



DATE: October 16, 2023

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council through City Manager

FROM: Peggy Flynn, City Manager
Patrick Carter, Assistant to the City Manager

SUBJECT: Resolution Supporting Human Rights of All Petalumans and Condemning Hate Speech, Racism, and Acts of Extremism

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council adopt the attached Resolution Supporting Human Rights of All Petalumans and Condemning Hate Speech, Racism, and Acts of Extremism

BACKGROUND

At the February 27, 2017 City Council meeting, the Council adopted Resolution 2017-032 N.C.S. in support of the protection of human, constitutional, and other rights of community members of the City of Petaluma. At that time, the resolution reassured the Petaluma community that the City would protect its vulnerable community members against unreasonable demands from the Federal government related to detentions, deportations, registries, conversion therapies, imprisonment, and other acts that target or discriminate against Petaluma community members or others based on immigration status, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, disability, political affiliation, economic status, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or other characteristics protected by California and federal anti-discrimination statutes and the United States and California Constitutions. The resolution further affirmed that the City's law enforcement officers would not detain an individual based on an Immigration and Customs Enforcement hold beyond the time the individual becomes eligible for release from custody.

In response to the tragic murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the City of Petaluma initiated programs related to transparency and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). These actions include the establishment of an Ad Hoc Community Advisory Committee, creation of the Black Lives Matter mural on Fairgrounds Drive, providing inclusive and proactive communications to community members, approving a resolution in support of solidarity with the Asian American Pacific Islander communities and denouncing anti-Asian racism and violence, and establishing a staff-led DEIB task force to ensure our City, as an employer, provides and nurtures an equitable and inclusive workplace.

In recent weeks, other Sonoma County municipalities have experienced unwelcome, antisemitic flyers in their communities as well as hate speech originating from anonymous, online Zoom commenters during public meetings. On October 2, 2023, the City of Petaluma received a number of comments from speakers that were off-topic and not relevant to the City's subject matter jurisdiction. Many of the comments included racist, antisemitic, homophobic, transphobic, and ageist divisive language. As a result of the numerous, off-topic, and apparently coordinated disruptive comments, virtual public comment, which is not a requirement of the Brown Act or City Council regulation, was suspended indefinitely.

An especially troubling context of much of the hate speech was the focus on antisemitism. A 2021 study by the American Jewish Committee reported that one in 4 Jewish Americans experienced antisemitism. According to the FBI, more than 50% of religious-based hate crimes in 2021 targeted Jewish Americans, who make up 2.4% of the U.S. population. The Anti-Defamation League reported that 3,697 antisemitic incidents were reported in 2022, the highest since the League began tracking in 1979.

DISCUSSION

While hate speech, defined by the United Nations as "offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual based on inherent characteristics (such as race, religion or gender) and that may threaten social peace," is protected speech by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, hate speech is divisive and disruptive by definition, and antithetical to the ideas and practices of inclusive governance demonstrated by the City of Petaluma. Disruptive and purposefully harmful behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. As such, it is recommended that the Council adopt the attached resolution reaffirming the Council's support for human rights and condemning hate speech, racism, and acts of extremism.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This agenda item was requested by the City Council during the October 2, 2023, City Council meeting.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Adoption of this Resolution is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), which establishes the general rule for projects concerning which it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

There are no financial impacts resulting from this item.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution Supporting Human Rights of All Petalumans and Condemning Hate Speech, Racism, and Acts of Extremism