

Guidance from City Atty.

Yes, city councils in Iowa can pray before meetings, but this practice must adhere to constitutional guidelines. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in cases like *Town of Greece v. Galloway* (2014) that government bodies, including city councils, can open their meetings with prayer as long as the practice does not coerce participation or promote one faith over others. The prayer must not be used to proselytize or disparage other religions or non-religious beliefs. In Iowa, as long as the prayer is inclusive and respects the principles of religious freedom and neutrality, city councils can include it as part of their proceedings. Some cities might adopt non-sectarian or rotating invocation practices to ensure inclusivity.

For a city council to include prayer before meetings in a way that complies with constitutional guidelines and ensures inclusivity, they should follow best practices to avoid legal or public relations issues. Here are steps the council can take:

1. Adopt a Formal Policy

The city council should adopt a formal, written policy outlining how invocations will be handled. This helps ensure consistency and transparency in the process.

2. Allow Diverse Participation

- **Rotating Prayer Leaders:** If the council invites clergy or individuals to give the invocation, they should do so on a rotating basis, ensuring a variety of faiths and non-religious viewpoints are represented. This might include Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or other faith traditions, as well as secular humanists or others with non-religious perspectives.
- **Volunteer Basis:** Invitations should be open to volunteers from the community rather than selected by the council members themselves, to avoid the appearance of favoritism toward certain faiths.

3. Non-Coercion

- **Optional Participation:** Council members, staff, and attendees should not be required or pressured to participate in the prayer. Make it clear that the invocation is voluntary, and no one will be penalized for opting out.
- **Inclusive Language (Optional):** While prayers can reference specific faiths, councils should consider using inclusive language to respect the diverse beliefs of those present.

4. Avoid Proselytizing or Denigrating

Prayers should not be used to promote one religion over others, nor should they denigrate any other faiths or non-believers. The invocation should be respectful of all beliefs.

5. Provide Alternatives (if needed)

Moment of Silence: Some councils choose to offer a moment of silence instead of a spoken prayer, allowing individuals to pray or reflect privately according to their own beliefs.

Prayer at Council Meetings

🕒 Updated on January 25, 2023 📅 Posted on December 14, 2016

In May of 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, a case in which a town's practice of opening town meetings with a prayer was challenged as violating the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The case impacts cities in different ways and city officials need to carefully consider the ruling if they wish to consider opening their city council meetings with a prayer.

The Town of Greece Lawsuit

Starting in 1999, the town of Greece, New York began opening their meetings with a roll call and pledge of allegiance, following which a prayer giver was invited to step to the front of the room and deliver a prayer. Prayer givers were solicited by a town employee, who would call congregations listed in a local directory until she found a minister available for that month's meeting. No person or religion was excluded from delivering the prayer. However, nearly all congregations in Greece were Christian, thus nearly all of the invocations delivered before Greece town meetings were given by Christian ministers. Greece provided no guidance to the ministers regarding the content of the invocations.

Susan Galloway and others who attended Greece town meetings complained that the prayers violated their religious or philosophical views. In one meeting she told board members that she found the prayers "offensive," "intolerable," and an affront to a "diverse community." Finally, she and others filed suit, claiming that the town violated the First Amendment by preferring Christians over other prayer givers and by sponsoring sectarian prayers. They asked the Court to rule that the town should be limited to allowing "inclusive

and ecumenical” prayers that referred to a generic god.

Although the district court upheld the prayer practice, on appeal the Second Circuit Court of Appeals instead held that some aspects of the Town of Greece prayer program, viewed in totality by a reasonable observer, conveyed the message that Greece was endorsing Christianity and in so doing violated the so-called Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The U.S. Supreme Court, on a final review of the case, ruled that the Town of Greece legislative prayer practice was lawful and did not violate the First Amendment. The Court observed that legislative prayer, although religious in nature, has long been understood as compatible with the First Amendment. The Court pointed to a lengthy historical precedent of opening local legislative meetings with a prayer. The Court also noted that such prayers are a tolerable acknowledgment of beliefs that are widely held, not a “first, treacherous step toward establishment of a state church.”

The decision clarifies the rules for cities that want to open council meetings with a legislative prayer. Cities are specifically allowed to open city council meetings with a prayer. The Supreme Court rejected arguments that the prayer must be of a generic nature. The prayer can be sectarian, and the prayer can be given in the prayer giver’s own language. The person offering the prayer is not required to exclude any specific references connected to that person’s religion. For example, references to Jesus are allowed in the invocation. Also, the Supreme Court specifically held that there is no requirement to establish numerical equality among prayer givers of different religions. Cities are not required to search beyond their borders for religious leaders in order to ensure that a wide variety of religions and beliefs are represented among prayer givers.

Restrictions

The Supreme Court did make it clear that there are some restrictions upon offering an invocation at city council meetings:

- Cities cannot allow a prayer giver to disparage or vilify other religions.
- Prayer givers are not allowed to proselytize – to attempt to recruit or persuade others to join their faith.
- Persons attending the council meeting cannot be coerced into engaging in the prayer – for example required to stand or to bow their heads.
- While numerical equality among prayer givers from different faiths is not required, the city cannot discriminate in the selection of prayer givers.

- There cannot be any implication that city council actions could be affected by participation or non-participation in the opening prayer.

Best Practices

Finally, here are some suggested practices to consider if your city has an opening prayer before city council meetings.

- Have the prayer before the beginning of the legislative part of the city council meeting. This helps to make it clear that the prayer simply helps to lend gravity to the occasion and to reflect upon common ideals and values.
- Ask the prayer giver to face the city council and mayor, not any persons who may be in the audience. This emphasizes that the invocation is directed at the legislative body, not at any persons who may be in attendance at the council meeting.
- Make it clear that members of the public in attendance at council meetings are not required to participate in any prayer.
- Establish a written policy concerning the opening prayer, and make it easily accessible to the public.
- Send your city's written policy concerning prayer before council meetings to all religious institutions in the city. The minority opinion in the Town of Greece case was highly critical of Greece for failing to make a bona fide attempt to reach out to non-Christian denominations for prayer givers. A genuine effort to be inclusive will help to insulate an opening prayer program from criticism.
- Do not edit prayers or suggest content. It would be appropriate to describe the purpose of an opening invocation as setting a suitable tone for conducting the business of the city.
- Contact your city attorney for assistance in preparing a written policy and for guidance.



Gallagher

City of Afton
Renewal Summary | 2025 Plan Year

Coverage	Carrier	Renewal Date	Rate Action
Medical	Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield	1/1/2025	19.43%
Dental	Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield	1/1/2025	0.00%
Life and AD&D	Madison National Life Insurance Co Inc	1/1/2027	0.00%
Voluntary Life and AD&D	Madison National Life Insurance Co Inc	1/1/2027	0.00%



City of Afton
Financial Summary

Coverage	Current		Initial Renewal	
	Premium	% Difference	Premium	% Difference
Medical	\$14,337.32		\$17,124.12	19.43%
Dental	\$1,190.16		\$1,190.16	0.00%
Life and AD&D	\$387.00		\$387.00	0.00%
Voluntary Life and AD&D	Step Rates		Step Rates	Step Rates
Total	\$15,914.38		\$18,701.28	17.51%
				\$2,786.40

*The information contained herein is subject to the disclosures and disclaimers on the Disclaimers page of this presentation.



Kelly's Flowers & Garden Center
 Creston, IA 50801

INVOICE

Greene Landscaping

Creston, Iowa 50801
 United States

BILL TO
City of Afton
 City of Afton
 115 E Kansas
 Afton, Ia. 50830.

Invoice Number: 5659

Invoice Date: September 23, 2024

Payment Due: September 23, 2024

Amount Due (USD): \$9,500.00

Items	Quantity	Price	Amount
Rebuild wall with old blocks, install three layers of geogrid fabric, install new top capstones. City provides 3/4 clean gravel. Jesse to help tear down wall and haul dirt away.	1	\$9,500.00	\$9,500.00
Total:			\$9,500.00
Amount Due (USD):			\$9,500.00

Powered by wave

Quote for wall by 805 E. Filmore

From: Jeff Wallace [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, September 24, 2024 8:34 AM
To: Jeff Wallace
Subject: Fwd: St Joseph's - Marion
Attachments: IMG_2334.jpg

Good morning!

Attached is a video of one of our most recent projects at St. Joseph's Elementary in Marion. This PlayStax playground offers a ton of climbing opportunities for the kids to keep them engaged at recess and burn off some energy.

When we work with our clients we can bounce off a number of ideas and then make changes based on needs, dimensions, and vision. It was great working with Casey Kettmann, the Principal at St Joseph's. If you would like to talk with him about his experience working with Play Pro Recreation he can be emailed at ckettmann@crcxs.org.

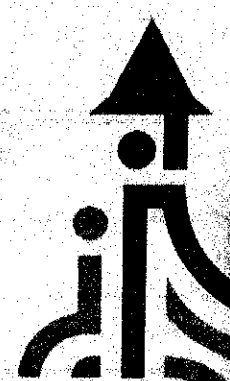
As a reminder, Little Tikes Commercial equipment is made in the USA! Also, Play Pro Recreation is an Iowa based company.

Thanks!



Play-prorec.com





play by design

PLAY BY DESIGN

304 NORTH GENEVA STREET
ITHACA, NY 14850

www.PBDplaygrounds.com
(607) 351-5160

 facebook @playbydesign

"We Love W..."

FIELD





03/28/2023



1 of 10



Latest



RAILROAD



WEBSTER

23 Eagleview



actyhall@windstream.net

From: Dams, Lauren [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, October 2, 2024 9:10 AM
To: Lauren Dams
Subject: IRA Tree Planting Grant

Hello all,

The Community Forestry Grant Program, IRA Tree Planting Grant application is now open.

This is funded through the USDA Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Iowa Tree Planting Grant provides reimbursable grants to purchase trees, mulch, tree staking/protection and supplemental watering by contractor or city staff. The grant is a two-year program allowing for planting to take place in the spring and fall of 2025 and 2026. Grant funding is competitive, non-match, and awarded in amounts between \$10,000 to \$30,000 per applicant.

The Iowa Tree Planting grants are available to community governmental entities, volunteer organizations, and service organizations involved with local urban and community forest services, to plant trees on publicly owned properties within the community to diversify the tree canopy, increase tree benefits, and help disadvantaged populations with energy costs and health disparities, and increase access to parks and nature. Eligibility is determined by the [Forest Cover and Socioeconomic Assessment Tool](#).

To Apply, go to the [Iowa DNR Urban Forestry website](#). Iowa Tree Planting applications are due by 4:00 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 30, 2024. Award recipients will be notified by Wednesday, Jan. 15, 2025.

For questions about the application, reimbursement and rules, contact Chip Murrow at chip.murrow@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-822-1031.

For application assistance or to set up a site visit, contact Laurie Dams at lauren.dams@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-782-6414.

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Thank you,

Laurie Dams (she/her)
Urban and Community Forestry Technician
DNR Forestry | Trees Forever
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Des Moines, IA 50321
515-782-6414
lauren.dams@dnr.iowa.gov