

*To: Hamilton City Council
71 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario*

Dear Councillors,

I recently wrote and published an opinion piece for OpenFile, entitled "Prayer In City Council Meetings: Is it Appropriate?". I sent this piece to councillors when it was published, but you can find this opinion piece at www.hamilton.openfile.ca/blog.

In researching this piece, I found that Hamilton is one of the only major Ontario cities that include religious prayer as a part of the opening ceremonial activities at the beginning of City Council meetings. Toronto, Burlington, Kitchener and London are among City Councils who do not employ this practice.

I also found that the selection of presenters was not reflective of Hamilton's spiritual diversity- so far in 2011, eleven out of 14 prayer sessions were led by speakers from houses of worship identified as Christian churches. In 2010, all but one of the 14 prayer sessions were conducted by Christian churches. I do not feel that this adequately reflects our community.

Rather than fully explore this issue in the contents of this letter, I would like to make a simple request that this issue be discussed by the Governance Review Subcommittee, to explore ways in which this practice can be made more inclusive of all faiths and beliefs. Failing that equality, I would suggest that this practice be retired. After all, as a friend pointed out to me, City councillors don't appear at Church on Sundays reciting City Council meeting minutes.

I would be happy to work with this committee to discuss my concerns further.

Respectfully,

*Matt Jelly
www.mattjelly.com
129 James Street North
Hamilton, ON
L8R 2K6
(905) 525-2531*