

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P. O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

March 11, 2011

SENT BY MAIL AND EMAIL

The Honorable James R. Buck
City of Grandville
3195 Wilson Avenue SW
Grandville, MI 49418

Re: Faith and Religious Heritage as Community Values

Dear Mayor Buck:

I am writing on behalf of a local resident and other members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to serious concerns with the Grandville's "community values." FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization that works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between church and state. FFRF represents nearly 16,000 members across the country, including nearly 500 in Michigan.

Our complainant informs us that Grandville's official website contains the following as its first community value: "Faith, being guided by a strong religious heritage." It is our understanding that residents use the website to access important governmental information about the city. It is our understanding that these community values were adopted in on June 26, 2000 via the approval of Resolution No. 2349.

It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot in any way promote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion. The Supreme Court has said, "The touchstone for our analysis is the principle that the 'First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.'" *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005), (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Board of Ed. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985)).

Incorporating a proclamation of shared religious belief into the values of a municipality is inappropriate. It is also inappropriate to display this value on the city's website. By implying that belonging to the Grandville community requires adherence to "religious heritage" and valuing "faith," Grandville is compromising the First Amendment rights of its citizens. The Establishment Clause, "at the very least, prohibits government from appearing to take a position on questions of religious belief or from 'making adherence to a religion relevant in any way to a person's standing in the political community.'" *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 492 U.S. 573, 594 (1989) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 687 (1984)).

The prominent promotion of religion by a municipality violates the Establishment Clause. The website gives the impression that the Grandville government supports and endorses particular religious views. This “sends the...message...to nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members...” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-10 (2001)(quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. at 668)(O’Connor, J., concurring). Furthermore, more than 15% of adult Americans do not believe in a god (The American Religious Identification Survey 2008). Therefore, this message excludes as many as 15% of your current or potential community members.

We request that you ensure that Grandville city government refrains from sending the message that Grandville community members share a common religious heritage. Furthermore, we request that the community values be revised to reflect constitutional mandates. We also request that the message be removed from the website and that no further religious messages are disseminated through the website. Please inform us in writing of the actions that Grandville is taking to remedy this constitutional concern. We look forward to a reply at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RSM", with a horizontal line above it.

Rebecca S. Markert
Staff Attorney

RSM:jek

COMMUNITY

QUICK LINKS

Community

The Grandville community is a special place where people support one another, take pride in their community and enjoy a sense of belonging. We have inherent values that provide the foundation for making this a positive place to live. By stating these common values, we want to ensure they continue to define and guide our community life.

Values

FAITH

Being guided by a strong religious heritage.

FAMILY

The common bond and support that exists among parents, children and extended family members.

HONESTY

Being truthful and having integrity.

CARING

Showing concern for others.

RESPECT

Showing proper acceptance and courtesy.

RESPONSIBILITY

Being dependable and accountable for one's actions.

OVERVIEW
LINKS

SEARCH

3195 Wilson Avenue SW
Grandville, MI 49419
(616) 531-3030

Bill

OVERVIEW
AGENDAS & MINUTES
CALENDAR
CONTACT US
FAQ'S
FORMS
GENERAL INFO
LINKS
NEWSLETTER

SEARCH

3195 Wilson Avenue SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(616) 531-3030

City Council Minutes

PROCEEDINGS OF THE GRANDVILLE CITY COUNCIL

2000-186 Regular session, June 26, 2000, in the Council Chambers at 7:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Mayor James Buck.

The City Clerk called the roll. Present were Council Members Robert De Witt,

Kenneth Gates, Scott Petersen, Carole Pettijohn, and Joe Sierawski, and Mayor Buck. Absent: Council Member Maas. Also present were City Manager Ken Krombeen, Assistant City Manager Dan Johnson and City Attorney Randall Kraker.

Other staff present:

Michael Chesher, D.P.W. Director
Richard Meyers, Wastewater Superintendent
Sharon Streelman, City Clerk.

The invocation was given by Father George Darling, St. Pius X Catholic Church, and was followed by the pledge of allegiance.

Moved by Council Member Gates and seconded by Council Member Sierawski, CARRIED, to approve the June 26, 2000 agenda, removing items 4 and 5 under Resolutions and adding a Wastewater purchase item under City Manager's Report.

Moved by Council Member Gates and seconded by Council Member Pettijohn, CARRIED, to waive the reading of the minutes of the regular meeting of June 12, 2000 and approve the minutes as presented.

Moved by Council Member De Witt and seconded by Council Member Pettijohn, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, that bills totaling \$243,948.27 as presented by the City Manager, be allowed and the Treasurer authorized to pay the same.

Moved by Council Member Pettijohn and seconded by Council Member Gates, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, to excuse the absence of Council Member Maas.

PUBLIC COMMENT

City Manager Krombeen presented the Library Millage proposal to be on the August 8 ballot. It

was explained that this is both a renewal and an increase of the current millage. The first question asks for 0.77 mills and the second question asks for 0.11 mills.

Lori Holland of Kent District was present to answer questions.

August Lenger of 4280 Redbush commented as to the pleasant affect of the Mariott Residence Inn as a neighbor to the Whispering Springs Condo Association.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

2000-187 Moved by Council Member Petersen and seconded by Council Member De Witt, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, to adopt Resolution No. 2439, a resolution endorsing Grandville's Community Values.

2000-188 Moved by Council Member Sierawski and seconded by Council Member Gates, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, to adopt Resolution No. 2440, a resolution amending the Fiscal Year 1999-2000 Budget.

2000-189 Moved by Council Member Gates and seconded by Council Member Sierawski, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, to adopt Resolution No. 2441, a resolution of Modification of Special Assessment Roll – SAD No. 133.

COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

Moved by Council Member De Witt and seconded by Council Member Petersen, CARRIED, to appoint James R. Buck as the voting delegate and Carole Pettijohn as the alternate to the Michigan Municipal League.

2000-191 Correspondence from Charles Furman of the WGVU out of Grand Valley University relative to the federal requirement to convert to digital transmission by May of 2003. Moved by Council Member Pettijohn and seconded by Council Member Gates, CARRIED, to direct a letter of support to Governor Engler for funding from the State of Michigan.

2000-192 CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Gates and seconded by Council Member Pettijohn, CARRIED, to approve the Consent Agenda of June 26, 2000

Reports: Investments (May)

Proclamation: "National Night Out" (August 1, 2000)

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Library: Circulation Desk Components. Finance Director Guinther explained the process used by the Librarian, indicating the purchase was directed prior to approval by City Council. Council Member Sierawski indicated the company should be notified that a purchase order should be issued prior to the purchase. Moved by Council Member Gates and seconded by Council Member Pettijohn, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, to award the purchase of library components to Library Design Associates in the amount of \$6,491.66 in the best interest of the City.

2000-194 Wastewater Superintendent Meyers presented chemical bids.

Moved by Council Member Petersen and seconded by Council Member De Witt, CARRIED unanimously by roll call vote, to award chemical bids as follows:

to the low bidders: