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City Council may set translation policy

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The Lewisville City Council Monday night discussed at length the possibility of adopting a resolution setting guidelines for the city staff as to what materials may or may not be translated into Spanish or other foreign languages.

The council may take formal action on the proposal at a regular meeting Oct. 6.

Councilman Lathan Watts had requested that an item be placed on the agenda calling for "a discussion of policy related to translations of city publications and communications."

Watts suggested that "the council should set a policy so staff will have direction" as to which documents should or should not be offered in Spanish or other translations.

Councilman Rudy Durham called the proposal "ridiculous" and "racist."

Durham said Tuesday morning, "If I appeared to be making a personal attack against Councilman Watts, I did not mean to, and I apologize to him."

Councilman Dean Ueckert said, "Times have changed over the years. I have no problem with the way that we are doing it now except that it puts a burden on the city manager to make those decisions."

Councilman David Thornhill's initial reaction was, "I am OK with they way it is now if we are not going to have a resolution."

Councilman Greg Tierney said he would be in support of developing a policy setting guidelines for city staff as to what materials could be translated.

City Manager Claude King said some guidance from the council on the subject would be welcome.

"Right now, we're trying to keep a hand on it strictly in regards to cost," he said. He later said if the matter gets totally out of hand, even ordinances one day may have to be translated into Spanish or other languages.

Watts said, "It may not be a major issue right now, but I can see it becoming one."

Two people with Spanish surnames n John Gorena and Susan Davis-Duarte n came from the audience to the podium to speak in favor of documents being printed only in English.

"I know the law requires that some documents be printed in both English and Spanish, and I am against that," Gorena said. However, he later said he understands why some materials need to be in both languages because of life-threatening situations which occur.

Gorena said he is a former paramedic who often interpreted for victims at accident scenes.

Both Gorena and Davis-Duarte spoke in favor of the council approving English as the official language of the city.

Both pointed out that legal immigrants must be able to read English at least at a third-grade level.

Watts noted, "All we're talking about is translation of documents. Anyone (city employee) who is bilingual could be free to assist anyone who comes in in Spanish or anther language."

City Secretary Julie Heinze estimated that about half of the people who come into her office requesting birth certificate applications do not speak English.

While the council members stopped short of saying they were in favor of adopting English as the official language of the city of Lewisville, City Communications Manager James Kunke said it is possible that the city may adopt guidelines similar to those in nearby cities.

He said both the cities of Farmers Branch in Dallas County and Oak Point in Denton County have adopted resolutions designating English as the official language of their cities. He said a city in South Texas has adopted a resolution designating Spanish as its official language.

At present, federal laws require cities to produce a total of 14 different documents in both English and Spanish.

They include materials on sexual harassment, Fair Labor Standards Act, Family Medical Leave Act, Equal Employment Opportunity poster, Uniformed Services Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act, Occupational Safety Hazards Act, Employee Polygraph Protection Act, Workers Compensation notices, unemployment rights, payday notices and Public Information Act posters, election materials, concealed handguns prohibited signs and a consumer confidence report.

At present, the city of Lewisville voluntarily prints and distributes materials in Spanish about the Food Handlers Test, West Nile Virus information, Retail Food Protection manuals, customer service applications and waiver forms, letters to school children about open house and smoke detector batteries, "After the Fire" booklet, some employment advertising, Emergency Protection Orders (from the Municipal Court), Interlock warning, No Contest docket option, options through the automatic phone system, Lake Park receipts and park rules (given at the park entry gate), glass container prohibition signs, Lake Park swimming safety signs, DWI paperwork, Miranda warning, magistrates warning, inmate request for an assigned attorney, Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) officer business cards, NET neighborhood flyers, birth certificate application form and death certificate application form.

Also, the city distributes some materials in Spanish which have been printed and paid for by a third party. Those materials include petting zoo signs, public education brochures, "Know What to Do" materials, nationwide information packet (employees only), Violent Crime Victims brochure, Preventing Domestic Violence brochure, Denton County Crime Stoppers information, car seat safety brochure and marijuana information brochure.

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