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CITY OF OTTUMWA
Staff Summary

**** ACTION ITEM ****

Council Meeting of : Jan 20, 2026

Administration

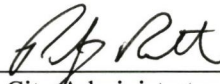
Department

Mayor Ben Foote

Prepared By

Admin Phil Rath

Department Head



City Administrator Approval

AGENDA TITLE: Resolution No. 18-2026, A Resolution to Accept the Invocation Policy.

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Public hearing required if this box is checked.

RECOMMENDATION: Pass and Adopt Resolution 18-2026

DISCUSSION:

The United States has began official government meetings with an invocation since its beginning. This established and important part of official proceeding has been adopted and used in a large majority of State governments, include the State of Iowa. Furthermore, many cities throughout the State of Iowa also include an invocation as part of their official proceedings. Beginning each council meeting with an invocation brings an opportunity to include our Creator into our decision making, start with a blessing for our City and additional guidance towards our decisions. Giving an opportunity for our local churches and the congregates to come together, united in giving a blessing over the City of Ottumwa and our citizens.

Source of Funds: N/A

Budgeted Item:

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Budget Amendment Needed: No

RESOLUTION NO. 18-2026

RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING POLICY RELATED TO THE PROCESS AND PROCEDURES FOR
PROVIDING AN INVOCATION AS PART OF CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

WHEREAS, at the beginning of each council meeting it is established practice to begin each council meeting with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance, and

WHEREAS, it is an established practice throughout the history of our nation and the State of Iowa, along with many towns and cities in the State of Iowa to begin official proceedings with an invocation, and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate to begin meetings of decisions for the City of Ottumwa with additional guidance and blessing for the city and all its citizens.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OTTUMWA, IOWA: the attached Consideration and Issuance of Invocation Policy be adopted, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Ottumwa City Council of the City of Ottumwa, Iowa that the Mayor and City Clerk are hereby authorized and directed to execute said resolution

PASSED, APPROVED and ADOPTED this 20 day of January 2026.

CITY OF OTTUMWA, IOWA



Benjamin Foote, Mayor

ATTEST:



Christina Reinhard, CMC, City Clerk





City of Ottumwa Invocation Policy

The Pledge of Allegiance has been an established part of the City of Ottumwa Council meetings. The Pledge of Allegiance is also an established opening to legislative sessions of local, state and federal government and has been throughout the history of the United States. Federal legislative sessions open with prayer and have done so since the first Congress under the Constitution. A large majority of States, including the State of Iowa, follow this same example. At official city council meetings, an invocation will be given as an opening part of the meeting after the meeting is called to order and prior to the Pledge of Allegiance, which precedes the roll call.

This policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in any way to affiliate the City Council with, nor express the Council's endorsement or preference for any faith or religious denominations. Rather, this policy is intended to acknowledge and express the City Council's respect for the diversity of both organized and unorganized religious denominations, as well as other faiths, belief systems, or the lack thereof, represented and practiced among the citizens of the City of Ottumwa.

To ensure that invitational speakers are selected without preference to any specific religion, belief, faith, or ideology, from amongst a diverse pool of Ottumwa citizens, volunteers shall be selected according to the following procedure:

1. The invocation shall be voluntarily delivered, without compensation, by any person who is a resident of Ottumwa and on the list of volunteers, which shall be maintained by the Mayor. The Mayor shall include any resident on the list upon submission of written request including the person's local address and contact information, including e-mail.
2. Within thirty (30) days of the adoption of this policy, and on or about July 1 of each calendar year thereafter, the Mayor shall e-mail one invitation addressed to potential volunteer groups for delivery of the invocation and will also enable submitting a request to volunteer to provide the invocation on the City's website. The invitation shall state the following:
 - a. The City Council makes it a policy to invite residents of the City of Ottumwa to voluntarily offer an invocation or prayer not to exceed two minutes in length before the beginning of its meetings.
 - b. If you are willing to assist the City Council in this regard, please send a reply at your earliest convenience to the Mayor. Volunteer invitational speakers are scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. The dates of the City Council's regularly scheduled meetings for the upcoming fiscal year are listed on the following, attached page. If you have a preference among the dates, please state that request in your written reply.



- c. This opportunity is voluntary, and you are free to offer the invocation according to the dictates of your own conscience. The City requests that the content of the invocation align with a tone suitable for conducting the business of the City.
 - d. To maintain a spirit of respect and ecumenism, the City Council requests only that the opportunity not be exploited as an effort to proselytize, i.e., convert others to the particular faith of the speaker, nor to disparage any faith or belief different than that of the speaker.
3. All requests shall be submitted through the City of Ottumwa's website with a timestamp showing when received. The Mayor shall schedule and notify the volunteer, by email, of the date and time the speaker should be prepared to offer the invocation or prayer. The notice shall remind the speaker of the duty not to proselytize nor disparage others' religions, faiths, beliefs, or lack thereof, and of the two-minute time limitation.
 4. No invitational speaker shall be scheduled to offer an invocation at consecutive meetings, or at more than three Council Meetings in any calendar year.

If the person scheduled to provide the invocation is unable to attend as scheduled, it is the option of the Mayor to forgo the invocation or to have the Council observe a moment of silence.

Invocations should be given in a solemn and respectful tone which lends gravity to the City Council's proceedings and invites the City Council to reflect upon shared ideals and common ends as they embark on the task of governing. Invocations are not to be treated as public comment periods. Invocations shall comply with the following:

1. The deliverer shall not disparage or vilify any other religions or beliefs.
2. The deliverer is not to proselytize or attempt to recruit or persuade others to join their faith, church or other religious organization.
3. No member of the City Council, City employee, or any other person in attendance at a meeting shall be required to participate in any invocation that is offered.
4. Neither the City Council, Mayor, City Clerk, nor City staff shall engage in any prior inquiry, review of, restriction, or involvement in, the content of any prayer or invocation to be offered.
5. The deliverer is to approach the podium used for public address when prompted by the Mayor that the meeting is in session and the invocation will



be given. The deliverer is to face the Mayor, Administrator, Clerk and Council when delivering their invocation.

6. It is requested that the invocation be concise and not exceed two minutes in length.
7. Any invitational speaker who violates this policy shall be subject to disqualification from offering future invocations by official notice from the Mayor.
8. If a speaker wishes to appeal the disqualification, he or she must file an appeal with the city clerk in writing within ten days of the date provided on the Mayor's disqualification notice.