
6. The City shall make reasonable effort to ensure that a variety of eligible Invocation Speakers are scheduled for City Council meetings. If other eligible speakers are waiting and have not had an opportunity to deliver an Invocation, no speaker shall be scheduled to offer an invocation at more than two (2) City Council meetings in any calendar year.
7. The City shall not engage in any prior inquiry, review of, or involvement in the content of any invocation to be offered by an Invocation Speaker.
8. This Policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or constructed in any way, to affiliate the City with, nor express the City’s preference for, any faith or denomination. This Policy is intended to acknowledge and express the City’s respect for the diversity of religious denominations and faiths represented and practiced among the citizens of Palm Coast.