

From: **"Mochrie, Paul"**

To: **"Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"**

Date: 1/8/2024 10:01:33 AM

Subject: Response to the British Columbia Humanist Association - Inclusion of non-denomination prayer in the Council inauguration ceremony on November 7, 2023

Attachments: 2023.11.30 Vancouver letter.pdf

CMO - Letter to BC Humanist Association - Jan 8 2024.pdf

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Dear Mayor and Council,

For your information, attached is our response to the British Columbia Humanist Association's letter dated November 30, 2023, regarding the inclusion of non-denomination prayer in the Council inauguration ceremony on November 7, 2023.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best,  
Paul

**Paul Mochrie** (he/him)  
City Manager  
City of Vancouver



The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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Dear Paul Mochrie

Please see our attached correspondence regarding an invocation in the City's 2022 inaugural council meeting.

Sincerely

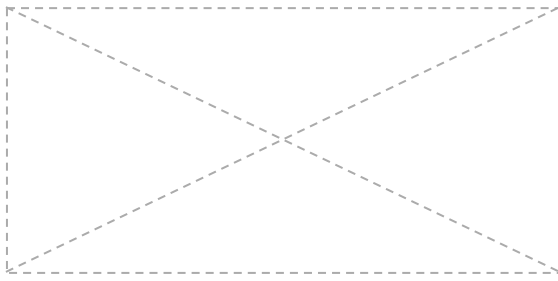
Ian

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Ian Bushfield

Executive Director

[Pronouns \[bchumanist.ca\]](mailto:ian.bushfield@bchumanist.ca): He/him



[\[bchumanist.ca\]](http://bchumanist.ca)

**British Columbia Humanist Association**

[www.bchumanist.ca](http://www.bchumanist.ca) [\[bchumanist.ca\]](http://bchumanist.ca) | [facebook.com/bchumanist](https://facebook.com/bchumanist) [\[facebook.com\]](https://facebook.com) | [@bchumanist](https://twitter.com/bchumanist) [\[twitter.com\]](https://twitter.com)

422 Richards St, Suite 170, Vancouver, BC V6B 2Z4

I acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the kwikwəłəm (Kwkwetlem First Nation). I thank the kwikwəłəm who continue to live on these lands and care for them, along with the waters and all that is above and below.

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BRITISH COLUMBIA HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

422 Richards St, Suite 170  
Vancouver, BC V6B 2Z4

(604) 265-9298  
bchumanist.ca  
info@bchumanist.ca



November 30, 2023

Dear Paul Mochrie, City Manager

We seek confirmation regarding the inclusion of prayers in future inaugural meetings of Vancouver Council. As an organization that represents nonreligious members of your community and advocates in the interest of upholding the state's duty of religious neutrality, we respectfully request that the City of Vancouver confirm its commitment to refrain from including prayers in such meetings.

In *Mouvement laïque québécois v. Saguenay (City)*, 2015 SCC 16, Justice Gascon, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court of Canada, found that prayers said by a municipal council breached the state's "duty of religious neutrality" by favouring religion over nonreligion. It is essential that our government institutions remain neutral and inclusive to protect the rights of all citizens.

Considering these constitutional principles and to ensure that Vancouver respects its constituents' diverse beliefs and perspectives, we kindly ask for confirmation that the council will not include prayers, religious invocations, or any religious observance in future regular or inaugural council meetings. This would help create a more inclusive and respectful environment for all residents, regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliations.

We note that your 2022 inaugural meeting included greetings from representatives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver, Canadian Memorial United Church, Temple Shalom, Khalsa Diwan Society and BC Muslim Society. These greetings were a non-denominational prayer, which Justice Gascon argued (at para 137) "is nonetheless a religious practice." He continued, "even if a religious practice engaged in by the state is 'inclusive', it may nevertheless exclude non-believers." We discuss our concerns further in our recent report, *We Yelled at Them Until They Stopped*.<sup>1</sup>

Still, in the spirit of progress and inclusivity, we hope the City will consider this request seriously. By making this commitment, Vancouver can demonstrate its dedication to upholding the principles of religious freedom, inclusivity, and the separation of church and state.

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<sup>1</sup> Phelps Bondaroff, T.N., Bushfield, I., & Jensen, O. (2023 November 15). "We Yelled At Them Until They Stopped: Revisiting Prayers in BC Municipal Council Meetings and the Power of Secular Advocacy." *BC Humanist Association*. Available at: [https://www.bchumanist.ca/we\\_yelled\\_at\\_them\\_until\\_they\\_stopped](https://www.bchumanist.ca/we_yelled_at_them_until_they_stopped)

We kindly request a written response to this letter by December 31, 2023, indicating the City's official stance. Your prompt attention to this request would be greatly appreciated. Barring a response, we will forward the matter to our legal counsel to consider all possible remedies.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response and hope your council meetings will have a positive and inclusive future.

Sincerely,

Ian Bushfield  
Executive Director

January 8, 2024

Ian Bushfield  
Executive Director  
British Columbia Humanist Association  
422 Richards St, Suite 170  
Vancouver, BC V6B 2Z4

Dear Ian,

I am writing to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated November 30, 2023 and your stated concern regarding the inclusion of a non-denominational prayer in the Council inauguration ceremony on November 7, 2023.

I can confirm that the program for each Council inauguration ceremony is determined by the incoming Mayor. Following the next municipal election in 2026, we will address this matter with the Mayor-elect for their consideration.

I can also confirm that Vancouver City Council does not conduct prayers of any type at regular meetings.

Yours truly,



Paul Mochrie  
City Manager

cc: Mayor and Council  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Francie Connell, City Solicitor